

Margaret Goff Clark

JUNE 12, 1984

SISTER: This is June the 12th 1984, and I have with me Margaret Goff Clark who has written many books and is a former student here from the college. We're going to start off with question 1 because I'm getting ahead of myself already. We're very happy to have you here with us, Margaret, and we'll start right away with the questions. Could you give some background information on your family roots, both sides, childhood education, and some experiences that you might like to have recorded for your grandchildren or family?

CLARK: My mother was Fanny Lorina Church who married Raymond Goff. So, that's where the Goff comes in. I still use my maiden name for the middle name. My mother was a very strong woman, strong mother, strong person, and I was the only child except for a little sister who died when she was an infant. My mother wanted many children but was so happy when she knew she was going to have little Carolyn. After Carolyn's death she took in a little girl named Betty Lou and kept her for five years. Her mother wouldn't give her up to begin with. My father was ill, and my mother had to help at the lunchroom which he owned. She reached the decision that she couldn't do enough for Betty Lou because she felt she

needed a good education, but she finally, with a great feeling of loss, gave her up. This was probably one of the worst experiences of her life. I remember how we took her on the street car; we didn't have a car. My father was in a very serious accident when he was just a young man, 19 years old. He was an engineer on the train and in those days they didn't have rules about how long they had to work at a time. He had been working 48 hours straight. He sat down beside the track on a box and when his train came, he jumped the wrong way -- toward it and had a severe head injury that caused pressure on his brain and that caused epilepsy which they were unable to cure because the pressure was too deep. This of course, his illness, affected his heart finally because of the strain. However, he made a living all his life, worked hard, but he died at 55 almost 56. So, this was what caused my mother to give up Betty Lou, but she never got over it.

SISTER: Had you become close to Betty Lou?

CLARK: I was quite close, although there was about 10 years difference between us. I was a big sister to her. But, I remember riding home on the street car, and we both cried all the way back. It was terrible, and mother, of course, always wondered what happened to her because according to the rules, when she gave her back to the adoption agency, a Luthern home it was, a Luthern hospice it was called in Buffalo, they were very good people and tried their best to locate children. They said they couldn't tell her where she was going because they wanted the child to start new.

SISTER: Did Betty Lou realize the reasons that she was being

taken back?

CLARK: I'm sure they told her, but I don't remember. She was pretty young to understand. She was only about six. I remember she said, "Why can't I stay and have my own mother like other little girls?" because she felt my mother was her mother. So the rest of the time, I was the only child. By then, I was about fifteen and I wanted to go to college to learn to be a writer, because I knew I wanted to be a writer all my life. From the time I was about 7, I began to write.

SISTER: You must have enjoyed writing compositions in school then?

CLARK: I did, only I turned them all into stories. Whatever I was asked to do, I did it as a story.

SISTER: Did you have encouragement from your teachers?

CLARK: Not a great deal. They used to tell me I was pretty good in English. I remember one English teacher who assigned me a general topic of spring, and I wrote a poem. She gave it back with a failing mark saying, "I didn't ask for a poem." That didn't discourage me though. When one wants to do something badly enough, I think it doesn't matter too much what happens. My teachers were very good to me, but I can't remember any particular encouragement except when I was in high school I had some.

SISTER: Where did you go to high school?

CLARK: To Bennett High School in Buffalo. I went to School 17. We lived in Olean until I was about half way through eighth grade. I had skipped a class, a half of a year, somehow. I was a

half year ahead from where I started, so I was graduating at mid-term each year. When I came to Buffalo, I was half way through eighth grade. There was no place for me except School 17, where I could finish up eighth grade and take my first year of high school at the same time. By adjusting my schedule it made it impossible to do anything but do the classes. I wanted to be in the orchestra though I played the violin very badly, but I thought it would be fun to be in the orchestra. That turned out to be the time I took penmanship which I, of course, needed badly.

SISTER: They don't teach penmanship any more I think.

CLARK: No I don't think they do either. So students all have their own individual penmanship. Now back to my roots, I'm certainly wandering from my roots. My father Raymond Goff was born November 29, 1879. My mother was born on January 7, 1884. They were second cousins, but nobody seemed to think anything of it. My son-in-law who's a doctor said "it's a good thing they had good genes". He said, "you're in remarkably good shape for the situation." My father was the son of a doctor, Dr. George Goff and my father's mother died when he was just very young. My grandfather, his father, remarried a young woman, and he told her she didn't have to have anything to do with the children if she would just marry him. So, she did marry him and didn't have anything to do with the children. The children just grew up. If anyone ever should have had an education, it was my father, because he was a student in his ways, and he was not worldly. He was an unworldly man, and it was hard for him to cope with working without

any background, any foundation for what he was doing. This, I presume, was why he was working for the railroad at a young age.

SISTER: The railroad certainly gave a lot of jobs didn't it? There are very few families that don't have someone that worked on the railroad back two or three generations ago when the railroad started out.

CLARK: I think the railroad was what the airplane became to a later generation. It was exciting to him. Did you want me to go any farther back in the history?

SISTER: No, that's pretty good. I had wondered. One of the questions was about your childhood education, whether you had received a great deal of encouragement or if you got your initiative to write from teachers but you said you had it within you yourself.

CLARK: Well, I think my father really gave me encouragement. I know when I made this poem up, a little song, I went around the house singing it when I was about seven. He was excited and made a big thing of it. I began to think it must be good to write. So everything I'd write, he would be very interested. He was fond of poetry. He used to write, recite poems aloud, and he read a lot of poets.

SISTER: He must have had some schooling then?

CLARK: He did. He had through grade school and possibly part of high school, but I don't know how far. He read a great deal all his life.

SISTER: From that second question that you see before you, I

understand that you were very close to your mother. Would you care to recall some happy memories of her? You already mentioned a little bit about her but maybe some more.

CLARK: My mother was always a very good mother. She was not a mother who made a fuss over her children, but she was firm and very approachable. Anything I wanted to ask her, I could. She expected me to confess my misdoings to her, and she would let me know what she thought of them, but she was not one to do a lot of spanking and that sort of thing. When young, I did understand I had been spanked, but when I was old enough to remember it, I was disciplined in other ways.

SISTER: Did you ever get the impression that your mother knew everything that you were doing anyway, so you might as well just confess?

CLARK: No, I thought that I had to tell her. I don't know if it was a good habit or not. It was very hard for me not to start confessing everything to my husband and that sort of thing.

SISTER: I meant you might as well tell her because she already knew it anyway.

CLARK: I didn't have that feeling. But I wanted to. It sort of unburdened me. It was like confessional.

SISTER: And your husband was a little surprised at this habit you had of doing it?

CLARK: I don't know, he seemed to take it for granted.

SISTER: Was he as open about it as you were?

CLARK: He was apt to be more stern about it than my mother as

I recall.

SISTER: Did he reciprocate?

CLARK: Oh my no! I eventually got over it and decided one's own counsel is perhaps best sometimes.

SISTER: Did your mother encourage you as much as your father did in your writing or your poetry, or did she just take it for granted that you were doing a good job and that was it?

CLARK: She didn't seem so much interested in it as he. She didn't in any way discourage me, but she tried to bring out whatever practical things she could in me and my way of living and thinking. She was very down to earth -- just a very practical woman but very warm and very loving. Not so much in touching when I was young. When I was very young, I know she held me and that sort of thing, but as we got older, a kiss good night. Very rarely touching, arms around me, and I used to long to be held, to be hugged.

SISTER: What nationality was she?

CLARK: English. I didn't know why I loved to be touched, but I did by someone that I was attached to. I remember a nurse in the hospital when mother was in to have an operation I remember she put her arms around me, and I thought "oh, how wonderful".

SISTER: What about your later education? Your high school? Any particular overall memory of these years?

CLARK: Well yes. I went to high school, Bennett High School, in my sophomore year because I had gotten my freshman year at School 17. I was a little bit at loose ends. I didn't know so

many people as the others who had been there all the time, but I liked it. I made friends but not awfully close friends in high school. I was very shy. I was gangly, plain looking, with horn-rimmed glasses, tall, and I felt very into myself. But I did find that writing was sort of an open sesame to things. I could write; and therefore, I was accepted as one of the writers for the yearbook and the school paper.

SISTER: Did you read a lot?

CLARK: I read all the time, and I did have another writing job for the North End Advertiser, a little newspaper at the North end of Buffalo. I would write school news and for that I would receive free tickets to the movies. I wrote some short stories which they printed at Christmas time.

SISTER: You just enjoyed writing? Did it ever occur to you that you did it in long hand didn't you?

CLARK: I did learn to type, because I typed the menus for the restaurant my father owned. But I didn't type well, not well enough to be writing stories on the typewriter. But, I could type my work to send out.

SISTER: I was wondering whether you found it tedious to write in long hand, whether that didn't discourage you at all? You just erased it and went on or you did it over again?

CLARK: It's easier, although it's still difficult I think. I'm not really an accomplished typist, but I turn out a manuscript that looks good, because I go back until I get it so that it is as

perfect as possible. I did take courses in typing at night school. But back to my mother. I wanted to tell you some more things about her. She was very much family oriented, and I can remember our happiest times were when her relatives or my fathers would come, mainly hers, because, with his step-mother, we weren't as close as would have been otherwise. They didn't live as nearby either. So it was mainly my mother's side of the family that would have the family gatherings. They would come to our house for dinners for the day or for picnics, and then we always went to my grandmother's in Wellsville, New York for Christmas, from Olean, as we were living there. I remember sitting in this four-door touring type car with the curtains at the windows. In the winter, it was so cold everyone wanted to hold the baby to keep them warm on their laps. The excitement of the Christmas Day there with all of the other cousins and aunts and uncles made a wonderful Christmas.

SISTER: Like a storybook Christmas?

CLARK: I think of Christmas at Wales by Dillon Thomas. It was something like that. My mother also was friendly with the people who lived on our street. We lived on a dead end street. It was a beautiful, quiet street with many trees. We lived in a house where three families lived. The people next door to us and the people in the other two parts would get together for impromptu picnics and lunches, and those times to me were so exciting to see the grownup people having so much fun together, and the children could have fun too.

SISTER: The fact that you lived in Olean tells me a great

deal right there. Olean is such a beautiful spot.

CLARK: Isn't it. I slept on the third floor of this building, and I could look out and see Mt. Herman, and that just meant so much to me. The beauty of that. My father took me in the spring for a walk, a hike, up Mt. Herman to look for the first spring flowers.

SISTER: Beautiful area. St. Bonaventure is down there. I have been down there several times and just been inspired by the beauty of not only the ride down there but the actual location of the place, it's just beautiful.

CLARK: The mountain laurel up on the mountain, isn't it wonderful?

SISTER: Your mother lived a long life didn't she?

CLARK: 97. This year, she would be 100 if she were still alive. Her mind was very good right up to the day she died. It was very hard for me when I found out about it. I was not there when she died, and this made me feel very bad. We were at our cottage. She had been in good health, and I thought she was fine. We talked every Sunday. I called her at 10:00 wherever I was, and I could talk with her. She was in the nursing home then, but the nurse brought her to the phone. About a week before she died we had a hard time getting the connection, but the nurse insisted and persisted, and we did finally get it. Mother couldn't hear, though she had her hearing aid on, and it had to be adjusted but she finally did. We talked, and she said "Even though you're not here,

I feel as if you're here just as if you were with me and I just feel close to you." It was so good for me to know that. The day she died they had a hard time reaching us on the phone. She had a stroke. We immediately leaped into the car and drove home but it was a five hour trip. Part of the way home, we stopped and I called. She had gone, but I found out when I went to the nursing home that she had talked with a young girl who had taken her some breakfast. She said she went in and mother wasn't very interested in her breakfast that day as she usually was. After breakfast she actually had the stroke and this girl was talking to her. Mother couldn't see very well or hear very well, so she said "are you Margaret" and she said "no, not Margaret" for she knew I was her daughter. Mother said "well, hold me, and I will pretend you're Margaret". She did, and I was so appreciative that the girl was understanding enough.

SISTER: How wonderful it was for your mother to have expressed that and for that girl to be able to tell you so that you would have that happy memory. Your mother was thinking of you. Let me hold you and pretend that you're Margaret. That was a creative act wasn't it?

CLARK: Yes, that girl really was a good person to be around older people.

SISTER: But for even your mother to think of that.

CLARK: Yes, wasn't that creative of her.

SISTER: It was more creative of your mother, and then it was cooperation of the girl to do that. But something in your mother

was creative and must have almost made the girl do it just instinctively. Your mother was so convincing that the aide just leaned over and let your mother hug her pretending that she was you. She replaced you. That was a great honor I think for that girl and privilege of that girl to have done that. It was a beautiful act of love. It really was. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you and she did. She replaced you and I'm sure that she pretended that your mother was her mother too. That's a beautiful experience, Margaret.

CLARK: I have more to tell about her. After my father's death, my mother brought up a young boy, When he was 8 years old, his mother died and she lived in the house and took care of the boy and took care of the house for 18 years. When he was 26, my mother went to live with one of her sisters who wanted her to come live with her. This boy, though, is a wonderful young man. Just a fine person. The day my mother had the stroke, he and his wife were on their way to dinner and a play and they stopped to see my mother. They lived in Lockport. When they found out that she was so bad, they stayed and gave up what they were going to do. He held her hand and talked to her all the time until she died. They weren't sure she was conscious but they'd heard that even though a person isn't conscious they often can hear. He kept telling her that I was on the way home, and that I would be coming soon.

SISTER: Beautiful. They gave up their evening! How fortunate it was that they came by.

CLARK: I'm so glad that she wasn't alone. She loved people.

SISTER: I don't think anything could be more evident that God was with you and your family at that time, and he took her and she went to him.

CLARK: She didn't have to suffer.

SISTER: And she was ready.

CLARK: She was ready. Well no, I forgot one thing she said. The aide heard her talking and she said, "Oh God, is this my time?" and then she said, "oh, not yet". She didn't want to go yet, and I think she was waiting.

SISTER: You're aware that it wasn't that she didn't want to go to him.

CLARK: She wanted to stay a moment longer.

SISTER: But it just wasn't meant to be. But I guess in a sense that young man and his wife had that experience, and I'm sure they didn't regret having missed their play.

CLARK: I think you're right. I think it meant an awful lot to him to be able to be with her then.

SISTER: You know and so much we don't know now that we will understand later and it looks so simple. Is there anything else you would like to say on that.

CLARK: No, I thought you did just right. I think that was about it except that she was, I felt, a very good mother. As an only child, I could have been spoiled and I may have been, but I don't think so because she didn't let me get away with anything. I had boundaries, and I was not made to think I was the greatest thing in the world. I was made to think that I could do things.

She helped me that way. I could believe, she believed I could do just about what I wanted to do so I grew up with that idea.

SISTER: But you weren't afraid of her.

CLARK: I was never afraid of her.

SISTER: And you trusted her.

CLARK: I thought she knew the right answers, and she generally did. Children went to her naturally. It was a strange thing to see her. She would come into a room where there were children and she wouldn't pay any attention to them particularly but in a little while they would be going up to her.

SISTER: A calmness maybe or a quietness.

CLARK: Something about her. And my children, I didn't realize how much she had meant to them until just about the time she died. They said their visits to her just meant so much, that she gave them so much.

SISTER: Did she talk much about her childhood or her life?

CLARK: Yes, quite a lot. You see that's how she got to be such a good mother. She had practice all her life. She was the oldest girl in a family of 6 children, only one brother older and so after my grandmother and grandfather had three children and then a space of time had three more, my mother was like a mother to those three younger children. She loved it and of course you see she got recognition. This was her identity. She was a mother, and so this mothering was her thing. At least that's the way I figured it out.

SISTER: She was happy in being what she was. Did she work in the restaurant with your father?

CLARK: Yes, she did. My father went down and he said he was going to buy this little tea room. He always wanted a little restaurant. His father died, and he had a little money.

SISTER: Was this in Olean?

CLARK: It was in Buffalo. We went to Buffalo when I was in eighth grade. He called up, I believe the first day he was there and asked how to make an egg and olive sandwich. Mother went down and showed him and she went down every day after that.

SISTER: Did he keep the business?

CLARK: He kept that business and did very well. Then he took a lease on a restaurant in the stock exchange building in Buffalo and that did well. He always had a good business. But he didn't have the experience in purchasing; he didn't have places to store enough ahead. It wasn't a financial success. They lived on it but that was about it. Always had a whole restaurant full of people happily eating, but the prices were low and it was depression time.

SISTER: Well you know, may I go on now?

CLARK: I worked at the restaurant too by the way. One summer I took the place of the dishwasher and if ever I decided I needed an education it was then. All that work, I washed them all by hand you know.

SISTER: Did you have gloves?

CLARK: No, as I recall I didn't. All these stacks of dishes would come in. I just get one stack lowered and in would come

another. I got ten dollars for the week or each week.

SISTER: Were you ever a waitress?

CLARK: Yes, I was a waitress.

SISTER: How did you enjoy that?

CLARK: I was terrified. It's so hard for me to remember what they said and I couldn't concentrate, I was too embarrassed and too shy.

SISTER: Don't you have a high regard or high respect for waiters and waitresses now.

CLARK: I do. I always believe they earn every bit of tip they get.

SISTER: It's hard to me but so many of them don't mind.

CLARK: Some of them I think take great pride in it and like it.

SISTER: When you finished high school, was it a sigh of relief or did you enjoy your senior year so much that you were sorry that it ended.

CLARK: I don't remember any emotion about it. I think I just was looking forward to the next thing which was college and I wanted to go. I wanted to go to Alfred University. I had friends there, and I wanted to go there and study and publish and learn to be a writer. I even went down there to visit my friends and found someone who would let me look after their children in turn for a room, and I figured I had everything pretty well lined up. When I came home and told my parents, they said they couldn't even afford to give me what else I would need. They said, "you couldn't stand

that kind of work". They thought I wasn't too strong but I was stronger than they knew, of course. I had all the childhood illnesses and I was allergic to many things which made me seem to be not as strong as I really am. So, I had to give it up. They said there's one thing I can do. They could afford to send me to what was called Buffalo State and learn to be a teacher and I will have a living and then I can do what I want to.

SISTER: I'm sure you were a little disappointed that you didn't go to Alfred.

CLARK: I was very disappointed. But I had learned to enjoy Buffalo State very much. I started at the old Normal School my first year and then I don't remember exactly whether it was during that year that we moved to the new campus.

SISTER: Did you start out in 1930?

CLARK: Yes.

SISTER: All right, because January of 1931 they moved over here. So you moved with that?

CLARK: I moved, yes.

SISTER: You were in that famous class then that moved over from Grover Cleveland High School, it's Grover Cleveland now.

CLARK: Yes, I was in that class.

SISTER: And you came over here?

CLARK: I was rather sorry to move because it was sort of a cozier spot and they had a wonderful tower that I thought was fun to climb up to with little seats around it and it was a fun place to go.

SISTER: Grover Cleveland, the Normal School in that building was a very beautiful building wasn't it?

CLARK: Yes, I thought it was.

SISTER: Did they have a marble staircase in the middle of the building or first floor and George Washington statue at the top of it?

CLARK: I couldn't say. I can't remember.

SISTER: Because I have pictures of the statue of George Washington and the stairs and they said 'I'll meet you at George Washington' people used to say.

CLARK: Yes I think I remember just faintly that.

SISTER: You recall happy years then, a happy semester at Buffalo Normal?

CLARK: Yes, I had a permanent for the first time and I thought I looked quite good that's why I was a little more confident of myself than before.

SISTER: You were a college girl

CLARK: I was a college girl. Yes it was exciting.

SISTER: There were more women, of course, than there were men weren't there?

CLARK: Very many more women than men. At least 10 to 1. Very few men. The men were very much at a premium and to find a man in that place was quite an accomplishment and the first year I didn't I remember. That, I can remember. We went over to the new school and I believe it was my second year that I met a man, a boy

I liked very much. He came up to me in the, well I guess you would call it the common. Sort of the open area outside the cafeteria and asked to talk with me. He had seen me at a program where I had been part of it. I wasn't doing anything but we were all lined up and it was something to do with writing because I belonged to Nu Lambda Sigma which was a writers group, a literary group. I had talked very briefly to him, I remember there, and then a few days later he came up to me in this open hall and asked me if I would go to a dance with him. I was absolutely delighted. I had never had any dance lessons but then it worked out all right. We seemed to get around and we went to most of the dances that year. But I was pretty unhappy because he told me after about the second date, it may have even been the first date, he said, "I think I should tell you that I am engaged." He almost could have told me he was married, it seemed as much a blow as that. I just felt that I couldn't allow him to, I just held him completely at arms length, to be fair to him and his intended. So I remember when he did kiss me once, I pushed him away and said "your girl wouldn't like that". So perhaps it's not too surprising that romance never reached fruition, and I don't know if he ever married the girl he was engaged to or not but I liked him very much. I was really sort of in love with him. He had a lovely voice, singing voice, and he was a kind, gentle person.

SISTER: But he never thought of breaking off with the other girl.

CLARK: I don't know if he did or not. I never warmed up a

bit. And I was very warm inside.

SISTER: Did you ever ask him why he was dating you if he was engaged to somebody else.

CLARK: He just said that he had the agreement with her that he was going to date while he was in school.

SISTER: So you never knew what happened to him.

CLARK: Well he did marry but I don't know if it were the one.

SISTER: I see, the girl that he mentioned to you before.

CLARK: No, I did talk with a friend of his and I do believe it was the same one when I think it over.

SISTER: All your classes, were they in Rockwell Hall or were they in Ketchum?

CLARK: No, they were in Rockwell Hall as I believe.

SISTER: The vocational building I meant.

CLARK: No, I don't remember having any in the vocational building because I was taking what they called 'gram for the grammar grades' for the upper elementary grades. And I believe they were all there except, of course, we went to the gym for health and for the exercise classes and for swimming. I like to swim and I used to go to the pool quite a bit. And, of course, the practice school.

SISTER: Bacon Hall now.

CLARK: Yes. But we also had to go to various schools in the city to practice teach. I was considered a fairly promising type, so I was more or less taken to put in different grades to see if I might become a principal or an administrator. I taught second

grade as well and I remember teaching creative writing to the second grade and they liked that, the children and the teacher did. I taught mostly in 6th.

SISTER: Did you feel at ease in the classroom? Were you comfortable?

CLARK: I was not too happy to be a teacher. I liked it, but the shyness was always overcoming me. I must have done fairly well, I think as I ended up with a B+ in teaching, in practice teaching, but it still wasn't my choice of a profession. Even when I taught my first year I was in a country school teaching grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. There were only a few, thirteen children, and I found it difficult, very difficult. The next year I was invited to come to Buffalo because I had taken the examinations for teaching in Buffalo and I was placed number 10 or 11 on the list. They appointed right up to my name that first year and the second year I was invited to come. I taught in a school I was very fond of on Dolton Poplar, School 11 and the faculty was wonderful. I was very happy there and I began to enjoy teaching more, gradually, as I became more comfortable with it. I had a chance to either stay in departmental work, that's what they called it then, where I was teaching, 6th, 7th and 8th grade with one class coming in at a time and they decided to put 6th grade on its own and have one teacher. There were three 6th grades and they were going to do this with all of them and I had a chance to take my choice and so I took the 6th grade and I enjoyed that the most. I thought it would be fun to have a class become really close. I did my best work when I was

with a class who knew me well and knew what to expect from me. To me discipline was not something that was easy that I could do with a group of strange children. I could do it with children that I knew and worked with and then they were good and we got along well. I was there five years in Buffalo and one in the country.

SISTER: Now this was after you finished here?

CLARK: After I finished here.

SISTER: Did you go here two years or three?

CLARK: I went here three years and then quit because we needed the money. I needed to earn a living.

SISTER: In those days you only had to have three years. It was later that they changed it to four.

CLARK: Well they changed it I think the very next year. I think I was the last of the three year classes.

SISTER: It's interesting to note, I'm sure you've noticed the difference in the campus. The campus, this building where this building is was to have been a field or what was here. It's right behind the gym.

CLARK: Beyond the gym I don't remember that there was anything.

SISTER: Just land wasn't it.

CLARK: I think so. But I don't remember anything behind it.

SISTER: No, there weren't any buildings but I just wondered if you walked through the fields or walk through the trees.

CLARK: No, I never did that I remember.

SISTER: There are 37 buildings on the campus now. And when you went to school here there were only 4 and those 4 original we walked awhile ago, I'm sorry I didn't realize that as we were walking through the quadrangle. We were walking through your quadrangle. And here you are back in 1984 and we are going beyond that quadrangle into another quad because we have the 4 four buildings and then you go beyond there are more quadrants, all in quads, and I just wondered what it must have been like to be here back there when these buildings weren't here. Were there a lot of trees.

CLARK: No, it seems to me that the quadrangle was with only small trees. Quite bare.

SISTER: So it must have been just field. I had heard something once Margaret and maybe you can confirm this. I had heard that this had been a farm which was part of the Psychiatric Center.

CLARK: I never had heard.

SISTER: So, you never heard that. I thought that was the reason there weren't any trees or any vegetation here because it was part of a farm. But that is interesting.

CLARK: It was more like going to high school in those days than college. We didn't have the freedom that they have now and we didn't have dormitories. Those who were from out-of-town stayed in private homes or at the YW up on North Street I believe.

SISTER: You enjoyed your years here though didn't you?

CLARK: I did enjoy them.

SISTER: Much even more than your high school years.

CLARK: I felt as if I really did enjoy these years and I related to people more easily and more happily. I had many friends that, a number of people to whom I still feel close.

SISTER: What about teachers, do you recall any teachers you had.

CLARK: Oh yes, I remember a number of the teachers. I remember David Hodgins who taught English and who I believe fell into sort of disrepute because of some incident with a girl but I thought he was probably my best and most inspiring teacher I had in English. He didn't stay. He was released. I was very sorry to see him go. I remember Dr. Thurber and I remember Dr. Neumann, the sociologist and one of the best teachers here. Another one ...

SISTERS: Counselors?

CLARK: No, it was one who taught us the psychology of dealing with children. It was a Professor ... I can't think of his name.

SISTER: It wasn't Clement was it?

CLARK: No, I did have him. He was a friend of my uncle. One of my uncles was once a teacher in vocational section. Appleby. And then there were Kathryn Thomas Whittemore. She was a penwoman and therefore became a friend in that field afterwards.

SISTER: She just died last year.

CLARK: Kathryn Reed.

SISTER: Oh yes, Kathryn Reed, you knew her didn't you.

CLARK: And of course Dr. Rockwell. I was greatly in awe of him. We all were. And Dr. Nesmer. I took just one extension course from him I believe. After I graduated I came back and got my degree.

SISTER: What about Dr. Pugsley?

CLARK: I didn't know him well but my husband did. My husband you see was in the same year as I and we were in sections as they say and part of the time we were in the same section. We didn't know each other then. We did, but we didn't date. He was very busy trying to put himself through. He was orphaned and living with a farmer and his daughter.

SISTER: He didn't marry the farmers daughter?

CLARK: She was not of age to marry.

SISTER: I couldn't resist that.

CLARK: He did go with some farmers' daughters.

SISTER: Is there anything else you would like to say about the college?

CLARK: I thought they gave me a good education, and I think the fact that I did study to be a teacher probably made it easier for me to write for children, otherwise it might have been different.

SISTER: Well it's a good point. What experiences did you have after you left the college?

CLARK: In teaching you mean? Or anything?

SISTER: After college you taught for awhile, you just mentioned that didn't you.

CLARK: Yes, I went to New York City after my first year of teaching and took work in journalism college in short story and also had a class under the famous Kilpatrick who had quite a system of education, you know learning through doing. This was all toward my degree. I was able to get this toward my BA. I had a wonderful teacher in, I think it was Victorian Literature. He came from D'Youville and was Dr. Lapin. One day while he was talking, he remarked on a tree outside of our window. He talked on it quite a bit during the class and that night I went home and wrote a short poem and the next class period I handed it to him. I said "here's a verse", I hesitate to call it a poem. "Here's a verse I wrote." The next time he talked the whole period about my verse and he said it was a poem. I was so excited and thrilled, I nearly perished. The rest of the class were muttering 'what has this to do with Victorian Literature'. He asked me to talk with him and to see some more of my work. He told me that he thought I was a real poet. He died not too long after that. I wish so much that I could have had his influence because he might have made a real poet out of me.

SISTER: Instead of prose you might have written poetry.

CLARK: I do write poetry. I still write poetry.

SISTER: More poetry than mystery stories. That is interesting. I don't know whether we have already answered number 6. What attracted you to writing stories for young people?

CLARK: To start with, it was because they were short and I couldn't stand to write anything long. I had always written poems,

practically always. Also, I was looking for something that I could write that might get published. I knew about the Instructor magazine that teachers took, and by then I had met two other women who wanted to write. We formed a little group we called the "Deadliners". You have heard about the Deadliners where we had to pay \$1.00 if we didn't bring something to a meeting that we had written. We began to bring magazines in to study to see what did we think we could break into, and so I started for poems for the Instructor. That was my first sale "A Poem To The Instructor" about Easter morning and I got \$2.68. It was one of the thrills of my life.

SISTER: A lot better than getting a rejection slip.

CLARK: I began to look at their short stories and plays, and I began to write those. First very short ones about 500 words for which I could get \$5.00 sometimes and then a little bit longer, and plays which were longer than that. Plays, that's a good practice for somebody who wants to write stories because you get into the habit of writing dialogue and helping to carry the plot forward with dialogue. I wrote about 25 one-act plays.

SISTER: You wrote plays that teachers could use in the classroom. Is that the idea?

CLARK: Yes, I did. And then as time went on, I wrote plays that might be used in high school. I wrote one called No More Boys and another one, Henry My Wife. I don't remember the names of all of them but I wrote quite a few.

SISTER: And they were accepted?

CLARK: They were accepted and printed.

SISTER: Did you get many rejections on your plays or your poems?

CLARK: I know I received rejections. Of course, I did, but I was quite lucky with the plays.

SISTER: You weren't depressed by it?

CLARK: Oh no. I got enough acceptances to keep me from being depressed because we were fortunate enough to start at the bottom where there wasn't all the competition and then sort of work up. It was always a little step up, and editors were very helpful. If they liked my style, they would tell me, and they would encourage me to rewrite something if they liked it except for something that was wrong with it. I received many good, helpful comments.

SISTER: And the more you wrote, of course, the more you wanted to write.

CLARK: Yes. And the better you get with the more you write.

SISTER: It's just like practicing the piano.

CLARK: That's just what I tell children when I give talks. It's just like music lessons. You can't do it right at first. Of course, I never thought I could write. I knew I liked to write, but I didn't think I could be a writer.

SISTER: It's like a seed isn't it. It's in you but it's up to you to let that burst. It may burst but you've got to nurture it. You've got to do it like a flower. It comes up in the ground. You've got to water it, fertilize it and everything else. You've

got to do something with it to keep it growing.

CLARK: That's a good way to put it.

SISTER: Your writing too. You've got to keep using it.

CLARK: You do. I think there are so many people who have the ability who don't do it. You have to want to very badly because it is not a well paying field unless you are a best-selling writer. It's hard to make a living at it.

SISTER: Just like artists though. It's an art. It's not like throwing a football or basketball. You know all these sports people who make all the money.

CLARK: Well they have such a short career. That's why they have to make it fast.

SISTER: You've got a point there. That's a very charitable point. You're more charitable than I am. I just get so upset when I hear of all the money those sports people make and the wonderful teachers here on campus who are influencing peoples minds and they don't even get one-fourth of those salaries. I think it's a misplace-ment of values and priorities.

CLARK: Maybe this is capitalism. It's what is wanted. Supply and demand.

SISTER: If people didn't go to those games, they wouldn't be doing it would they?

CLARK: No. And as a writer I always feel that if I wrote more and were more consistent about writing of the year around instead of taking a little time off, I'd do better. The more I write the more I can make.

SISTER: But again though and this is not deviating from the subject, in your case you have made a choice. You have a family and what would it profit you if you had seven best sellers and lost the love of your family.

CLARK: Yes, that's right. I would say my family has come first always.

SISTER: I think it's intended to be.

CLARK: I feel the best thing I did first probably was to marry my husband and next to have the children and next to have persisted at writing.

SISTER: That's a beautiful way of putting it. Is it time now to talk about how you met your husband?

CLARK: Well I guess it's a pretty good time. It was after college. We had a, what they called, section picnic. That is the section of our class that met together. We had this nice picnic, and I don't know who I went with, but I came home with my husband, my future husband. We all brought something to this picnic, apparently, and I remember my husband was serving and he put something down in front of me, and instead of putting it down with one hand he put both arms around and set it down in front of me. I remember thinking 'this man looks as if he has some possibilities, has some interests or something'. So a little later he went over and began to pick up some sticks for a fire, and I went over and helped him. That was the beginning of the end because in the course of the picnic, some of them decided wouldn't it be fun to go on to a place where there is some dancing. He

asked me if I would go with him, and I did. He had a car and so that was what happened.

SISTER: Did he say he was attracted to you right away, or did it develop?

CLARK: It developed. He didn't say but he just sort of made it apparent that he was attracted to me. A little while later I received a postcard from him and my mother said, "well, who's this". And I said, "oh, I think you're going to be getting to know him better". He had gone to Chicago with a group of friends. He had the car and they paid for the expenses to go to the World's Fair. It was in Chicago. I went to teach that fall. He was living on a farm down in Ransomville near Wilson, New York

SISTER: That was before World War II.

CLARK: Yes. I graduated in 1933 so that would be my first job in 1933 down in the country. It wasn't near where he lived, but it was probably within 20 miles of where he lived. I was boarding with a woman, a widow lady, and I was upstairs in my room when I heard the doorbell and I heard her say, "no, you can't see her". I thought I recognized his voice so I went out and looked down the flight of stairs and said, "it's all right, you can let him in, I know him". I found out later that she had been turning away any neighborhood boys that had come to see me. She was protecting me. It was good that I had heard his voice. I may not be Mrs. Clark.

SISTER: So he came to see you.

CLARK: So he came to visit and took me out to a movie. Every

week he would come over and we would go to a movie or have some dinner or something and that was how we started.

SISTER: You felt comfortable with him?

CLARK: Yes. I didn't ever think I was going to marry him, though. He wasn't my idea of what I wanted to begin with, but he grew on me. He was just as persistent about courting me, as I was about writing. The thing that really got me I think--we went to Rochester to the Lilac Festival, and I remember we sat on a hillside, and he told me how he had put one of my poems on the blackboard and had taught his pupils as if it were literature. He talked in a way that made me think that he was quite interested in beauty, nature and things like that, and I began to think, well you know, I think maybe. It just gradually developed like this. We couldn't get married right away because we had no money, and he had an appendicitis, a ruptured appendix when he was in his third year of school. I remember it must have been after he had taught a little bit too. He had to go stop and teach beforehand because he didn't have enough money. But at any rate it was when we first started to know each other that he had this. We had known each other at least a year, and he had this ruptured appendix, and I know I was just distraught. I was teaching in Buffalo then, and that was my second year of teaching.

SISTER: You were a little worried about him then?

CLARK: Oh, very worried. I spent all my time driving to Lockport where he was in the hospital.

SISTER: And that's when I guess you realized--

CLARK: I realized it, yes.

SISTER: So when did you get married?

CLARK: I had to wait until I had my permanent position in Buffalo. That was three years. We waited until 1937. I graduated in 1933 and we began going together then, but we didn't get married until 1937.

SISTER: And then did you both continue to teach?

CLARK: We continued to teach until I became pregnant.

SISTER: In those days, of course, you couldn't continue to teach.

CLARK: Did I ever tell you what happened with that experience? In 1939, in the summer, I became pregnant for my first child. And when I went back to school they asked me if I would take over the junior high classes because the junior high teacher had left and was retiring. I was happy with my 6th grade, and wasn't keen on changing but I agreed I would. I was teaching a course, one of the classes I was teaching was the one I had the year before in 6th grade. I enjoyed my teaching 7th and 8th grade. I was teaching social studies and I liked that subject. Lots of things to talk about--the world. I read the manual for the Buffalo teachers, and it said as soon as you are "aware of your pregnancy" you must notify the principal and superintendent. So I went to a gynecologist and told him the situation and asked him if I were pregnant. He said, "well I can't really say for sure yet if you are or not". This was about my second month. So I went back again in another month and he said "well, yes I would say you are". I

thought I was honor-bound to dash to school and let them know. Not really knowing the consequences, I wanted very much to teach at least, (this was in November) until Christmas and save a little more money because we needed a number of things such as a washing machine and a refrigerator and a stove. We just didn't have very much, because our salaries were very modest. I think I was getting \$1700 then. I went right home and wrote a letter to the principal because he was home ill and to the superintendent. When I got to school, I guess this might have been a weekend, the vice-principal called me down to the office and said "Margaret, you mustn't let the superintendent know. The principal has just called that he received your letter and we would like you to stay. But the minute he knows you will have to quit". In a little while they received a call from the superintendent's office that Mrs. Clark had to leave that noon. She couldn't stay the rest of the day. Well they begged and pleaded and they finally convinced the main office it would not be disrupting to the children's morals or anything if I did stay until night. This was on a Thursday. I was able to stay until night. At noon when I heard that I had to leave, I went into the lunch room, the faculty room where we ate, I couldn't eat, I couldn't talk and they realized something was wrong and finally a woman next to me said, "Margaret, what is it?" I burst into tears and fled with her after me and put her arms around me and, of course, I was just devastated. I loved the school, I loved the teachers and the pupils. I couldn't stand to think that I had to leave now. Well they were just great. One of the teachers took

one of my classes so I'd have time to pack my things. It was the music teacher, and she had a terrible time with discipline. It was a real act of mercy for her to take a class that she didn't have to. And she did. The children know what was wrong and they said, "Mrs. Clark you look terrible". My face looked awful, and as I recall I also had a cold that day. So I packed up and, of course, I couldn't go back, and nobody told the children why, and I wasn't suppose to tell them why. I wrote and the children wrote letters to me and wanted to know why I left. I wrote back and said I had done it of my own free will, that I wanted to stay home and make apple pie for my children. Then the children went on strike. They thought I had been fired. And they refused to behave for the other teacher that took my place and they got rid of one. Finally the principal got back the experienced teacher whose place I had taken, and she finally got the children calmed down. It was awful. Those children took up a collection and sent me a plant, and it was just so rough for those poor kids to go through all that.

SISTER: You see, we were talking about the changes in the church and it's the same thing in education too and life. The whole world has changed. Now I admit and you will to that some have gone too far but in that case it was awful. You could have stayed for two or three months without anybody knowing.

CLARK: They didn't know I was pregnant. Nobody knew and I wasn't wearing a smock even.

SISTER: But today if this were to happen to your daughter you would say don't tell them until it begins to show and then you can

tell them and then you go. They stay until the last minute now.

CLARK: If I had talked to some of the teachers or the vice-principal, they would have told me. And I was close to them too. But I thought I don't want people looking at me and to see how big I'm getting and all that. We didn't feel this free then.

SISTER: But you managed.

CLARK: We managed but we did have a hard time trying to gather what we needed. We were all right. I remember I did want a washing machine to wash the baby's diapers and I didn't know where I was going to get the money and faith put fortune right into my lap. In our area there was an elderly man in our area who had written a very weird book. He saw visions, he saw ghosts and he wrote a book and he had no knowledge of grammar whatever. He wanted this book typed up to send in for publication. I looked at it and I said, "you know, no matter what I do, it won't be publishable". He didn't care. He just wanted it to be typed up and put into as good of English as possible. Well it was certainly a job.

SISTER: So you did that?

CLARK: I did that and I earned, I think it was \$15 I got a washing machine, and it served for many years.

SISTER: The Lord sent that weird book - the Lord works straight in crooked lines doesn't he? Using that man and his odd book. Did it ever get published?

CLARK: Oh no. I think he got it printed himself.

SISTER: Well bless his heart. He wanted to write.

CLARK: But he wanted to tell people about the visions he had.

SISTER: Well that's okay. We all have our dreams. Old men dream their dreams and young people have their visions.

CLARK: So you see my literary career has been a great help to me. In the beginning I would think well I can't play baseball very well. I was very nearsighted and I was always having trouble hitting the ball. But I thought I can write poems. I used to think, console myself in this way.

SISTER: You find writing easy. We were talking about that a little while ago. You do rewrite a lot.

CLARK: Yes.

SISTER: Where do you get your ideas.

CLARK: Every place. I get them from places I go or things that people say or what I do. Of course with the short stories, I got many of the ideas from the children. Little things they did or little problems. As they grew older, my stories became older. I kept on using their ideas and I had a deal with them that any story they gave me an idea for, I would give them half of the proceeds. Marsha gave me some ideas for nursing stories and I gave her half the profits.

SISTER: Not a bad deal. For example, if I were to give you an idea and you used it and it printed and I would get ... that's a pretty good idea. That's very good.

CLARK: Maybe you'll give me an idea!

SISTER: I was just using that as an example that's what they did. I'm sure that Marsha was quite busy trying to think of those

ideas to make some money. That was how she earned her money. That's darling, that's wonderful. What was the most interesting story that you've written?

CLARK: I think freedom crossing was basically one of the most interesting at least. Because it was based on the history of Lewiston and I could go to Lewiston and see the place where it took place. I got a map that showed me where the buildings were at the time of the story which was pre-Civil War and I could go into that house with four cellars on the Niagara River and see how those cellars went down the river bank by steps.

SISTER: Is that building still there?

CLARK: It's still there and the people who own it now are, at last I knew, were trying to fix up the cellars to make them safe enough so that people could go through. The time I went they were pretty safe but you wouldn't want lots of people going. The steps were steep, and then there's a secret room in it.

SISTER: And it's still there?

CLARK: It's still there. Yes, it was actually built probably about 1835 and stood empty a good deal of the time because the man who built it did it more for a surprise for his wife and she wouldn't move in because she didn't want to live out-of-town and have to go down the dusty lane with her long skirts dragging.

SISTER: Did he build the secret room?

CLARK: I think actually that was not a secret room. It was perhaps a cistern. It had a pipe down in the floor and it was all

brick and I think it might have been intended as a cistern. I talked with a woman who lived in as a child and she said her father put the door in that room. There was no entrance in it. Remember in the last chapter I tell how you have to look down through the hole.

SISTER: What was the most difficult book, if you had any?

CLARK: Yes I did. My most difficult was Their Eyes on the Stars: The Life of Four Black Writers and that was difficult because it was so hard to find the true background of those writers because so little had been written and what had been written was somewhat fictionalized.

SISTER: What made you even decide to choose those four black writers?

CLARK: To begin with, I had been asked to write biographies for a company called Girard. My agent at the time had said "I believe you can do biographies as well as fiction and this company wants someone". So she introduced us, and they asked me what I would like to write. I said I would like to write a life of Benjamin Baniker, the black man who helped lay out the city of Washington, D. C. and who made almanacs. That was quite a job to do, the research for that, but I enjoyed it very much. They asked me to do another one, and when I went through the list of types of things they wanted, I saw poets or writers. I thought I would like to write about writers. I think I could understand their feelings and how they would think and so I chose that. I had to narrow it down to four early writers who achieved a fair amount of

distinction. It was Jupiter Hammond and George Moses Horton, (he was an interesting fellow) Charles Chestnut and then the one who, I can't think of his name, and he was probably the most famous too, the one who wrote quite a bit himself. Sorry, I can't think of his name.

SISTER: I've read it quickly. How long did that take you?

CLARK: That took me almost a year.

SISTER: What's the usual length it takes to write?

CLARK: It takes me about six months usually.

SISTER: Well that's not bad.

CLARK: No. I only do one a year usually because the rest of the time I'm recovering from the last one and thinking about the new one.

SISTER: You have to have a little vacation don't you?

CLARK: That's what I tell myself, I have to live a little. It's that month or two that I take or three or whatever, it's sort of like being out of school because writing is very much like having homework all the time. You're never quite free. My son says "mom, you have a monkey on your back". But it's a nice monkey.

SISTER: What is the usual procedure that you follow in writing a book? Is there any procedure you follow?

CLARK: It's kind of a loose procedure. I get an idea, which is very exciting and then I begin to find out a little more about it. For instance, we won't take Freedom Crossing, we've talked

about that but Mystery of Sebastian Island was fun because I went to dinner at a beautiful old inn on an island near where our cottage is in Canada. The next year when we went back, we were told that inn and the island had been bought by the Mafia. Now I decided I don't know if that is true or not, probably isn't, but it gave me an idea. I thought what if a girl went back to her island home and found that a criminal organization had taken it over. I thought I don't want it to take place in Canada and I don't want to start any international incidents. I looked for an island. I had a friend who had a friend who lived on an island off the coast of Maine called Matinicus about 20 miles off the coast. She arranged for Charles and me to go there and, Lord, they don't have any motels or inns there. They don't want outsiders. It was a lobstering island. We went there and stayed, and I soaked up background on this island only about a mile and a half long and less than a mile wide and so we walked. There weren't roads all over it, there were paths. It was summer, and the fields were full of flowers and perfectly untouched beaches but cold water, ice, I tried to swim because I always feel that water is there only to be entered.

SISTER: What does your husband think of all this? Does he help you? Does he give you any ideas?

CLARK: He likes to go on these excursions. He has a good deal of curiosity, and he's a big help in research in this way that he is so willing to do these things. He pokes around.

SISTER: Does he ask questions? Does he give you ideas, for

example, you ought to do this or you ought to do that or this isn't developed so much or what do you think about this? Does he correct you sometimes or give you suggestions?

CLARK: No, he doesn't enter into the process. He likes to go and observe, and he helps me observe. For instance, I wanted to know about a shrimp boat for Who Stole Kathy Young, so he went out one morning and I was staying at the trailer writing in Rockport, Texas where this took place. He came back and said "How would you like to see a shrimp boat unloaded?" and he had talked with the captain and said my wife is interested and had gotten permission. No I didn't happen to use that incident. It didn't fit but he's always very willing to go with me. He doesn't do the reading, for instance, in the libraries and that sort of thing. Sometimes he has looked up books for me.

SISTER: Has he read your script and made any suggestions or changes or corrections?

CLARK: I have to be rather firm with him to get him to read it. I say, "Read", because he's not so interested in that, but he's a big help in many other ways. He's a practical help. If I want to know how some man would do something or make something, I ask him and he knows many of those.

SISTER: He doesn't think your crazy with some of the ideas you get or does he say "Oh come on lets get a better idea than that".

CLARK: I don't usually talk too much about it because he might. I find that when you're in the creative process it's a

little hard not to be discouraged. You might be discouraged at this early time.

SISTER: Do you outline right away or does it come later?

CLARK: It isn't my nature, but I do because I have found that I have to know the ending if I'm going to finish it satisfactorily and if I'm going to work up to it step by step. In short stories when I first started I just sat down and began to write, and it worked out. After awhile I think I had used up most of what was in me to come out, and I began looking for other things. I wrote a story called Little Joe the Butter Cutter about a fellow who cut the butter up in squares in the restaurants. I had the background. I had done the butter cutting often enough but I got way into it and realized I didn't know how to end, and I never did end it satisfactorily. So that taught me I had to know the end.

SISTER: You have to have a beginning, a middle and an end. You have to develop a crisis don't you.

CLARK: You do. And you have to have a number of crisis. You have to work by steps. A diagram of a book is like a jagged series of mountain peaks that you're climbing and with an abrupt descent at the end and it's over. There's a practical reason too for outlining. After you've written a book or two all you have to do is send in a couple of chapters and your synopsis or outline, and if they like it they will give you an advance and a contract that says we are behind you and even if we don't like it at the end, you can keep the advance. Also, I don't feel as if I'm writing a book in the dark. Just throwing it out into the wilderness.

SISTER: Have you had any ideas rejected though?

CLARK: I've had some ideas rejected. Yes, I started to write one of the books on Barney who sees the UFO. One of the later books. The third one. I think my editor thought it would be interesting to have some kind of space animal, and I thought of a space horse. I didn't want it to be like a regular horse so it's a combination horse and cat. I called it a porze. I can't remember why. This did not go over, and so I just put it aside. I believe I gave you that beginning in the stack of papers I left today just to see, maybe I didn't. In fact I think I did.

SISTER: Do you follow a routine when you're writing a book?

CLARK: Yes, I get a notebook to begin with, and I begin putting ideas down in it. At the beginning I have a separate page for titles and then I start with pages for the characters and when I know the characters a little I try to give them a name fairly soon because they are more real to me when they have a name. I keep lists of names, I have a folder for names and I get first names, many of them, from the children when I autograph books, and then I get last names from the Buffalo telephone book. People I don't know. I try to get many different nationalities because we are such a multi-national country.

SISTER: What about male/female, girl/boy, do you try to alternate it or do you have more boy heros?

CLARK: It just seems to come. If the story is better told from a boy's viewpoint or a girls. I don't arbitrarily decide usually if it is going to be boy or girl.

SISTER: Have you made a study of your books to see which one could dominate?

CLARK: Which one dominates? Let me see. No I haven't though the children have sometimes asked me about that. When I started the boy had a tendency to be. No it didn't! In my first book a boy was the main one, but the second was a girl. But there's a reason. The American Girl magazine editor, fiction editor, Marjorie Better, had asked me to write the second book for American Girl. I gave you huge stack of material on that on the Mystery of the Buried Indian Mask because that's laid here in Buffalo. Back to my process I keep wandering from. Then I begin putting down plot ideas and there's almost always some kind of background that I have to learn, so I do research, and I do notes on the research and that usually goes into the notebook. Also, I try to think of the problem, or perhaps the problem is the first thing I think of. Like with The Mystery of Sebastian Island my problem of the girl who comes back and finds the island changed. I couldn't get immediately into the problem in depth and I wanted to grab the reader right away. I had to do a lot of thinking and rewriting to get into it and I did get into it. It was satisfying to me and also with Who Stole Kathy Young. I didn't want to start with a kidnapping. I wanted to wait until the reader knows the scene and a little about the girl so they will care. One of the girls is deaf. I had established that. I wrote that beginning over at least 12 times.

SISTER: You gave me the manuscript to show that. You read

just two or three of the different paragraphs, they were all good, but just that last one was the one that was chosen.

CLARK: I decided that one because I felt it got into the story better and foreshadowed more.

SISTER: You described the dog even, I mean it was everything. But that takes a great deal of work, I think that's where the artistry comes in - the gift of short story telling - getting into a paragraph all of the five W's.

CLARK: You have to grab the reader in young people's books right away.

SISTER: You do. Its got to be action right away. They're not going to take a long description of a beautiful forest. Not any more.

CLARK: While I'm making notes I sometimes don't know where I'm going to go until I start to write. Sometimes I just begin to write chapter 1 and see what happens and then I go on and change my outline. Sometimes I write a couple chapters before I change or see it ahead enough.

SISTER: Do you do it differently like from the movies. In the movies they can make the last scene first and the middle scene next and maybe the first scene last. When you write a book do you begin with chapter 1.

CLARK: Do you know I almost always write in consecutive order but you know this latest book I'm working on now, I wrote the first two chapters and I began to think this story through, and I knew exactly how I thought the last chapter was going. I knew exactly.

I could visualize it! What happens is, when I wake up early in the morning, I sometimes stop and think, lie there and think, very quietly just think and this morning I could visualize that whole scene. I suddenly thought, why not write it. I know it. I can see it now. It will be harder later. So I wrote the whole chapter. Then I discovered I needed another chapter so I wrote that. What I've sent to New York (we're going next Sunday), to my editor and agent was the first two chapters and the last. I wrote three chapters and then the last two and then the synopsis of what goes in between. It may change while I write it but it's sort of nice too, but that's the only time I've done it.

SISTER: Other times you have done it in sequence?

CLARK: Yes. I always thought I didn't want to do it any other way. Because when I usually get to the place where I would have written the thing, my ideas are all different by then because of what grows when you write it.

SISTER: Of course and you just said you're not saying that it won't change. It might but at least you do have the ideas down and there is a possibility that you can still use it as it is. How long does it take to write a chapter? All morning?

CLARK: Well that one I wrote the whole chapter and couple pages of the next. That's not customary I usually can't turn out that much. Sometimes a page.

SISTER: Do you have a regular routine as when you're in Florida or when you're writing a book so many hours of writing and you don't do anything else?

CLARK: I did before my husband retired. I was much more apt to be able to stick to a schedule. But I still try to write every morning until lunch time. Now quite often, he will get lunch and ring a little bell and say "lunchtime". Now how about that for cooperation.

SISTER: He's real quiet then in the morning.

CLARK: He likes to do other things too. He likes to read the morning paper. In Florida we have a screened porch facing the river and he sits out there and loves to read that paper then. He loves to walk and he takes long walks and he has friends whom he likes to visit and plays golf sometimes.

SISTER: So you go your separate ways in the morning and the afternoons.

CLARK: There are times when a friends will call up, some friend who has a boat and teases us "how would you like to go out in the boat, it's a beautiful day". So we'll go to the marina for lunch. Who could resist that? You've got to be foolish not to. I always tell the children you have to live too in order to write. You have to have a full life. Then as I write I generally have had and fortunate to have had a group of friends who met every two weeks and read our work aloud. Then I would read it chapter by chapter to this group, and they would criticize, very helpfully, honestly and helpfully, and this would be a great help to me.

SISTER: Do you still do that?

CLARK: Yes. I had a group in Florida but some of them are not in it now. We'll kind of have to get reestablished.

SISTER: Do these people like to normally? Do they publish?

CLARK: Yes. Now in Niagara Falls there's a group. There was a very good group of writers. Some have moved away though. We lost many of our most productive. We keep getting new ones and this workshop helps produce them. The deadliners I told you about was the beginning of it. It was the beginning of that workshop and it has gone on for all these years. At least 30 years.

SISTER: Even despite the television and all the distractions, people are still writing and reading.

CLARK: Children are still reading.

SISTER: The majority maybe no but that's all right.

CLARK: Then to continue the process. After I go to a workshop and have criticism, I go home and go over the manuscript. I take notes if they tell me the corrections they suggest. I weigh them and decided whether I agree or not and then incorporate them or put them aside depending on other things. When I finish the book, I go back and each day as I work in the morning I read over what I wrote the day before and make corrections. Then I go on with the next day's work. I find that helps me to get ahead to find out where I was the day before. Also each day I take Hemingway's tip and that is to stop work when I know what I'm going to write next. I sometimes jot down just what I'm going to write about the next day or even stop in the middle of a sentence and know how I'm going to finish it. Anything to get myself over that coldness with which you face that morning paper. After the book is finished, I again go through it and make sure everything holds

together. In a mystery you have to be sure you have the clues scattered along and that the villain was on hand when things were done and sometimes they're not. One time one book Mystery of the Buried Indian Mask, I didn't have the villain there when something happened. I had to go back and put him there. I didn't find out until it was in galley proofs. I went over the galleys and said "no, he's not there". It was horrible.

SISTER: They stopped it of course. It was all right and you corrected it.

CLARK: When I send it to my editor, she goes over it and makes suggestions for changes. If I agree with her, I do it. She's usually right. If I feel very strongly, she will say "all right, it's your book".

SISTER: They really have to know a lot don't they?

CLARK: They do.

SISTER: Where do they learn all that?

CLARK: Well they have to.

SISTER: They just do it by experience.

CLARK: I think so. Many of them grow up into editorship through being clerks in the office or reading manuscripts. They're educated now to do it. There are courses in college. I have an excellent editor named Rosemary Casey and she's very thorough but she's an imaginative person. She's helpful.

SISTER: You know her personally? You'll see her in New York?

CLARK: Yes. I'll see her in New York, we'll go to lunch, we'll talk very much about the work. I'll go back to the office

and we'll go over it. It's just delightful.

SISTER: A big publishing office, you're a part of that.

CLARK: Oh yes, it is, it's fun. If I write a letter to her and ask her anything, she answers immediately. It's just a very good relationship. She's a very good, hard working editor. She's very conscientious in having the book look well. It always turns out, don't you think? Very good looking books. The print is important, all the little details In the Barney books she is very interested in having the same artist do the work, and he has become very much in demand. He will do only work he enjoys doing, and thank goodness he likes the Barney books. He was so creative in the way he did Barney on Mars. I think he showed the Garks, you know that scene in where all the lights are flashing. Also in that book they have little symbols for the UFO on the chapters. I love the little things that the artists do.

SISTER: They read it of course.

CLARK: Yes, I have to send two copies of the manuscript and the artist reads one. Some artists don't read too carefully; they make mistakes. Generally, the editor sends me a photocopy of the illustrations before they are in the book.

SISTER: So there are artists who make a living just by illustrating books. Of course that's what makes the book expensive too because they have to pay the artist. Look at all the people behind the publication of a book.

CLARK: Now the artists who do my books don't get royalties because the art is not so important in my book as a picture book.

They get a flat fee and I don't have to pay that. That's taken care of by the publisher.

SISTER: That's incorporated in the cost of the book?

CLARK: Yes.

SISTER: That would be expected.

CLARK: And I've met the artist and talked. Twice he's given me pictures that he did for the book, the originals. So we have them framed and they are in my office.

SISTER: Good, I was going to ask you if you have them. Acid free and all that stuff, because they should be protected. Very good. Do you follow a yearly schedule of writing books? How many months do you write books?

CLARK: Yes. It just seems to fall into that line because I must get my book in generally by January though I can make it if things hold me up in February. So this makes things an awful rush. This means that it's generally spring when I'm starting another book. In June I like to go with my daughter. It's the best time for her to go to New York. So June I generally have a finished proposal that I can talk over with my editor. It seems foolish for me to go and have this opportunity and not do something useful with it.

SISTER: So that it is an incentive, a motivation.

CLARK: It makes me hurry up and get that done. Then I write in the summer at the cottage. It's an excellent place to write. I just find I can accomplish so much more there with very few interruptions. When we were traveling in the trailer, which we did

for seven years, I found it very difficult, but I did keep on writing, but you know with only a one room trailer my typewriter was taking up the dining room table. I got so that I simply pushed it aside and wrote and ate on a small space.

SISTER: There were a lot of distractions too in the travel.

CLARK: You couldn't carry much reference material with you and we would be on the move some times too a good deal. I found I was just delighted when we bought a mobile home. Now I have an office that my husband helped me set up. He put up shelves and I bought myself a good second hand desk with a return on it. It's an L-shaped working space. It's our guest room and I found it doesn't work because when guests come I can't get at my desk. Now do you know what we do? When we have guests we give them our room, and we sleep in the guest room. It's a very good bed there. They're happy to have our bed because it's a king size.

SISTER: In a mobile home?

CLARK: Oh we have a nice mobile home. It's 24 x 56. We have a lovely room in the front with many windows called a Florida room where we look at the birds. We eat practically every meal there because we like to look at what's going on out there. It's the nicest kitchen I've ever had. It's a round kitchen, octagonal, with shelves and cupboards all around. Fantastic place to work. Over the sink there's a pass through to the Florida room so we can eat out there easily, and pass the food and dishes back and forth. Also, I can see the river, the Kaloosahatchie River.

SISTER: And you love the water don't you? Of course living

near Niagara Falls and who wouldn't.

CLARK: Charles and I both have a thing about water, we both like to be near it.

SISTER: I could agree with you there.

CLARK: It's so changing. It's like having a different view every day because water changes.

SISTER: You visit a lot of schools and you have many experiences I'm sure. Do you write those down. Do you keep a log?

CLARK: I have never kept a log. I know I should have but I don't. I do enjoy visiting schools. I've visited hundreds and talked to the children about writing, about how I write and how they might want to write and about books and reading. I find that probably my school experiences have been a big help there because I can go into any size group and feel comfortable and feel I'm relating to them.

SISTER: The children have been primed before you come and they know you and all that, but aside from that, do you have the sense that they are reading or they aren't reading. Are you encouraged or discouraged by reading habits that you see.

CLARK: I feel very encouraged. I probably go to some of the best schools because they're the ones I want to take the time with. It's a nuisance to a librarian or a teacher. That's true, but the places I go I am very encouraged. The children are reading and the teachers are encouraging them. They're having little contests to see who can read the most and the children are writing. They show me things that they're writing. They're writing books, and then

they're covering them. They're illustrating them and they're doing the whole process. They want to talk about writing. They ask questions that are unbelievably deep. I used to always talk to a huge auditorium of children. Anywhere from 200-500 children and it worked out all right. I was quite happy with the situation. Then one day a couple years ago I changed my attitude quite a bit because a Jim Mayer who's a librarian at Benjamin Franklin school in Kenmore, asked me if I would speak to small groups. They were going to pick the children who they thought would benefit most. They had children who wanted to come a listen they had to read so many of my books. They had to express some interest or show some interest in writing. There was some help by the teachers in selecting. I had these groups by grade pretty much from 25 to no more than 50 children. I don't believe it went up to 50 in that school, probably 30-35. That was an exciting experience because those children were on fire with writing and reading. They just wanted to know everything I could tell them, and I wanted to tell them everything I knew. It was thrilling. Mr. Mayer said that he felt it was the most valuable experience he had all year. I was thrilled. So I suggested it to some of the other schools I went that we might do it. It's harder on me, to tell the truth, because I have to keep repeating all day.

SISTER: It's much more profitable though and meaningful for the kids. Do you get many requests to speak to children?

CLARK: Yes.

SISTER: That's good.

CLARK: If I lived here in this area where I'm known, I could just speak a couple times a week I believe all the time.

SISTER: To me that's very good, it's very encouraging.

CLARK: It is that they're interested enough today.

SISTER: And that you're known... I think that's wonderful that you're appreciated.

CLARK: I feel very appreciated. The children are reading my books and I get lots of letters from children all over the country.

SISTER: And you're saving them I presume.

CLARK: I'm not. Except for a few. I can't. They pile up. So, you think I should save them? How could I save them all? I get hundreds you know.

SISTER: Well, I don't know, Miss Lenski didn't keep all of hers. I have scrapbooks of hers.

CLARK: You have?

SISTER: From children.

CLARK: Do you have her answers?

SISTER: I don't know. I didn't read through them. In fact, I just know they're scrapbooks of letters and certainly sometime and if you were to have time and cared to look through Miss Lenski's collection you could see. But I would suggest that you would go through, say for example, one out of ten. There are letters that stand out. You should save those.

CLARK: I have saved some.

SISTER: Then put them in the archives.

CLARK: Good. Now I did have a batch and I didn't bring them

today. I will.

SISTER: We could go through them or you could go through them. Some evening when you're just sitting there looking out and not too much to do, not writing, you might just go through the letters and instinctively you know which ones to save so set them aside. I think you're doing a disservice to yourself and to future researchers and even the memory of the children because they took time to write those. Future historians and researchers will then realize the answer to the question they might raise, 'what did the children think of these', 'what are their reactions'. We have evidence of Miss Lenski's books.

CLARK: I hadn't thought of it that way and I think you're right, it is important.

SISTER: Letters, correspondence is important. I've learned that in archives and we tend, this generation tends to throw things away more so than former generations because it's so complex.

CLARK: Well if I could just get a batch and then send them to you that would be a solution. I have very little storage space in Florida.

SISTER: Anything you wish to send, I'll save for you and at a later date if you want to go through or I can go through I have the space and I will be glad to enhance that collection.

CLARK: When I was at the University of Southern Mississippi, I found that they did have some letters and also the answer of the writer or the author. I saved a few things but I have been writing

personal letters geared to the letter to all children.

SISTER: Do you make a copy of those?

CLARK: Very rarely. And I think I should have. I've lost the opportunity for many years.

SISTER: I don't give lectures on Lois Lenski, Bruce Andrews does. Bruce has a masters in English and he wrote on her and he talked with her and taped an interview with her too. So he knows her quite well and knows the collection and the young lady who works with me put the collection in acid free files and she knows it even more than I do. I have seen scrapbooks and Nancy has said, "Sister should we cover all these letters written"? and I said, "no, cover just some of them" because we couldn't cover every one of them. I'm sure there is a box of correspondence from Lois Lenski.

CLARK: I'm glad I talked with you and I'll save them from now on and the children. It would be good for the children to have them saved too.

SISTER: We still have a little time. Do you have any ideas for future books? I know we've talked about it but we want to put this on tape. By the way, I meant to ask you, while you're working on one book do you get ideas for other books and does that form a distraction?

CLARK: I often do get an idea for the next book or for other books. I have an idea file and I jot it down. Yes I have a book I just started called Latch Key Mystery. It's about children whose parents work and they go home from school and let them into the

house that's empty.

SISTER: Is this a modern day story?

CLARK: This is a modern day story. The children do have many problems in connection with this and yet there is an opportunity in it too. Some children find that it helps them gain maturity and they like the responsibility of looking after a younger brother or sister. Some of them just like being alone and being able to think and do what they want to do. Others are frightened. I interviewed about 40 of these latch key children. One little boy was very outgoing or seemed to be and had a wonderful sense of humor. There were four of them talking to me at that time, and one of them said, "you ought to put him in one of your books because he says funny things". I could see that he did have this gift because I said, "you must be responsible to be allowed to have a latch key," and he said, "me, I'm a responsible coward". He was scared to go in to the house.

SISTER: So you interviewed children who actually go home.

CLARK: Yes. To get their experiences and how they feel about it.

SISTER: What gave you the idea?

CLARK: A friend of mine did - A friend in Fort Myers. I became acquainted with her as a writer when she wrote her first book called Safe Keeping which is done very well. She said, "I have an idea for a book but it's not one I can write or want to write". She said, "it's about latch key children". She said, "it's a present and it's yours". She got the idea. So I went to

the library and found all I could and there's very little I could find in book form but I found a lot of newspaper and magazine articles.

SISTER: About children who are alone after school?

CLARK: I continued to work and found a book that has been written about the subject and it's really good. Good help. It gives me the picture well.

SISTER: And then you went to a public school in Florida?

CLARK: Yes. I've been speaking to schools in Florida and when I told one of the principals that I was doing this she said, "I'd be glad to arrange for you to talk with some of the children". I said, "you wouldn't mind"? She said, "no, I think it would be a good experience for them". She was a teacher who's very interested in having the children learn to write and read and express themselves.

SISTER: Did you tape this conversation?

CLARK: No, I just took notes.

SISTER: The children knew this that you were going to write a book, a mystery book. I'm sure they cooperated beautifully.

CLARK: They did. They thought that would be fine.

SISTER: To be part of a book.

CLARK: I'll see to it that those schools get a copy. I thought I might dedicate, I don't know, maybe I shouldn't say ahead, but I was thinking I might dedicate it to the children, the latch key children who had helped me.

SISTER: That's one idea you're working on. Do you have already ideas for other books that you have stashed away?

CLARK: I do. I have a couple of science fiction books I'd like to do. I have another Barney book. The children want Barney books. That's one thing many of them write to me about. They say "what comes next"? One child from Pennsylvania wrote and said "is Barney real, because if he is will you give me his address I'd like him for my pen pal". Another child told me just the other day "when I read your books I feel as if I'm in the story, I feel as if I'm inside". And teachers tell me that children do like my books. They tell me too. I think I'm writing for them. I'm not writing for the librarians or the critics. I'm thinking on their level. I think on that level.

SISTER: Well you have to.

CLARK: I like the things I write about. I get excited about UFO's, missing stamps.

SISTER: Do you have any future plans other than what you're doing?

CLARK: I want to just continue to write. I thought I might do another book like this one I'm doing on latch key children because I'm enjoying it. I'm finding it so interesting and helpful to have a subject that I can research and find material that helps me with the plot. The things I want to include that will help the children. It's not going to be a preachy-type book. It's just going to be a mystery that I hope will be exciting.

SISTER: Where is the setting?

CLARK: The setting is Florida, Fort Myers, but I'm not calling it Fort Myers because I want to use my new setting. I'm talking to those children and their circumstances so I think it's better to use that situation. I like to write best about a place I know. That's why I wrote about this area so much because I lived here a long time.

SISTER: It's exciting to read a book about an area in which we're living. It's something.

CLARK: I think I would like to write another problem-type book like this to see if I can do this sort of thing and talk directly to a child perhaps that will be helpful to them. A woman I know in Niagara Falls typed up my proposal because I didn't have much time. My daughter was coming and I had to get this off to my editor to give her time to read it before I went to New York. She's a typist and does this sort of a side way of earning money. She typed it and gave me a critique of the whole thing when she came in because she's also trying to write. It was very helpful. She said, "I was a latch key child myself". This woman is in her 30's and she said, "if I had this book when I was a latch key child, it would have helped me. I would have been less afraid". So I thought I might be on the right track.

SISTER: I think you are.

CLARK: I don't want to frighten them. I have to tell about some of the things that are frightening. But I'm trying to show them in the book how the child in the story is frightened but learns how to cope with the thing and then becomes more sure of

herself and rather proud of herself that she can handle situations.

SISTER: It's going to be a girl?

CLARK: It's a girl who is the central character. There is a boy in it who has quite a large part and he's an abused child. His father beats him, loses his temper. Then in turn he teases, pokes at other kids but has inside generosity and a desire to help too.

SISTER: Showing why, how these things can, why these things can happen and yet how you can overcome.

CLARK: This is one advantage of writing as one gets older. You have time to learn some things about how people react to childhood experiences and your own experiences, your children's experiences.

SISTER: Did we leave anything out?

CLARK: I don't think so. I think we just about covered everything. It's been a pleasure to talk with you. I'm glad you're the archivist.

SISTER: It's been a pleasure to have you too Margaret. It's not quite at the end but I think we better stop and say Amen to this.

SISTER: It's not quite the end. Recently Margaret Goff Clark wrote me and asked me to add this to the tape. She said in the letter:

"I was pleased and so glad to have this amount of my life in words to pass on to my children. In this one hearing I noticed one omission. I never mentioned the name of the dear man my mother

brought up and who stayed with her on her last day here. If possible to add. I would appreciate it very much, and here it is. This dear man's name is Raymond E. Ruhlmann, II. He lives in Lockport, New York. This is 1984. At 174 Windermere Road. He and his wife Marge were both there with mother when she died. Thank you. I believe this is the end of the tape."