

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Neil Marcus
Performance Artist

Interviews conducted by
Esther Ehrlich
in 2004

Copyright © 2006 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Neil Marcus, dated September 10, 2004. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Neil Marcus, "Performance Artist" conducted by Esther Ehrlich in 2004, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2006.

Copy no. ____



Photo courtesy of Gary Ivanek

Acknowledgments

This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts which believes that a great nation deserves great art.



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

Table of Contents—Neil Marcus

Series History	vii
Interview History	ix
Interview 1: 9/1/04	
Audiofile 1	1
Birth—Family—Legacy as artist	
Audiofile 2	7
Influence of parents' attitude toward life—Childhood: the importance of nature, books, thinking—Discovering co-counseling at age fifteen—Loving musicals—Self-definition as marine biologist as a child—Role of physical activity	
Interview 2: 9/8/04	
Audiofile 3	17
The significance of petrified whalebone—Eclectic visitors in childhood home—More on the importance of co-counseling—Experience in school—Difficult early experience of having dystonia	
Audiofile 4	23
More on having dystonia as a child, parents' response—Issue of exposing the negative dimensions to living with a disability—Similar relationship to being Jewish, having disability	
Interview 3: 9/10/04	
Audiofile 5	30
Role models and developing a disability awareness—Father's work, illness—Power of living an artistic life—More on the metaphor of petrified whalebone	
Audiofile 6	34
College, views on sex then—Visiting Berkeley in 1968, moving to Berkeley in 1976 and impressions	
Audiofile 7	37
More on impressions of Berkeley and the disability rights movement—Artists with disabilities in the mid-80s—Writing projects: <i>Special Effects</i> , <i>Complete Elegance</i>	

Interview 4: 9/17/04

Audiofile 8	39
More on <i>Complete Elegance</i> —Relationship between co-counseling ideas and creative work, role of audience	
Audiofile 9	40
Story about man and pencils—Pivotal experience of making speech in high school—Impetus to make art—Influence of Remy Charlip—Desire to "stir things up," people's low expectations	
Audiofile 10	43
"Life as performance"—Negotiating artistic visions in <i>Storm Reading</i> —Impact of <i>Storm Reading</i> —"Six hours of fame"	

Interview 5: 9/21/04

Audiofile 11	49
Example of storytelling—Spoken voice—Other artistic choices for <i>Storm Reading</i> —Digital storytelling class at University of California, Berkeley—Definition of "artfully"	
Audiofile 12	52
Appearing on the television show <i>ER</i> —Professionalism, training—Performers Marcus admires—Frank Moore—Current sweetheart	
Audiofile 13	55
History of romantic relationships—Writing process—Exchange with interviewer regarding her title—Role of editing in writing process, recycled phrases	

Interview 6: 9/23/04

Instant messaging interview	59
Influence of other writers—More on spoken voice—Language of disability—Importance of dance—Power of touch, relationship between touch and dance—Dream of choreographing for AXIS Dance Company—Attitudes toward spasticity—Soirees—Writing to brain surgeon—Surgeries and art—Future projects	
Appendix A: Email about "...speaking for the first time"	64
Appendix B: Email from Neil Marcus to surgeon	66
Appendix C: Letter to doctor and poem, "Silver Cord"	67

Artists with Disabilities Series History

*If there was a country called disabled,
I would be from there.
I live disabled culture, eat disabled food,
make disabled love, cry disabled tears,
climb disabled mountains and tell disabled stories...*

from “Disabled Country,” Neil Marcus, performance artist

Artists with disabilities, propelled by a powerful history rooted in the struggle for civil rights, have been creating a vibrant arts culture which embodies the individual and collective experience of disability and contributes to the artistic landscape of our nation. In June of 2004, the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, launched the Artists with Disabilities oral history project, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. The project grew out of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement [DRILM] collection, which explores the social and political history of the disability rights movement from the 1960s to the present and includes two interviews with artists.

[\[http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm\]](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm)

Our primary goal was to document the lives and work of seminal artists in performance art and dance, providing a rich resource of interviews and documents for scholarly research, education, and general use. We planned to examine issues of relevance to the artistic community, including the ways in which artists with disabilities are expanding themes of identity and the body, central concerns in the performing arts. We also hoped to contribute to an understanding of the impact that the mainstream art scene has on those who, historically, have not been welcomed into it, as well as the role that artists with disabilities have had on artistic trends in the broader arts world.

In developing the project, we consulted with scholars and administrators in the arts, scholars in disability studies, artists, and members of the disability community. Our funding supported interviews with five artists, whom we chose in consultation with our advisors. All of the narrators are professional dancers or performance artists who draw on material from their own lives and whose work has made a significant contribution toward defining disability arts culture.

The interviews were videotaped. They took place in the narrators’ homes, except for the interview with Neil Marcus which was recorded at the Regional Oral History Office and was unique in that it utilized instant messaging technology to accommodate his disability. In addition to the standard oral history format, these interviews also include impromptu moments of the artists sharing their creative work, tours of the spaces where they make that work happen and, in the case of Lynn Manning, a visit to the judo class he teaches for blind and visually-impaired adults.

All of the interviews probe the artists' formative influences, education/training, career trajectory, and creative process. They address a range of themes, including:

- the intersection of identities, specifically identities rooted in the body, in a particular place and time. What does it mean to be gay and disabled? African-American and blind? And how does being “seen,” living in the public eye as a performer, impact these identities?
- networks of artistic access and achievement. Who helps whom gain entry into the art world and why? How do these informal networks work?
- ideas of normality. What is a “normal” body? What is “normal” art?
- the formation of a disability arts culture. How is the work of professional artists with disabilities creating a disability arts culture? How does their work relate to the more mainstream art world?

Several of the artists in this project are currently making arrangements to have their historically significant materials, including personal papers, writings, photographs, and recordings of performances, archived in the Bancroft Library.

I'd like to thank Ann Lage and the DRILM team for their belief in this project and their tremendous support. I also want to offer my deep appreciation to the artists who so generously shared their stories.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. The office is under the direction of Richard Cándida Smith and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The catalogues of the Regional Oral History Office and many oral histories on line can be accessed at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/>.

Esther Ehrlich, Project Manager/Interviewer
Artists with Disabilities Oral History Project
Regional Oral History Office
University of California, Berkeley

Interview History

“Disability is an art—an ingenious way to live,” writes Neil Marcus. This award-winning playwright, actor, poet, and performance artist earned national acclaim when he crafted his experiences as a man living with a severe neurological disorder, dystonia, into a powerful staged work. *Storm Reading*, first produced in the late eighties, challenged audiences to reevaluate conventional ideas about disability and set a standard for performing artists with disabilities. Voted one of Los Angeles’ top ten plays of 1993, it enjoyed a nearly decade-long run. Since then, Neil Marcus’ passionate stance toward life has infused his artistic choices. Believing that “life is a performance,” he has cast his creative net wide, participating in a range of diverse projects.

Conducting an oral history interview with Neil Marcus presented a unique challenge, since he has a difficult time speaking, due to his disability. An oral history interview is, of course, oral and typically relies on the engaged verbal exchange between an interviewer and a narrator. Neil Marcus speaks slowly and unclearly and the process taxes him. Neil is also an unusually creative man, with a wildly active, associative mind and expressive body. In planning for our oral history interview, a central question emerged: How do we capture this artist in all of his boldness and complexity?

Neil and I met twice in late July, 2004 to explore this question. We decided that we would conduct the interview through instant messaging on two computers placed side-by-side in an office here at the Regional Oral History Office. Though typing on the computer is an arduous process for Neil due to his disability, he felt that he would be able to say more through the written word. We also decided that it was important that Neil have the freedom to switch to speech whenever he felt that he would be able to express himself more fully in that way. Videotaping the interview sessions would allow us to preserve any verbal exchanges between us. It would also provide a record of our nonverbal communication and give Neil the opportunity to slip in a spontaneous bit of performance art, if he felt so moved.

We begin our first interview session on September 1, 2004. I am concerned about logistics. Will Neil and his wheelchair fit at the desk? Will he be comfortable enough in our cramped space? Will the instant messaging program work effectively? Neil arrives and we begin, with no glitches. We each sit at our computers while the video camera runs. I type a question. “When and where were you born?” There is a long pause. Neil’s body is curved forward. His finger hovers above the keyboard. He slowly steers his finger toward a key, strikes. Over and over, his finger hovers and strikes, hovers and strikes. I wait. “i was born in 1954 in scarsdale ny.” I am astonished by how long it takes for Neil to answer my questions. He is working so hard, dripping sweat. What have I gotten us into? How will we possibly complete an interview of any substance if every word takes so long?

As the minutes tick by, I begin to settle into the rhythm of Neil’s pace. Perhaps it is these words he writes, “I’m a human bridge in a moment of time, spanning as far and as relevant as my thoughts will carry me,” that reassure me, that help me understand that what we’re doing here is not ordinary and enable me to slowly shift my relationship with time. I am easing into this experience of instant messaging with Neil, no longer feeling a sense of urgency, when he turns to me and says that he wants to talk. At first, I hesitate. Switching to speaking, now, is not what I

expected. This is, I realize, exactly who Neil is. His existence, his constantly changing body, is not what we expect.

Neil begins to speak. His body jerks, his jaw clenches, his blue eyes are full of light. My body leans forward, every ounce of me, concentrating on his words. I ask him if it's okay with him if I repeat back what he says in order to insure that I've understood him correctly, that the transcriber will be able to understand him. Neil agrees. We are two bodies, straining with the effort to communicate. Again, I feel like I'm entering into a different world, much more aware of being a physical being.

During a break, I tell Neil that I think that I need to ask him questions in a new way, that rather than asking for details, for a linear progression of his life, I need to aim for the heart of things. We can't afford to focus on typical questions, like, "Where did you go to high school?" and use up precious time and energy. Neil agrees with enthusiasm.

As the interview progresses, my mind begins to work in new ways. I think more. I follow Neil's lead, entering his world of pared-down language used powerfully, homing in, as Neil does, on what matters most. My words become fewer, distilled, compressed, while my ideas become more expansive. I provide context in my questions, which facilitates Neil answering fully, without having to use too many words. I realize that I need to be vigilant that in providing context, I am not speaking for Neil.

As Neil and I progress through our six session, approximately sixteen-hour interview (including one instant messaging session which Neil participates in from home, due to his fatigue level, and one session in which I videotape him in his home) we develop a rhythm, moving in and out of our various modes of communication, not without moments of awkwardness, but always with a deep sense of shared purpose. Though the interview is brief, in terms of number of words shared, it is not lacking in depth. In the interview, Neil discusses, among other topics, the formative importance of his parents' attitude toward life, role models who helped him develop a disability awareness, the significance of Berkeley in the late seventies, and his definition of "artfully." In one session he shares the meaning of petrified whalebone in his life, and in the subsequent session offers me, literally, a piece of that whalebone.

Throughout the interview, Neil sends me lots of emails. Many of them are copies of his writing, spanning many years. Some are letters that people have written to him. He also sends me his response to our interview, including the following:

I have been working on my oral history for about a month now. It is September 2004.

We weren't sure how to do an oral history with me because I have limited speaking abilities.....meaning to say I have a lot to express but my oral expression can feel and be about 1 percent, out of my mouth, of what it is in my mind before I speak. (That's a guesstimate-need a scientific equation to find out the exact relation of spoken word to unspoken thought)

For instance, you ask me how I am? Im likely to answer, "fine". But what I really want to say, but never would say, is that my humors feel quite balanced today even through the vail of agony I am experiencing in my hip. Also I am pleased that the republican press is very displeased with dick Cheney's below the belt remarks towards john Kerry regarding 9-11 the other day.this makes me hopeful.

Esther E., who is my interviewer, and I came up with the notion that this oral history needed to be accomplished in some new way. We decided on the technology of instant messaging. We'd be in the same room on two connected computers and we'd converse.

Converse we did. I found myself saying things and expounding on them as never before. I found myself thinking things I never would have thought of saying aloud before because of their complexity or seeming unimportance in relation to essential speech.

I vividly remember using the word gestalt to describe my attitude towards sex and love. I chuckled because at that moment I had the freedom to be a "Sigmund Freud" with my words.

Upon completion of the interview, we merged the instant messaging and the oral transcripts. Neil reviewed the transcripts in my office and together we made a few clarifying changes. Though in the interview I repeated Neil's speech back to him verbatim in order to ensure I'd understood him correctly, we deleted those repetitions in the transcript, except where we determined that they added something useful. We decided to leave the misspellings and abbreviations in Neil's instant messaging text since they reflect Neil's language and convey his unique way of expressing himself.

Esther Ehrlich
Interviewer
January, 2006

Interview 1: September 1, 2004
Begin Audiofile 1

1-00:00:15

Marcus: Can we talk?

1-00:00:21

Ehrlich: Yeah, yeah, we can do whatever. That's partly why we have the video on. I mean, in some ways the less we talk, the easier, because then it gets confusing when you have the [instant messaging] transcript; it won't be in the transcript. But that's partly why we have the video on, so that we can get the stuff that happens between us that isn't on the [computer] screen. Does that make sense?

1-00:00:48

Marcus: [inaudible] It's okay to talk?

1-00:00:56

Ehrlich: Yes.

1-00:00:58

Marcus: Okay, yeah.

1-00:01:03

Ehrlich: Okay, I go first.

1-00:01:07

Marcus: Okay.

1-00:01:13

Ehrlich: That door's about to slam. [door slams shut]

[Begin Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Neil Marcus Interview 9/1/04

Neil Marcus is idle at 9:49:55 AM.

Esther Ehrlich: So, let's start at the beginning., Neil. When and where were you born?

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 10:04:27 AM.

Neil Marcus: i was born in 1954 in scarsdale ny.

Esther Ehrlich: And who was in your family?

Neil Marcus: ii have 2 brothers 2 sister.all older and 2 parents

1-00:04:30

Ehrlich: I was thinking that I always hate when people read over my shoulder. I keep catching myself. [laughs] Do you mind?

1-00:04:36

Marcus: I don't.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Did you grow up with extended family nearby? Grandparents or aunts and uncles? Anyone else you considered family?

1-00:05:26

Ehrlich: Just give me one sec. I'm going to save it. [referring to the instant messaging text]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: there was another family who lived in a cottage behind our house....and yes i knew some of my relatives.my granddmothers too.

Esther Ehrlich: What do you know about where your ancestors came from?

Neil Marcus: ive learned a whole lot in my adult llife about that. my fathers side were from eastern russia and came to the u..s. to avoid the p;ograms [pogroms].....my moms side.....had a lot of italian roots and helped a m,ajoriity of musicians of that century.

1-00:18:51

Ehrlich: A majority of? [attempting to read the instant messaging text]

1-00:18:54

Marcus: Musicians.

1-00:18:59

Ehrlich: Oh, musicians.

1-00:19:05

Marcus: Yeah.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: that wwas in ny.

Esther Ehrlich: You mean, the musicians that they helped were in New York?

Neil Marcus: yes my nonas guest book has almost every person of the music world in it

Esther Ehrlich: I'm thinking about legacy. Do you make a connection between the persecution that your family suffered and your upbringing? Any "trickle down" that you think influenced who you are? I know that in your work you have a strong sense of identifying with "oppressed people."

1-00:27:07

Ehrlich: I'll just leave it there [referring to the instant messaging text]. I could go on and on, but do you get what I mean?

1-00:27:12

Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:27:12

Ehrlich: Okay. Oh, I have to send it to you [laughs].

1-00:27:20

Marcus: Can we take a break?

Ehrlich:

Yeah, yeah. Let me save this. So what do you want? Do you want to move around and stretch?

1-00:27:57

Marcus: Yeah. That last question is really incredible, a different way of looking at the question.

1-00:28:33

Ehrlich: Yeah. I have more to say but—we can also, you know, we're recording this right now, but also when we do just a talking interview, we can follow up on some of this, if we feel like we want to go deeper in.

1-00:28:55

Marcus: Yeah!

1-00:28:57

Ehrlich: We're using *all* of these different ways. I'd love to know your response, after we take a break.

1-00:29:03

Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:29:05

Ehrlich: I should probably pause the camera, huh?

1-00:29:06

Marcus: Yeah.

Neil Marcus is idle at 10:35:29 AM.

[They take an approximately ten-minute break]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 10:43:41 AM.

Neil Marcus: i see it slightly iin a different way.the legacy as i see an FEEL it was an is how the

generations have built so many bridgesperhaps in response to surrounding events/oppression..what they did with it.....yes i feel part of the tradition....definitely.

Esther Ehrlich: So, are you a bridge?

Neil Marcus: I'm a human bridge in a moment of time spanning a far and as relevant as my thoughts will carry me

1-00:47:10

Ehrlich: Okay, let me try this one. [reading text sent by Marcus] "I'm a human bridge in a moment of time." Can I add the "t"?

1-00:47:18

Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:47:19

Ehrlich: Oh, I don't know if I can. Anyway. [continues reading the text] "...spanning a ..." "ar?" [she looks to Marcus for help deciphering the word] "I'm a human bridge in a moment of time, spanning...air?"

1-00:47:45

Marcus: I don't know. [laughter]

1-00:47:45

Ehrlich: You don't know! [continues reading the text] "...and as relevant as my thoughts will carry me."

1-00:47:56

Marcus: Oh! "As far."

1-00:48:04

Ehrlich: Oh, oh, oh, oh. Poetry in the making.

1-00:48:09

Marcus: Yeah. You can—[gestures toward the keyboard, indicating that Ehrlich should type]

1-00:48:14

Ehrlich: Okay. How about if I just retype it?

1-00:48:17

Marcus: Sure.

1-00:48:31

Ehrlich: [speaking aloud as she types] "I'm a human bridge in a moment of time..." Can I punctuate? Comma or no?

1-00:48:42

Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:48:48
Ehrlich: "...spanning far."

1-00:48:54
Marcus: As.

1-00:48:55
Ehrlich: Huh?

1-00:48:55
Marcus: Far.

1-00:48:51
Ehrlich: Far.

1-00:48:56
Marcus: As.

1-00:48:58
Ehrlich: And? "Spanning far as?"

1-00:49:04
Marcus: As.

1-00:49:05
Ehrlich: Uh-uh-uh, okay. "...spanning as far as..." And what?

1-00:49:05
Marcus: And.

1-00:49:18
Ehrlich: As land?

1-00:49:19
Marcus: Huh?

1-00:49:22
Ehrlich: "I'm a human bridge in a moment of time, spanning as far as..."

1-00:49:28
Marcus: And.

1-00:49:30
Ehrlich: Okay. "...and as relevant..."

1-00:49:38
Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:49:38
Ehrlich: Oops. "...as my thoughts will carry me." I'm going to put in parentheses, so that that when we have a transcript, we'll know what happened here.

[laughter] How do I say that? “EE?” “EE?” [looks to Marcus for approval]
This shouldn’t be so hard. I’ll just say “EE for NM,” meaning that I just retyped it. Is that all right? Hmm?

1-00:50:41

Marcus: Yeah.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: I’m a human bridge in a moment of time, spanning as far and as relevant as my thoughts will carry me. (EE for NM)

1-00:50:45

Ehrlich: I’ll just put some note in there so we know what happened. Otherwise, it sounds like I’m just repeating what you...[types]—[colleague enters to check on camera equipment] Everything is just fine.

1-00:52:04

Marcus: Can I—? [gestures toward the keyboard]

1-00:52:05

Ehrlich: Of course. What? Fix something? Yeah. No, I don’t think you can, actually. We can just redo it if you care enough. Or if you tell me—we’re going to have to edit it—I can fix it then. Or we can fix it then.

1-00:52:25

Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:52:28

Ehrlich: We can’t go back now, but we can do that with the actual transcript. We’re going to take out all of the “Neil Marcuss”and— [colleague enters and communicates about the camera] Okay. [pause]

I wonder if I should write—I wanted to say, too, when I say “...your work has a strong sense of identifying with oppressed people...” really, I meant—you know what I mean by that? I mean, your work isn’t about being oppressed, but you talk about, especially in your journal, about identifying with the black [rights] movement, the disability [rights] movement, and all of that.

1-00:52:28

Marcus: Yeah.

1-00:53:19

Ehrlich: Jews and—I have another question, though. Are you ready for more?

Marcus:

[nods]

1-00:54:04

Ehrlich: Is that accurate, “personality”? [referring to instant messaging text]

Marcus: [nods]

1-00:56:36

Ehrlich: Oh, I should send it to you, huh? [referring to the text message]

Marcus: [nods]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: What about the legacy of artists in your family? I know that your mother was an actor/radio personality and now you mention your grandmother's connection to music. What relevance does that legacy have, their art to your own development as an artist?

Neil Marcus: i see that art has a very important ROLE in their lives. it seem very natural and logical 'to do art' and anyone who can do it is lucky. art is a gift.....

Neil Marcus: who would have thought that some of the greatest masterpieces wouldd come out of bows and strings and horsehair filiments.....mysterious huh?

Esther Ehrlich: Yes!

Begin Audiofile 2

2-00:01:21

Marcus: Can I take a break?

2-00:01:27

Ehrlich: Sure.

[break for lunch]

2-00:01:45

Ehrlich: So this is a follow-up. We began the interview doing Instant Messaging but have now switched to speaking, to give Neil a break from typing. We were just talking, when we took a break, and decided that rather than do—for the sake of conserving Neil's energy here—that we would try to focus on looking at childhood through the lens of formative influences, trying to make the connection between Neil's childhood and his development as an artist.

So, one of the things that I'm interested in is—you know, your work is in large part about, to quote you, “embracing the tumultuous journey,” rather than “steeping in the darkness,” and I'm wondering what you attribute this stance, this attitude to. Where do you think you developed that attitude; how is

it connected to your upbringing? Do you make a link there? I know that's a huge question, but—

2-00:03:41

Marcus: I think both of my parents have that kind of view of life. I really see it today. They are both in their eighties, but they're so interested in life. They're excited about everything.

2-00:06:31

Ehrlich: And do you remember that being what childhood was like?

2-00:06:38

Marcus: Hmm.

2-00:06:53

Ehrlich: Did they share that excitement with the kids?

2-00:06:59

Marcus: Walking on the beach.

2-00:07:30

Ehrlich: Walking on the beach. Is it okay if I repeat what you say?

2-00:07:29

Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:07:30

Ehrlich: So we make sure when we transcribe it won't be too—walking on the beach.

2-00:07:36

Marcus: Yeah. Finding petrified—

Ehrlich:

Pillow fight? Is that right? No.

2-00:08:16

Marcus: Petrified whalebone.

2-00:08:36

Ehrlich: Did you say petrified whalebone?

2-00:08:44

Marcus: [nods and smiles]

2-00:08:46

Ehrlich: These are the things they were interested in and shared with you and your siblings?

Marcus:

[nods and smiles]

2-00:09:05
Ehrlich: And you've written about your father's unconventional sense of humor.

2-00:09:15
Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:09:18
Ehrlich: Can you say more about that?

2-00:09:18
Marcus: He's a nonconformist and a rebel.

2-00:10:13
Ehrlich: So, do you feel like you walk in his shoes?

2-00:10:15
Marcus: [nods] My mother's, too.

2-00:10:25
Ehrlich: I know you said something about—I wrote something about [checks notes]—you carrying her imagination in your soul?

2-00:10:35
Marcus: Uh-huh. She is a wonderfully creative person.

2-00:11:12
Ehrlich: Is she still doing art?

2-00:11:21
Marcus: She wants to write the story of her mother.

2-00:12:13
Ehrlich: And her mother was Italian? Is that right? [pause] Is it right that her mother was your grandmother who you said saved the musicians?

2-00:12:32
Marcus: Her father was Italian.

2-00:12:50
Ehrlich: But was her mother the one—

2-00:12:53
Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:12:52
Ehrlich: They were both involved in saving musicians. And when you said “saving,” I didn't really understand that. When you said “saving musicians,” what did you mean?

2-00:13:05
Marcus: Ummm...I don't think I said “saving.”

2-00:13:19

Ehrlich: When we were writing, I thought—. I know you wrote that musicians were in the guest book. So they were in that circle?

2-00:13:38

Marcus: She helped them move forward in their careers.

2-00:14:33

Ehrlich: Uh-huh. Was she a musician herself?

2-00:14:35

Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:14:39

Ehrlich: So, [we have] a strong sense of your family and their connection to life.

Marcus:

[nods]

2-00:15:00

Ehrlich: What else from your childhood feels significant in terms of your sense of self as an artist?

2-00:15:27

Marcus: I did a lot of thinking.

2-00:15:59

Ehrlich: As a kid?

2-00:16:01

Marcus: Yeah! I remember thinking a lot about the universe and how big it is and what does that mean. I think there was a lot of nature in my life.

2-00:18:08:

Ehrlich: As a child?

2-00:18:10

Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:18:16

Ehrlich: I know that the performance artist and poet Cheryl Wade in an interview, she talked a lot about how important it was as a little girl to have her sort of sensuous relationship with the natural world, to feel it and be in it, to feel the grass, that she feels like that had a significant effect on her art as an adult. And that if she hadn't had that experience as a little one of mucking around, she doesn't think that she'd be the same artist. Do you have a response to that, in terms of yourself?

- 2-00:19:07
 Marcus: Swimming in the water—in the ocean, lakes, rivers—it’s been really important to me all my life. Traveling and camping. I think it’s also important to recognize that I came from a family of economic privilege.
- 2-00:22:14
 Ehrlich: Because?
- 2-00:22:19
 Marcus: A lot of what I’ve experienced, in lots of parts of the world, some people can’t.
- 2-00:23:25
 Ehrlich: So, how about specific—your relationship to words and language. I’m interested in how you developed as a writer. I know that you learned to read early.
- 2-00:23:48
 Marcus: Mmm-hmm.
- 2-00:23:47
 Ehrlich: Do you remember learning to read?
- 2-00:23:49
 Marcus: I don’t.
- 2-00:23:55
 Ehrlich: Do you remember what your relationships to books was when you were a kid?
- 2-00:24:11
 Marcus: I did read a lot.
- 2-00:24:39
 Ehrlich: Do you remember what your—am I interrupting?
- Marcus: [shakes head]
- 2-00:24:39
 Ehrlich: Do you remember what your favorite books were? Childhood books?
- 2-00:24:45
 Marcus: *Charlotte’s Web*. Everything about trucks. Jules Verne. Mythology.
- 2-00:25:53
 Ehrlich: Do you make a distinction—I realize I’m asking about childhood in a very broad way. Do you have a division between when you had dystonia and when you didn’t? Or, is there some dramatic shift when you think back about childhood?

2-00:26:20
Marcus: I think when you get dystonia you think more, and I thought more.

2-00:27:18
Ehrlich: Shifts in the things you became interested in?

2-00:27:19
Marcus: A little later.

2-00:28:08
Ehrlich: A little later there were some shifts?

2-00:28:12
Marcus: Big, big shifts.

2-00:28:19
Ehrlich: In terms of the things you became interested in, is that what you mean?

2-00:28:22
Marcus: Th—[points to his head]

2-00:28:21
Ehrlich: The thoughts?

2-00:28:23
Marcus: [nods]

2-00:28:29
Ehrlich: Do you want to talk about that, or should we save that?

2-00:28:35
Marcus: Thinking about how society works.

2-00:28:56
Ehrlich: These are the things you thought after you got dystonia and when you were older?

2-00:29:06
Marcus: Mmm-hmm. And human relationships.

2-00:29:27
Ehrlich: So how old were you when you started to think about this stuff more?

2-00:29:32
Marcus: Fourteen. Maybe every person does.

2-00:29:41
Ehrlich: We don't know unless we ask them.

Marcus: [nods and smiles]

2-00:29:52

Ehrlich:

So, I know that you became interested in—we're sort of leaping ahead, but I think we'll just take this wherever it goes—I know you became interested in co-counseling. Sue Schweik [English professor at UC Berkeley] told me that. And that your dad brought you to your first co-counseling session. Is that right?

2-00:30:18

Marcus:

That's correct.

2-00:30:25

Ehrlich:

What did that mean to you? How old were you?

2-00:30:31

Marcus:

I think fifteen.

2-00:30:40

Ehrlich:

What importance did that have to you at fifteen?

2-00:30:43

Marcus:

It woke me up as to who I am.

2-00:31:16

Ehrlich:

That's profound. It woke you up as to who you are, in what way?

2-00:31:41

Marcus:

I used to look at the floor. I was hiding from people. It turned that around.

2-00:33:02

Ehrlich:

The hiding?

2-00:33:09

Marcus:

[nods]

2-00:33:07

Ehrlich:

And co-counseling shifted that?

2-00:33:18

Marcus:

[nods] It allowed me to think of myself as a worthwhile person.

2-00:34:22

Ehrlich:

Mmm-hmm. How are you holding up?

2-00:34:37

Marcus:

Okay.

2-00:34:40

Ehrlich:

To back up a little bit to the childhood stuff, what about music? What place did music have in your life as a kid? I'm thinking specifically in terms of your

work, and rhythm and sound, and wondering—and your love of dance—wondering the childhood influences of music and sound?

2-00:35:09

Marcus: *Peter Pan. West Side Story.* All of the musicals really influenced me.

2-00:36:11

Ehrlich: How?

2-00:36:14

Marcus: I knew them all by heart. *Archy and Mehitabel.* That was a big one for me. I didn't know what the words meant back then, but I knew that they were extraordinary!

2-00:38:40

Ehrlich: Did you write?

2-00:38:46

Marcus: [shakes head]

2-00:38:50

Ehrlich: When did you start writing?

2-00:39:00

Marcus: In high school.

2-00:39:10

Ehrlich: And at that point, you were in Ojai?

2-00:39:16

Marcus: [nods]

2-00:39:16

Ehrlich: How old were you when your family came from Scarsdale to Ojai? You were still a little boy, right?

2-00:39:26

Marcus: I was six.

2-00:39:32

Ehrlich: A very little boy.

2-00:39:43

Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:39:39

Ehrlich: So, in high school, you started to write. Why?

2-00:39:50

Marcus: They told me to [smiling].

2-00:39:58
Ehrlich: [laughs]

2-00:39:58
Marcus: Every day.

2-00:40:01
Ehrlich: So, you mean in school?

2-00:40:05
Marcus: Yeah.

2-00:40:07
Ehrlich: Did you write for yourself, on your own, with pleasure? That's a loaded question, but you know what I'm asking.

2-00:40:17
Marcus: I liked writing for school. I didn't write on my own 'til later.

2-00:40:53
Ehrlich: Is there anything—

2-00:41:07
Marcus: You called me an artist.

Ehrlich: [nods]

2-00:41:59
Marcus: I still didn't think of myself as an artist until much later.

2-00:43:04
Ehrlich: 'Til you were an adult?

2-00:43:19
Marcus: [nods] I thought I was a marine biologist [laughs].

2-00:43:33
Ehrlich: Were you?

2-00:43:33
Marcus: Sort of.

2-00:43:36
Ehrlich: Sort of. Is that something you were interested in as a kid?

2-00:43:40
Marcus: Mmm-hmm.

2-00:43:48
Ehrlich: Were you a physically active kid? I know you swam, but—

2-00:43:54

Marcus: Yeah!

2-00:43:54

Ehrlich: What did you like to do?

2-00:44:01

Marcus: Walk. [laughter] Climb trees. Skate. Play ball. I never really stopped doing all of those things. Even today, I might attempt any one of those things.

2-00:46:03

Ehrlich: Maybe I should repeat the list, just in case. Let's see if I remember it. I think it was all clear. Walk. Climb trees. Skate.

2-00:46:20

Marcus: Play ball.

2-00:46:21

Ehrlich: Play ball. That was it?

2-00:46:28

Marcus: Uh-huh.

2-00:46:28

Ehrlich: I'm thinking we should take a break. What do you think?

2-00:46:41

Marcus: I think, yes.

[end of session 1]

Interview 2: September 8, 2004

Begin Audiofile 3

3-00:00:55

Ehrlich: So, it's September 8, 2004, and this is the second interview with Neil Marcus, and it's another instant messaging interview.

[Begin Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Neil Marcus Interview 9/8/04

Neil Marcus is idle at 9:39:24 AM.

Esther Ehrlich: So, let's talk more about your early years, which we began talking about last interview. First, I'd like to clarify what you meant when we were discussing your parents' love of life and I asked you how they conveyed that to you as a child and you answered, "Petrified whalebone."

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 10:08:23 AM.

Neil Marcus: wwell....if you go to certain beaches in calif and u kno what u are looking for.....there is the chance to find 100,0000000000000000000000000000 year old whales bone that has turned to stone.one of lifes 'treasures'.

Esther Ehrlich: Any other 'treasures,' either physical or metaphorical that we haven't talked about yet that you feel your parents exposed you to as a child?

Neil Marcus: ii would sayy that a lot of people visited us i remember it was incredible variety. my parents had a poker game tthey pplayed every fri nite.many of the players had been blacklisted iin hollywood i n the 50'ss.they let me play with themm.age 8,9.....

Neil Marcus: i guess i llearned EVERYONE HAS A STORY.aan incredible ne

3-00:22:47

Ehrlich: Is that supposed to say, "an incredible one?" [referring to the instant messaging text]

3-00:22:51

Marcus: Yeah.

3-00:22:52

Ehrlich: Don't worry about it. Well, do what you want. [regarding correcting the text]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: one

Neil Marcus is idle at 10:37:36 AM.

03-00:23:35
Ehrlich: That's really interesting.

03-00:23:39
Marcus: I could tell you a few—

03-00:23:48
Ehrlich: You could tell me a few—stories, you mean?

03-00:23:52
Marcus: [nods]

03-00:23:53
Ehrlich: Sure. You mean spoken or—?

03-00:23:58
Marcus: Spoken.

03-00:24:00
Ehrlich: Now?

03-00:24:01
Marcus: Yeah.

03-00:24:06
Ehrlich: Okay. I'm only hesitating because I'm thinking—let me just save this.
[referring to text message] So, spoken rather than written?

03-00:24:26
Marcus: Yes.

03-00:24:27
Ehrlich: Okay. Let me make sure that you're on camera, since you just backed up.
Yeah, you're fine.

03-00:24:51
Marcus: For instance, one of my mother's friends was the last living Dadaist [Beatrice Wood].

3-00:25:30
Ehrlich: Your mother's friend was the last living, what?

03-00:35:11
Marcus: Dadaist. Dadaist.

03-00:25:40
Ehrlich: Dadaist? Is that it?

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up, nods]

03-00:24:44
Ehrlich: Oh, interesting!

03-00:25:47
Marcus: She's the mother of Dada.

03-00:25:56
Ehrlich: Wow! She's the mother of Dada? Really? And what do you remember of her?

03-00:26:08
Marcus: What a character! She wore Indian saris all of the time and talked about her love life.

03-00:27:04
Ehrlich: When you were a child?

Marcus: Yeah.

03-00:27:13
Ehrlich: Did anyone make an effort to censor her in front of you?

03-00:27:18
Marcus: No. There was a friend of hers who was a bomber pilot in World War II. He was the only guy who survived ["out of thousands." dictated by Marcus to Ehrlich during editing]

03-00:28:15
Ehrlich: In his plane?

03-00:28:21
Marcus: In his platoon. After all of those years of bombing. I have memories of hundreds of people like that.

03-00:29:02
Ehrlich: That's really interesting. So that was the environment in your home.

03-00:29:11
Marcus: Yes. I learned co-counseling from the guy who invented co-counseling.

03-00:29:47
Ehrlich: Who is that?

03-00:29:55
Marcus: Harvey Jackins. [Ehrlich has difficulty understanding "Jackins" and Marcus uses gestures and repeats the sounds in the name to aid her]

03-00:32:03
Ehrlich: And that was starting at age, you said fourteen or fifteen?

03-00:30:36

Marcus: That was like learning from Mao Tse-Tung! He was the most incredible theorist ever born.

03-00:31:22

Ehrlich: In what way? What was it about co-counseling... You talked a little bit about it last time, that you went from looking down to looking up. Do you want to say more about the impact of it on your life or what touched you so deeply?

03-00:31:43

Marcus: It really explained the way society functions and the role of oppression and how to fight oppression.

03-00:33:46

Ehrlich: Neil, let me double-check that all of this is on film, that the camera is in the right place, because I don't want to lose this. And move around a little bit. Yeah, you're fine. I want to make sure that I'm not blocking you, but I have no way to tell.

So, you learned about how to fight oppression?

03-00:34:14

Marcus: It's a very personal fight, to love, to believe in yourself. Where else can you learn that?

03-00:35:21

Ehrlich: I know that one of the things—are you done?

03-00:35:26

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

03-00:35:28

Ehrlich: I know that one of the things that has come up in reading your journal, in reading responses to your work, and also just in your work itself, people comment, you comment on your positive self-image. You've even been criticized for being too positive.

03-00:35:50

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

03-00:35:50

Ehrlich: I remember in one of the things I've read, in one of the talk-backs after one of your shows, a guy in the audience—I think it was a guy—criticized you for not being more negative, and so it sounds like this experience with co-counseling is part of the answer.

03-00:36:18

Marcus: [nods] I think it's a large part of my success communicating. [Marcus continues talking]

03-00:38:47

Ehrlich: I missed that. I could guess, but I'd rather not. Did you say something about "contact?"

03-00:38:53

Marcus: [shakes his head] That's important, too! [laughter] I started hugging people at age fourteen. It's part of co-counseling. It's not easy to learn.

03-00:39:57

Ehrlich: To learn what?

03-00:39:59

Marcus: [touches Ehrlich's shoulder with his finger] To touch other people.

03-00:40:06

Ehrlich: Are you saying it's something *you* needed to learn?

03-00:40:09

Marcus: Everybody—

03-00:40:14

Ehrlich: —needs to learn.

03-00:40:19

Marcus: That's the way we keep alive, hopeful. It's about love. It's all about love. [smiling] Break?

[break]

03-00:41:47

Ehrlich: So, we took a break and we talked, and now we're back to instant messaging.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: We haven't talked very much at all about your schooling. In your writing you mention your desire to de-rigidify institutions. How does this relate i

Esther Ehrlich: to your experience in school, if it does?

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 11:06:06 AM.

Neil Marcus: when i think about school i think about it had been impossible for me to eat with all the otheer kid....i was too elf concious. id like to see schools address this aand other issues of the SELF.

03-00:49:29

Ehrlich: [points to the word "self" on Marcus' computer screen, which is mistyped as "elf"] Perfect! [Marcus nods. They laugh]

03-00:49:44

Marcus: I love it.

03-00:49:50

Ehrlich: Me, too.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: What would your ideal school look like?**Neil Marcus:** in a dome.learning techniques to save our earth and stop war.....theres love again. chioldcare....honoring culture.....race.....body type....gender etc.thats a beginning**Neil Marcus is idle at 11:29:41 AM.**

03-00:58:17

Marcus: What? [referring to Ehrlich's long pause]

03-00:58:21

Ehrlich: Just thinking.

03-00:58:24

Marcus: [nods] Could we talk?

03-00:58:36

Ehrlich: Sure. Let this go? [referring to instant messaging] Or just—

03-00:58:41

Marcus: Either one—

03-00:58:45

Ehrlich: Yeah.

03-00:58:47

Marcus: Okay. Try talking.

03-00:59:07

Ehrlich: Try? Try talking?

03-00:59:08

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

3-00:59:10

Ehrlich: Okay, so let me save this. [referring to instant messaging text] Will you say a little bit more about what your school experience was?

03-00-1:00:02

Marcus: After I got dystonia it was pretty hard, because I didn't know how to think about it. Few people talked to me about it.

03-00:1:01:44

Ehrlich: About having dystonia?

03-00:1:01:46

Marcus: Mmm-hmm. [colleague enters and changes tape]

Begin Audiofile 4

04-00:00:05

Ehrlich: So you were saying, few people talked to you about it.

04-00:00:07

Marcus: Yeah.

04-00:00:08

Ehrlich: Do you mean at school or in general?

04-00:00:13

Marcus: Both. They didn't ask what it was like and there weren't role models around you.

04-00:1:10

Ehrlich: You were in elementary school. Was it public school?

04-00:1:23

Marcus: Private.

04-00:1:32

Ehrlich: Can you say more?

04-00:1:34

Marcus: I didn't know what it meant to be crippled. It took a lot of learning about society.

04-00:3:19

Ehrlich: There was a period of time between when you got dystonia when you were eight, before the experience of co-counseling at fourteen, fifteen—

04-00:3:30

Marcus: Right.

04-00:3:35

Ehrlich: Was that a particularly difficult spell?

04-00:3:42

Marcus: I think it was a little hard. I didn't really get out much. I was hiding from people.

04-00:5:01

Ehrlich:

Do you feel like in school—not to harp on school, but I’m trying to get some sense of what your actual experience within the classroom was like—did you feel like in school, you were learning? Were people attending to your mind?

04-00:5:30

Marcus:

I was a good student, but that’s not all there is.

04-00:06:16

Ehrlich:

Were you able to do the tasks in elementary school that you were—

04-00:6:30

Marcus:

Yeah.

04-00:6:31

Ehrlich:

—supposed to do after you got dystonia?

04-00:6:37

Marcus:

Yeah.

04-00:6:41

Ehrlich:

Did you have an assistant or—?

04-00:6:44

Marcus:

Yeah. My folks. They gave me breaks and food, ‘cause I wouldn’t eat with the other kids.

04-00:7:42

Ehrlich:

Because you were self-conscious?

04-00:7:49

Marcus:

[nods]

04-00:8:21

Ehrlich:

So, you’ve written about dystonia. You have a piece, “How I Got Dystonia—”

04-00:8:32

Marcus:

Right.

04-00:8:33

Ehrlich:

—and I’m wondering if there’s anything, from your perspective now, that you feel like you’ve left out of that more public story that you’ve written, that you want to add?

04-00:8:49

Marcus:

There’s a whole lot more to the medical condition than people talk about. How do people relate to you? How do you relate to them? How do you be helped?

04-00:11:49

Ehrlich: And do you remember actually having those questions when you were a child?

04-00:11:57

Marcus: [shakes head] A little later. Fourteen.

04-00:12:24

Ehrlich: Fourteen was a really significant turning point, it sounds like. Very profound.

04-00:12:32

Marcus: Yeah.

04-00:12:36

Ehrlich: Is there anything else to say about the experience of first getting dystonia when you were a little boy—that we haven't talked about and that you haven't written about—that feels important?

04-00:12:54

Marcus: How my parents felt—

04-00:13:32

Ehrlich: Actually, that was something I was interested in asking you, your family's response.

04-00:13:45

Marcus: My dad was really looking for help for me from doctors all over the world. I've got a notebook full of his correspondence.

They played with me a lot.

04-00:15:45

Ehrlich: In your writing you talk about love as play, play as love.

04-00:15:57

Marcus: Yeah. [Marcus gestures pulling back a bow string and letting an arrow fly] Fffft! Archery.

04-00:16:09

Ehrlich: What about archery?

04-00:16:14

Marcus: My mother played that with me [laughs]. I've heard that they were freaked out, but I didn't know it.

04-00:17:12

Ehrlich: They've told you afterwards?

04-00:17:16

Marcus: [shakes head] I assume that they were worried, because I almost died.

04-00:18:19

Ehrlich: But they kept their fear from you?

04-00:18:25

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

04-00:18:35

Ehrlich: You almost died in an operation or—?

04-00:18:40

Marcus: From dystonia. From being all twisted. That's why they operated [points to brain].

04-00:19:50

Ehrlich: So, were you more twisted as a child?

04-00:19:54

Marcus: Yes. Yes.

04-00:19:58

Ehrlich: And it threatened your life?

04-00:20:02

Marcus: Yes.

04-00:20:17

Ehrlich: I know that other people with disabilities have talked about not wanting to speak to the negative part of having a disability because society is so ready to stereotype people with disabilities as having such wretched lives—

04-00:20:45

Marcus: Yeah.

04-00:20:48

Ehrlich: —and the disability [rights] movement and people with disabilities have worked so hard to counteract that stereotype, that a life with disabilities isn't a life worth living. And so there's pressure not to talk about the hard stuff.

04-00:21:10

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

04-00:21:26

Ehrlich: I wonder what you would say about the place that some of the more "negative" or difficult emotions, like despair, have had in your life? I'm thinking about childhood, when you first got sick, but wherever in time you want to land is—

04-00:21:31

Marcus: I think it's a great topic to talk about. It's not easy to talk about because there's a lot of pressure to look good or to look hopeful.

Can I swear?

04-00:23:27
Ehrlich:

Go for it. This is *your* interview.

04-00:23:35
Marcus:

I wrote this little piece recently called “Fuck Hope.”

04-00:24:46
Ehrlich:

Do you have it with you?

04-00:24:50
Marcus:

No.

04-00:24:52
Ehrlich:

Do you know it in your head?

4-00:24:56
Marcus:

Yeah.

4-00:24:54
Ehrlich:

Why don’t you say it? Can you?

4-00:24:59
Marcus:

I could write it. [points to the computer]

4-00:25:15
Ehrlich:

Is it worth the effort, or should we just include it later? It’s up to you. Do you want to write it so that we can talk about it now, or—?

4-00:25:29
Marcus:

I think it’s really appropriate.

4-00:25:44
Ehrlich:

Do you want to write it now?

4-00:25:49
Marcus:

[shakes head, begins reciting piece] Fuck hope. Fuck courage. Fuck science. There is a lot of room for negative expression. [some back and forth follows here to clarify if Neil is saying “is,” “is not,” or both]

4-00:28:34
Ehrlich:

Is there also *not* a lot of room? Are they both true?

4-00:28:32
Marcus:

[gestures with a thumbs up] Yes.

04-00:28:35
Ehrlich:

Okay. So, can I repeat it?

04-00:28:39

Marcus: [nods and smiles]

04-00:28:41

Ehrlich: There is *not* a lot of room for negative expression. There is a lot of room for negative expression.

04-00:28:49

Marcus: Yes! Both. It's important to be negative. It's [Marcus continues to speak]

04-00:29:59

Ehrlich: Say that again. I got the emotion, but I didn't get the words.

04-00:29:59

Marcus: It's also true that I'm not negative a lot. But I'm learning. [laughter]

04-00:30:43

Ehrlich: There was a period—well, I don't know this—in one of your pieces in "The Art of Human Being," you said that you tried to kill yourself.

04-00:31:00

Marcus: [nods]

04-00:31:02

Ehrlich: Do you want to say more about that? You were a teenager, right?

04-00:31:09

Marcus: Fourteen. [smiles]

04-00:31:11

Ehrlich: Ahhhh. Fourteen. Okay.

04-00:31:15

Marcus: I didn't try real hard. Cut my wrists 'cause I felt frustrated. It's a typical story. I think I felt like I wanted to love people but couldn't do it. [longer than usual pause] Typical problem. That's when I did co-counseling. You know that.

04-00:34:46

Ehrlich: I know that, yeah.

04-00:34:52

Marcus: But *they* don't. [pointing at camera and smiling] I did co-counseling at fourteen. [laughing and looking right into camera]

04-00:35:06

Ehrlich: They heard you. [laughter] Do you have energy to go a little bit further or do you want to stop?

04-00:35:20

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

04-00:35:22

Ehrlich: So, is there anything else from [your] early years that seems important that we haven't included here, from your perspective?

04-00:35:34

Marcus: [looks contemplative]

04-00:36:02

Ehrlich: If you do think of anything, we can always add it in.

One thing I'm thinking about is that, in your writing you said something about similarities between growing up Jewish and growing up disabled; it was in your journal. Anything to say about that?

04-00:36:30

Marcus: I didn't know I was Jewish. I didn't know I was disabled. My parents didn't emphasize it. They didn't talk about being Jewish.

04-00:38:50

Ehrlich: Do you know why?

4-00:38:57

Marcus: My father had it forced on him. My mother just didn't know too much about it.

4-00:40:29

Ehrlich: So, [are] some of the ways it was similar to disability that you had to discover both of them on your own?

4-00:40:40

Marcus: Yes.

4-00:40:50

Ehrlich: I'm wondering if maybe this is a good place to stop, and next time we can talk about your growing up years, college, coming to Berkeley and looking at your evolution into being a writer and performance artist.

4-00:41:16

Marcus: Good.

4-00:41:16

Ehrlich: Does that sound good?

4-00:41:18

Marcus: Yeah.

4-00:41:20

Ehrlich: Okay.

[end of session 2]

Interview 3: September 10, 2004
Begin Audiofile 5

5-00:02:24

Ehrlich: It's September 10, 2004, and this is the third interview with Neil Marcus, and we are going to start off with instant messaging.

[Begin Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Neil Marcus Interview 3

Neil Marcus is idle at 9:48:24 AM.

Esther Ehrlich: I'd like to begin with a bit of follow-up from last time re. childhood. When you were talking about first coping with dystonia, you said that you didn't have any role models. Do you remember having any role models as a kid?

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 10:07:16 AM.

Neil Marcus: funny you should ask. my memory in the past day has been lingering on all the people i NOW kno WERE disabled THEN. one of the poker player,for instance, had a stroke.

Neil Marcus: one of my teachers had polio.it was just not a part of my voocabulary or social conciousnes

Esther Ehrlich: When do you think that began to change?

Neil Marcus: i told u about being entransed by the miracle worker on tv. there was also some late nite talk sho mentioning a paralyzed persons life.....bit by bit i came to be aware

5-00:19:07

Marcus: Can I tell a story?

5-00:19:20

Ehrlich: Yeah, let me save this [referring to instant messaging text]. Do we need to move? [a short conversation follows, related to seating arrangements and filming]

5-00:20:18

Marcus: One of my father's friends from New York had a wife who wrote children's books—[pauses]

5-00:21:21

Ehrlich: I understood. "Who wrote a children's book."

5-00:21:26

Marcus: Well-known children's writer. She visited Ojai and stayed with us.

5-00:22:24

Ehrlich: Did she have a disability?

5-00:22:24
 Marcus: Not yet. But she wrote a book which had a disabled character and people told me it was me. And that sort of blew my mind!

5-00:23:19
 Ehrlich: In a good way?

5-00:23:26
 Marcus: It made me look at myself as a disabled person.

5-00:24:14
 Ehrlich: Huh.

5-00:24:14
 Marcus: Yeah.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: THE WESTING GAME by ellen raskin.

5-00:25:02
 Ehrlich: *The Westing Game*, is that—?

5-00:25:03
 Marcus: [nods]

5-00:25:07
 Ehrlich: Oh, that's the kid's book?

5-00:25:06
 Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

5-00:25:35
 Ehrlich: I'm just making a note that we switched to talking so that when we look at this, we'll understand.

5-00:25:32
 Marcus: Yeah. [laughter]

5-00:25:38
 Ehrlich: So, do you want to keep writing now, or what?

5-00:25:39
 Marcus: Yeah.

5-00:25:38
 Ehrlich: Okay.

Let me just ask. Is there more to say—I don't want to push us—I'm wondering if there's more to say about that realization that you were disabled, having someone from the outside see you that way? Is there more to say before I move us on? I don't want to short-circuit that.

5-00:27:49

Marcus: [shakes head] No.

5-00:27:52

Ehrlich: Just the fact of having someone else label you "disabled" and write about you that way was significant?

5-00:28:00

Marcus: [gestures with a thumbs up]

5-00:28:07

Ehrlich: Okay. So, happy to move on?

5-00:28:08

Marcus: Uh-huh.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: I want to move us towards your young adult years, but first I was realizing that we never talked about what kind of work your father did.

Neil Marcus: in his early yrs. he was a publicist and a film maker. along the way he got tubercullosis and spent 2 yrs in bed.... later in life i think he happened across his true passion.helping people as a counellor .he was always in love with nature and hiking.....

Esther Ehrlich: The artistic strain runs deep in your family! Anything to say about your father's illness and its effect on you?

Neil Marcus: i realize that we are in similar 'boats' . he talks about it a little.i imagine tthe theme is ,how to stay sane'. im sure art is related to this.

Esther Ehrlich: How?

Neil Marcus: doing art.....living artiisticly i think helps meit gives me good direction

Neil Marcus: i [w]as always fascinated by movies about prisons. how people cope?

Esther Ehrlich: With?

Neil Marcus: difficult situations.. another favvorite topic.....marooned.....

Esther Ehrlich: Themes of isolation? Separateness?

Neil Marcus: yes definaately aand discovering tremendous resources.....

Esther Ehrlich: Yes.

Neil Marcus is idle at 11:04:25 AM.

5-00:52:09

Marcus: Break.

5-00:52:10

Ehrlich: Good timing. [pauses video camera]

We were [about to begin] taking a break and Neil just gave this to me [referring to object in her hand] and I just put the camera back on. I don't know if we're even in the [range of] the camera. What—? [referring to the object]

5-00:52:30

Marcus: This is whalebone.

5-00:52:38

Ehrlich: This is whalebone!

5-00:53:00

Marcus: It reminds me of what we're doing. You deserve to have it. ["You're giving me a treasure by opening the whole story. The whalebone is a metaphor for treasure." dictated by Marcus to Ehrlich during editing]

5-00:53:22

Ehrlich: And what? [not understanding his words]

5-00:53:11

Marcus: You should have it.

5-00:53:25

Ehrlich: And I should have it! Thank you.

5-00:53:32

Marcus: Because it's a treasure.

5-00:53:38

Ehrlich: Thank you.

5-00:53:36

Marcus: Mmm-hmm.

5-00:53:35

Ehrlich: It's a gift.

5-00:53:46

Marcus: What we're doing here is a gift. I feel it so much. [gestures toward heart]

5-00:54:07

Ehrlich: So do I. Thank you.

[break]

Begin Audiofile 6

6-00:00:17

Ehrlich: So, we took a break and now we're back to instant messaging.

6-00:00:24

Marcus: [nods]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: What was involved in your decision to go to college? What did you study?

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 11:16:46 AM.

Neil Marcus: i was keen on experimental colleges. found a good one.part of western wash state college. i just thought well,,everyone goes to coll aftr highschool.i'll go too.my sttudie were self created.....frankly just living there was an education.

Esther Ehrlich: Your friend Sue Schweik said that you once said something to her like, "I never learned anything important from a book." Can you say more?

Neil Marcus: i regret saying that

Neil Marcus: i do learn a lot from observation .i d mean to emphasize education is not ALL IN BOOKS

6-00:11:37

Ehrlich: That's "I'd meant to," right? [referring to instant messaging text]

6-00:11:39

Marcus: [nods]

6-00:11:39

Ehrlich: Yeah, obviously. Don't fix it. It's—

6-00:11:43

Marcus: I—[he resumes typing]

6-00:12:06

Ehrlich: You want that small [lower] case? [referring to instant messaging text]

6-00:12:52

Marcus: Yeah.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: in books

6-00:13:05

Ehrlich: Is this something you wrote about? About being in college?

6-00:13:11

Marcus: [nods]

6-00:13:10

Ehrlich: Don't you have a piece about—you hung out with this friend and—it's just about sort of ranging around doing crazy stuff?

6-00:13:18

Marcus: Yeah.

6-00:13:21

Ehrlich: Maybe I won't ask you this [about college experience] so that we don't have to go through it, unless there's something else?

6-00:13:30

Marcus: Yeah.

6-00:13:31

Ehrlich: Is there?

6-00:13:32

Marcus: One thing.

6-00:13:33

Ehrlich: I'll ask then, and you can say the one thing.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: So what was the education? Beyond the writing that you've already shared about some of your adventures...

Neil Marcus: vivid memory.....one of my self created 'classes' was to meet with the dean once a week and just talk. the only topic i REMEMBER was talking about sex. i had strong ideas back then that it wasnt important. he was very progressive.

6-00:20:45

Ehrlich: We can either open up this whole thing, or get you to Berkeley!

6-00:20:48

Marcus: [nods, smiles, pauses]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: people liked talking with me it was as i i were the pro-fessor.

Neil Marcus: my favorite nicknme iss 'PROFFESOR'

Esther Ehrlich: What do you like about it?

Neil Marcus: im obviously NOT a 'professor' but in another way i AM

Esther Ehrlich: The ways that people learn from/with you is a theme in your writing and your art. Can you say something more about your views, back then, that sex wasn't important?

6-00:28:23

Marcus: Is that two questions?

6-00:28:32

Ehrlich: What?

6-00:28:37

Marcus: Is that two questions or one?

6-00:28:58

Ehrlich: It's one. The first is a statement. You can speak to it, if you want, but I was just saying that the ways—you said, "I'm obviously not a professor, but in another way, I am," and I'm just saying that in your writing and your art, that's a theme, how people learn from you—

6-00:29:22

Marcus: Yeah.

6-00:29:24

Ehrlich: But if you have something more to say—And then that was a question [referring to text] I just didn't hit return because then it [the computer program] puts my name in again. But do whatever you want with that.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: i was convinced that love would save the world and i didnt really kno what seex was. and i was very critical. of societys view of the ranking and importance of these things

Esther Ehrlich: Meaning ranking sex higher than love?

Neil Marcus: yes

Esther Ehrlich: And what are your views now?

Neil Marcus: now i see it more as one.....a gestault ??? if you will.

Esther Ehrlich: Unless you have something to say about college that we haven't yet talked about (or that you've written about), how about if you move on to your experience first coming to Berkeley? I know very little about that transition.

Neil Marcus: i was going to a junior colll. near la and moses brought me here.....he was my roommate and i had heard about c.i.l [Center for Independent Living] we visited there and eventually i moved here to go to cil's computer traininmg.

6-00:44:48

Ehrlich: The bells are going to go off very soon. [referring to the campanile on campus]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: What was your first impression of Berkeley? What year was it, more or less?

Neil Marcus: my 1st trip to berk was in 68 my sister was going to cal.my first walking OUT IN

PUBLLIC [in a big city] was her taking me to ae med [Café Med] and codys.moses and i came in 76.

Neil Marcus: i guess what impressed me most was the hippie movement. i was also very scared of life especially in 68.

Neil Marcus is idle at 12:24:17 PM.

6-00:51:10

Ehrlich: Want to take a break soon?

6-00:51:10

Marcus: [nods, continues typing]

6-00:52:17

Ehrlich: Let's just take a little pause here.

Begin Audiofile 7

7-00:00:03

Ehrlich: So, it is interview three, we are back from lunch and are continuing on with our instant messaging.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Why were you scared of life in '68?

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 1:12:06 PM.

Neil Marcus: id say it was a scarry feeling to be in this body with little knowledge of disability.

7-00:03:57

Ehrlich: So, '68 was just a little visit?

7-00:04:06

Marcus: [nods]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: When you came to Berkeley the second time, for good, what do you remember of the scene here? Was there anything that really struck you?

Neil Marcus: i came here right after the 504 sitin [sit-in]. i was impressed to see disabled peopl woorking at jobs. borp [Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program] was at cal then. [It] was inspiring. the film COMING HOME was juust out.wow.

Esther Ehrlich: Was it your first real exposure to a 'disability rights movement?' Did you think of it in that way?

Esther Ehrlich: As a movement, a political/social force...

Neil Marcus: for me i 1st learned of it thru the several junior colleges i attended before..but yes berkeley represented the most advanced wing of thee movemnt.

Esther Ehrlich: Cheryl Marie Wade talked about coming to Berkeley and encountering "disability cool" for the first time—people decorating their wheelchairs, emboldened... Does this have any resonance for you?

Neil Marcus: i did notice the sexuality explorations of the movment. i thought our moventt needed more ART... [During editing Marcus conveyed his dislike of the word "cool." We also took out a confusing comment made by Ehrlich]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: What was going on, that you remember, with artists with disabilities?

Neil Marcus: i didnt see much of it until mid 80'ss but there was beginning to be diabled dancers.i thought that as very progressive.

Esther Ehrlich: What were you up to artistically? Were you writing?

Neil Marcus: i was writing about what i saw and felt andd what the vision of disability might be...like a new kind of jazz

Esther Ehrlich: Was that early writing finding its way into the world yet?

Neil Marcus: yes. it wass called SPECIAL EFFECTS

Esther Ehrlich: A newsletter.

Neil Marcus: yes .it really inpired me

Esther Ehrlich: Did some of that writing evolve into pieces of *Storm Reading*?

Neil Marcus: definately as did my knowledge ffrom cocounselling

Esther Ehrlich: I know that you founded and edited a journal called *Complete Elegance*. Can you say more about what that meant to you? And when it was in time?

Neil Marcus: harvey jackins had the vision to see it was needed...basically be proud of who you are.speak out.tell your story simple but revolutonry ideas

7-00:41:28

Marcus: It's almost time. [referring to need to stop due to appointment]

7-00:41:32

Ehrlich: It is time. That seems like a good place to stop. All right.

7-00:41:43

Marcus: I hate to stop.

7-00:42:08

Ehrlich: Well, that's a good sign.

[end of session 3]

Interview 4: September 17, 2004

Begin Audiofile 8

[Begin Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Neil Marcus Interview 9/17/04

Neil Marcus is idle at 9:36:10 AM.

Esther Ehrlich: This is Interview 4. We don't have the video camera on for this portion of the interview. So, we ended last time talking about *Complete Elegance*. I know you have more to say about it and the role of co-counseling in your work as an artist.

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 10:06:16 AM.

Neil Marcus: complete elegance is one of a whole series of journals ranging from native american,jewish,parents,elders ...etc.all havingb to do with the topics of understanding oppression/liiberation. it gave and still gives me tools for dealing with the human condition...really ALL human conditions. why people are how they are.what can help.....

Esther Ehrlich: Just for the record, we're now videotaping. And the connection between your trajectory as an artist and your relationship with co-counseling? I know it's a big question.

Neil Marcus: my quik answer is that me as a writer/actor artist.....im always trying to put myself in the role of counsellor to my audience or let them counssel me..one important guideline might bee to never act powerless or as a victem.another might be to act wiith love as a basis

Esther Ehrlich: So these are ideas from co-counseling that you use in your art?

8-00:09:24

Ehrlich: It's sort of rhetorical. Maybe I shouldn't bother asking it. [referring to instant messaging question]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: yes.....also the belief that people are good

Neil Marcus: i try to limit blame

Esther Ehrlich: When you picture your audience, who do you imagine they are? I'm thinking of this question not only when you're on stage, but when you're alone, writing.

Neil Marcus: they are folks looking for truth ..looking to find theirr SELVVES in the mmidst of tremendous confusion and diis/mmis information

Neil Marcus: so the obvious question.....WHO AM I ?

Esther Ehrlich: And does the audience, then, also "counsel" you in terms of these issues/questions? It works it both directions?

Neil Marcus: yes.....they are there to SEE my SELF and to help me through my own confusion.....

Esther Ehrlich: Can you say more about how they help you? Maybe we should separate the experience performing on stage from the experience of writing.

Neil Marcus: in either case they expect the best of me and the truth,as best i can give it,from me. and were all celebrating life together in all its forms.

08-00:30:43
Ehrlich: Take a break?

8-00:30:46
Marcus: Sure.

Neil Marcus is idle at 10:55:27 AM.

Begin Audiofile 9

9-00:00:16
Ehrlich: This is interview four. We've just taken a break and now—a short break—and now we're continuing with instant messaging.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 10:56:05 AM.

Neil Marcus: theres a mann selling pencils outside of macys in sf. hes mounted very low to the ground on a platform with wheel. some time ago my girlfriend tried to give him a dollar

Neil Marcus: he responded, 'i dont want your god damn charrity.BUY THE GODAMNPENCIL'

9-00:03:45
Ehrlich: [laughs] Why are you telling me this? [referring to instant messaging text story about man and pencils] Okay, I'm going to make the connection here.

9-00:04:07
Marcus: [smiles] It's just a line that I like. A lot.

9-00:04:25
Ehrlich: Did you say it's just that you like it a lot?

9-00:04:26
Marcus: It's a line that I like.

9-00:04:52
Ehrlich: It's a line that you like. "Buy the goddamn pencil?"

9-00:04:55
Marcus: The whole [mouths the word "thing"]

9-00:04:56
Ehrlich: The whole thing. Okay. [both smiling, longer than usual pause] You've stopped me.[laughs]

9-00:05:34
Marcus: What?

9-00:05:37

Ehrlich: I said, "You've stopped me."

9-00:05:42

Marcus: Good! [smiling]

9-00:06:06

Ehrlich: [laughter] Okay.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: a slice of tuth [truth]**Esther Ehrlich:** When did you first consider yourself a performer/artist/writer?**Neil Marcus:** i think it started with speaking in public age 14. i saw and felt the power of it. i gave a speech in highsschool. that everybody felt changed their lives.others followed my example then too.**Esther Ehrlich:** What example?**Neil Marcus:** to speak whts in your heart. it was the last week of my senior year. ["The students had never really taken the opportunity to speak from their hearts. The whole school spoke. It was an assembly." dictated by Marcus to Ehrlich during editing]

9-00:15:14

Ehrlich: So many questions at once, I can't think of.

9-00:15:28

Marcus: Tell me all of them and I'll pick.

9-00:15:41

Ehrlich: [laughs] No.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: And did that experience lead you in a particular direction in terms of your urge to make art?**Neil Marcus:** yes a blend of art and social change. talking about human and sociial conditions.in telling my story i saw there was a lot there that others could be interested in**Esther Ehrlich:** Can you link this to specific performances?**Neil Marcus:** i wanted to capture all my insights into disability. COMPLETE ELEGANCE ,the title,gives u a clue as to my approach. sstorm reading came directly from my diary.**Neil Marcus:** in the early 80's we did a small sho thru vista college too.**Esther Ehrlich:** Where does the *Art of Human Being* fit in here?**Neil Marcus:** remy charlip wanted to do a spin off of strm readinng.i got to kno him. hes amazing.**Esther Ehrlich:** In what way?**Neil Marcus:** every where he puts his mind.magic happen and his mind goes everywhere. i feel we are similar..but im humble by his talents.

Esther Ehrlich: What have you learned from him?

9-00:34:41

Ehrlich: You know, anytime if you want to switch to talking, we can. [responding to Marcus' facial gestures]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: we have very similar views that life is a dance.ive learned that he lovves jokes inn art. cosmic jokes perhaps.little old big beard and tall young little beard, a book he just wrote.

9-00:39:38

Ehrlich: So did you meet him after *Storm Reading*?

9-00:39:42

Marcus: I don't remember.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: You've been described as a "trickster."

Neil Marcus: i must stir things up ssometimes becuz the unexpected is to good to let pass by

Esther Ehrlich: What is it that you seem to want to say that you're not saying?

Neil Marcus: people often hve low expectation of me and i want to let loose oftentimes.my humor etc. love..lust...etc

Esther Ehrlich: Handcuffing people?

Neil Marcus: or wrestling thhem to the floor. or speaking in public. eating.

Esther Ehrlich: Yes. You've said that "my life is a performance." How is your life as a performance different on stage and off stage?

Neil Marcus: if i wrote about my life every day there would be a script there. on stage its just more polished and concentrateed.

.

9-00:55:47

Ehrlich: I wonder if we should stop now? I think we should. Let's just take a break.

9-00:59:58

Marcus: [nods]

Neil Marcus is idle at 12:12:56 PM

Begin Audiofile 10

10-00:00:26

Ehrlich: So, this is interview four. We just came back from a lunch break.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 1:22:21 PM.

Esther Ehrlich: We just had lunch together and I want to clarify one thing. I'd read somewhere about Neil handcuffing himself to other people (in addition to seeing it in *Storm Reading*), but Neil said that it never really happened.

Neil Marcus: its an urban legend

Esther Ehrlich: Picking up the thread re. your life as performance, I saw a video of a presentation that you did with a class. Your mother was there and said something really interesting in response to a comment that you did the same thing on stage as off. I remember her saying that in the world, when people face you, they find themselves in the place of feeling watched, being nervous about "getting you," understanding your words, your body and that they, in a sense, become like the performer. What do you know/think of this?

Neil Marcus: my experience of dramatical theory i think reveals that every character in every 'script' has an element of ourselves in them. yes i am just another character that is in some way part of every one.

Esther Ehrlich: Yes and also that encountering you as a person in the world, challenges people in new ways, and some of those challenges mirror what an actor may experience... So, you and others have written a fair amount about *Storm Reading*. I haven't seen much about what the experience of collaborating was like for you. Can you share some of how that worked?

Neil Marcus: in the beginning of storm reading i really had little idea of what it would or could be. my brother and the director were mostly developing it for the stagee.i was mostly following their 'direction'. i got quite an education touring with it for 8 years and theres much i would have liked to do with it inn retrospect

Esther Ehrlich: Like what?

Neil Marcus: like i oftenn ffelt dance could have played a bigger part in it. also more anger and more sexuality in it.

Esther Ehrlich: But these weren't aspects you were aware of at the time?

Neil Marcus: yes and it was quite a task keeping what we DID HAVE all together. it was a full time job

10-00:34:27

Ehrlich: Yes, meaning you were aware that it was missing those aspects?

10-00:34:36

Marcus: Yes.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: How did the three of you negotiate your artistic visions?

Neil Marcus is idle at 2:10:01 PM.

[longer than usual pause]

10-00:37:04

Ehrlich: Yes? [responding to Marcus' facial expression]

10-00:37:09

Marcus: That's a rough question.

10-00:37:17

Ehrlich: [nods]

10-00:37:23

Marcus: [longer than usual pause, looks at Ehrlich and smiles]

10-00:37:18

Ehrlich: [using hand gestures and raised eyebrows, asks if he'd like to talk]

10-00:37:46

Marcus: [smiles, looks contemplative]

10-00:37:58

Ehrlich: Do you want to talk?

10-00:38:09

Marcus: [nods, some conversation about positioning themselves in relation to the camera]

10-00:38:59

Ehrlich: So, I just asked how did the three of you—meaning you, the director, Rod Lathim, and your brother, Roger—negotiate your artistic visions. You responded by saying, "It's a rough question."

10-00:39:29

Marcus: Yeah.

10-00:39:31

Ehrlich: Is that a good—well, why don't you answer—[meaning, respond to that before she says more]

10-00:39:34

Marcus: Okay. My vision was all in the writing and I didn't have other kinds of visions, and both of them had lots of other kinds of visions. They are both strongly opinionated people. It was a lot of work to do the basics, to get them done, like the money, the set design. I was learning how to be an actor. There were also family dynamics [Ehrlich erroneously repeats back "dynamics" as "in the

mix"] because we were brothers and I was supposedly the star of the show and yet he was doing a lot of the acting. So, it's a rough question!

10-00:46:27

Ehrlich: Tensions between you and Roger?

10-00:46:34

Marcus: Mostly between him and the director. I wish it could have gone better.

10-00:47:26

Ehrlich: So, what ultimately happened? I mean, I know that the fact is that Roger left the show and another actor, Matthew [Ingersoll] joined the show.

10-00:47:52

Marcus: That was unfortunate.

10-00:48:08

Ehrlich: What was? Having Roger leave or—?

10-00:48:10

Marcus: [nods]

10-00:48:13

Ehrlich: Having Roger leave was unfortunate—

10-00:48:15

Marcus: Yeah.

10-00:48:16

Ehrlich: Because?

10-00:48:20

Marcus: He helped create a beautiful work of art.

10-00:48:36

Ehrlich: Was it difficult for you when Roger left the show?

10-00:48:44

Marcus: Sure. [longer than usual pause]

10-00:49:26

Ehrlich: Did it have repercussions in your ongoing relationship with your brother?

10-00:49:34

Marcus: I think so. We're working on a revival now. [laughs]

10-00:50:02

Ehrlich: Did you say you're working on a revival now?

Marcus:

[nods]

10-00:50:06
Ehrlich: Of the show?

10-00:50:06
Marcus: Uh-huh.

10-00:50:08
Ehrlich: You and he? And I assume the director is not involved in that?

10-00:50:18
Marcus: I don't know at this point. It may be highlights of the whole process.

10-00:51:48
Ehrlich: So, you're actively working on that now?

10-00:51:51
Marcus: Yes.

10-00:51:50
Ehrlich: With Roger?

10-00:51:52
Marcus: Yes.

10-00:51:56
Ehrlich: Actually, I have a question related to *Storm Reading*. Like I said there, you've written a fair amount about touring and that whole process. I did speak with Rod about his experience working with you and one of the things I asked him is what would he ask you, if he was in my place. One of the things he was interested in knowing, really the main thing was, looking back, what do you hope people got from the show?

10-00:52:56
Marcus: I know they got it.

10-00:53:27
Ehrlich: What is it you hope they got, or that you *know* they got?

10-00:53:38
Marcus: They got a real thrill. [laughter] And something they'd never seen before. And a lot of hope and inspiration.

10-00:55:04
Ehrlich: Is there anything about *Storm Reading* that you haven't written about that feels important to add to the history of what we know?

10-00:55:59
Marcus: It changed my life and taught me that I can influence the world.

10-00:57:09
Ehrlich: And how has that changed you?

10-00:57:22
Marcus: It gives me newer expectations of myself. And it got me on *ER* [the television show], which was a big accomplishment.

10-00:59:12
Ehrlich: Do you want to say more about the experience of being on *ER*?

10-00:59:22
Marcus: You know how Andy Warhol talks about everybody getting seven minutes of fame? Well, I got like six hours. [laughter]

10-01:00:30
Ehrlich: You mean, being on *ER*?

10-01:00:32
Marcus: No, all of it.

10-01:00:49
Ehrlich: You're adding up the different performances, you mean? *Storm Reading, ER*? [Ehrlich starts counting on her fingers. She and Marcus continue counting together.]

10-01:00:58
Marcus: *TV Guide*.

10-01:01:19
Ehrlich: *TV Guide*?

10-01:01:21
Marcus: There's a picture of...

10-01:01:24
Ehrlich: Oh! There's a picture on *TV Guide*.

10-01:01:29
Marcus: Of me.

10-01:01:29
Ehrlich: All right.

10-01:01:37
Marcus: Michael Douglas. Lauren Bacall.

10-01:01:51
Ehrlich: We need some more fingers.

10-01:01:57
Marcus: George Bush. I shook his hand. The other one. [George H.W. Bush]

10-01:02:27

Ehrlich: I have one. *The Today Show*.

10-01:02:30

Marcus: Yeah.

[end of session 4]

Interview 5: September 21, 2004
Begin Audiofile 11

11-00:00:07

Ehrlich: So this is interview five with Neil Marcus. It's September 20, 2004 [correct date is September 21, 2004], and we are going to proceed with instant messaging.

[Begin Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: Neil marcus Interview 9/20/2004

Neil Marcus is idle at 12:24:54 PM.

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 12:29:39 PM.

Esther Ehrlich: A little bit of follow-up from last time. Can you tell me why you told me the pencil story?

Neil Marcus: i wanted to illustrate the way i use drama in my life and art annd i wanted u to hear a new voice from me.

Neil Marcus: and a new perspective

Neil Marcus is idle at 12:47:40 PM.

11-00:05:18

Ehrlich: Is it okay if I talk?

11-00:05:19

Marcus: [nods]

11-00:05:22

Ehrlich: So partly you as storyteller?

11-00:05:25

Marcus: Definitely. I couldn't really tell you that quote. It wouldn't come across.

11-00:06:34

Ehrlich: And the quote was "Buy the goddamn pencil?"

11-00:06:37

Marcus: The whole thing.

11-00:06:45

Ehrlich: What do you mean, "you couldn't —" You mean, you couldn't have spoken it?

11-00:06:49

Marcus: Yes.

11-00:06:52

Ehrlich: And what you like about it is what?

11-00:06:59
Marcus: It's very much me, but you would never know that unless I—[gestures typing out the words]

11-00:07:22
Ehrlich: [nods] —told me. Is the part that's very much you, partly, the "I don't want your goddamn charity?"

11-00:07:28
Marcus: The whole thing. It's drama and poetry together.

11-00:07:59
Ehrlich: Maybe I should just say it aloud, that I'm asking Neil about the story he told last time about the man selling pencils and just was trying to understand better why he chose to tell that story. So, it's the drama of it. It's the poetry and drama together, and it feels like you.

11-00:08:23
Marcus: Yes.

11-00:08:24
Ehrlich: And you as storyteller.

11-00:08:28
Marcus: Yes.

11-00:08:30
Ehrlich: Okay.

11-00:08:34
Marcus: I wish I could deliver it with my voice.

11-00:08:57
Ehrlich: Since we're talking about voice, is there anything more you want to say about that? [pause] Maybe I'll leave it that open-ended—anything else to say about voice and what that means or doesn't mean to you?

11-00:09:28
Marcus: *Storm Reading* found a way to deliver my voice, but it's not perfect because it uses someone else's voice. A robot voice wouldn't work.

11-00:11:06
Ehrlich: A robot voice wouldn't work?

11-00:11:08
Marcus: I don't think so.

11-00:11:14
Ehrlich: You mean, so that you wouldn't have to use another person?

11-00:11:19

Marcus: Yeah.

11-00:11:21

Ehrlich: What was that like for you, to have the experience of someone else speaking your words?

11-00:11:37

Marcus: It was very satisfying but not perfect. [turns toward the computer]

11-00:12:11

Ehrlich: Do you want to go back to writing?

11-00:12:15

Marcus: [nods]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: We just switched to speaking for a few minutes. Another question I just wanted to clarify from last time. You said that you would have liked to have seen more dance, anger, sexuality in Storm Reading. I'm not clear if you were aware, at the time that the show was touring, that these were aspects that you felt were missing. Or only in retrospect.

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 12:48:35 PM.

Neil Marcus: in an ideal world with unlimited time energy and money,we could have explored more. rods accountant at the theater was an amazing dancer,he and i talked about doing the photographeed 'dance scene' as a live moment there

Esther Ehrlich: Is there anything else you want to say about the experience of Storm Reading?

Neil Marcus: it was a moment in time when so many elements of my life synergistacally createdd a great thing,with otherrs help of course.my brother rogers energy and talent. rods vision to produce it etc

Esther Ehrlich: You've written a fair amount about the experience of "doing" the show. I'm wondering what it meant for you when you finally stopped touring Storm Reading.

Neil Marcus: i think i thought that of course, what is next will come along. i was content to stop....see what unfolds.

Esther Ehrlich: And?

Neil Marcus: i got involved with projects at uc.....tv sho ER.....made a quiktime film on the computer.....fell in love and on and on.....

Esther Ehrlich: Was the UC project the digital storytelling class? I'd be interested to hear more about that.

Neil Marcus: yes first learning how to do it.then helping sue schweik developpe a class using it in disability studies.. basicallly anyone can make a movie using computer skills.its very exciting. our class focused on telling stories about THE BODY we tried to get the students to think artfully.

Neil Marcus: as i had learned from storm reading.artfully is the key

Esther Ehrlich: Can you say what artfully means to you?

Neil Marcus: meanining non medically,non stereotypically...full of soul etc makes u laf and

cry.. human condition stuff.

11-00:46:33

Ehrlich: Ready for a break?

11-00:46:39

Marcus: [nods]

Neil Marcus is idle at 1:29:46 PM.

Begin Audiofile 12

12-00:00:05

Ehrlich: So, we just took a break and now we're back. And I think I'll write that, too.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 1:50:18 PM.

Esther Ehrlich: We just took a break and now we're back. What can you say about the significance of your appearance on the TV show ER?

12-00:00:52

Ehrlich: Do you want to keep writing, rather than talk?

12-00:01:00

Marcus: Umm. Yeah.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: at the time 98, it was tvs nbr 1 rated sho. it was a blast to be on. actually the cameraman was like a ballet dancer the camra was strapped to his body so that his body was part of the camera work. my 2 best friends from college were my assistants on the set. very exciting working iinto ttheir budgt of 600000 dollars per minute

12-00:09:55

Ehrlich: Does that just mean "a lot?" [referring to instant messaging text] Or is it really—?

12-00:09:58

Marcus: Yeah. A lot.

12-00:09:59

Ehrlich: I'm going to write that in. Can I?

12-00:10:07

Marcus: [nods]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: I just asked Neil if 600000 meant "a lot" and he said "yes!" What do you think your appearance on the show meant in terms of disability visibility/disability rights?

Neil Marcus: it was tony edwards-dr geen- 1st episode that he directed. he knew me from the play and i think he mad a big STATEMNT by using me .even ho my character had c.p. not dystonia. i asked a friend with cp what his opinion was he thought it was ok.

Esther Ehrlich: Did you get feedback from other people with disabilities? Disabled actors?

Neil Marcus: not actors butt thee community wa thrilled. yes actors told me they wwere envious.

Esther Ehrlich: Some artists with disabilities have said that there's not enough attention focused on professionalism among artists with disabilities, not enough good training, not enough emphasis on excellence. What's your sense of this?

Neil Marcus: my own wxperience was that people noticed i had a lot to offer and i was as if PUSHED,in a good way,on the stage. i kno its rarely like that.

Esther Ehrlich: And training?

Neil Marcus: mine was by DOING and also from my life experiences with people and philosoophies ...maybe genetic too.

Esther Ehrlich: Are there performers today who you admire or feel a sense of kinship with?

Neil Marcus: leroy moore a local poet.....dave roche. cheryl wade mark obrien..... the guy from the film STATION AGENT.....brenda prager.....many.....

Neil Marcus: edward scissorhands

12-00:38:58

Marcus: I really like him. [smiling and scissoring his fingers]

12-00:39:09

Ehrlich: You really like him? Why?

12-00:39:11

Marcus: He's such a cool metaphor—

12-00:39:30

Ehrlich: For?

12-00:39:29

Marcus: Dis—

12-00:39:33

Ehrlich: Disability. So do you mostly identify with other artists with disabilities?

12-00:40:03

Marcus: [shakes head "no"]

12-00:40:13
Ehrlich: That was who was in the list.

12-00:39:56
Marcus: Umm. Al Pacino.

12-00:40:08
Ehrlich: What?

12-00:40:09
Marcus: [types]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: al pacino

12-00:40:09
Ehrlich: Al Pacino.

12-00:40:21
Marcus: Yeah. I thought we were talking about disabled performers. [phone rings]

12-00:41:15
Ehrlich: We were sort of on a—I mean, the question was, "performers today who you admire," but we had been talking specifically about artists with disabilities.

12-00:41:27
Marcus: Yeah.

12-00:41:27
Ehrlich: Can you say what it is—maybe it's too big a question—but, can you say what it is that makes you admire a performer? What it is you look for?

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: if they can address the human condition.. i think of cyrano de bergerac

Neil Marcus: the universality of it all.

Neil Marcus: for every body.

Esther Ehrlich: What do you think of the work of Frank Moore?

12-00:44:51
Marcus: Oh boy! [referring to question about Frank Moore]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus: i played mik jagger in on of his early films. hes definately a pioneer. and i do admire his talent.i dont always agree with his philosophy.

Esther Ehrlich: What is it that you don't agree with?

Neil Marcus: his use of the 'eros' to motivate people im uneasy with that

Esther Ehrlich: Perhaps that's a good segue for asking about your "falling in love?"

Neil Marcus: my 'very special friend with very special privileges' as she puts it has just moved to southafrica for 2 yrs to join the peace corp. shes my sweet heart

Esther Ehrlich: How long have you two been together?

Neil Marcus: about 2 years. my sister introduced us

Esther Ehrlich: Anything else you want to say about her or what the relationship means to you?

Neil Marcus: its wonderful to feel open to another person.

Neil Marcus is idle at 3:06:13 PM.

12-01:01:20

Ehrlich: We're running out of tape.

Begin Audiofile 13

13-00:00:06

Ehrlich: So, we just took a break and we are still interview five.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 3:44:34 PM

Esther Ehrlich: So, what has your romantic history been? What I mean is, your history of romantic relationships.

Neil Marcus: its been enthusiastically quite rich. it helps that i feel the world so poetically and that i feel love eeverywhere especially iin the laundreymats of the lower east side [n.y.]

Neil Marcus: i wish theyd have written a love scene in ER. maybe nxt time.

Esther Ehrlich: Maybe.

Neil Marcus: perhaps i should begin writing more love scenes.they seem hard to write.

Esther Ehrlich: Tell me more about your writing process. Do you have some kind of routine? Do you write every day?...

Neil Marcus: i dont have a routine. but ive always felt it was important to record as much of my life and thoughts as possible. i love recording my impressions of all the 'trips' i take.lately its been a lo[t] of medical 'trips'

Esther Ehrlich: I want to know more about the medical stuff, but first let's talk more about your writing. Do you have a sense now when you write, that your words might find their way out into the world? I'm wondering, in part, if your relationship with your writing has changed since *Storm Reading* made your words so public?

Neil Marcus: ive always felt they would be public i see it as continuing on that path. im always eager to tell my story.

Neil Marcus: look where i sit today. tell me your nme an title again

13-00:27:37
Ehrlich: Why? [referring to Marcus' request]

13-00:27:39
Marcus: Because it's part of the story.

13-00:27:51
Ehrlich: You want me to write it?

13-00:27:52
Marcus: Yeah.

13-00:27:56
Ehrlich: Actually, can we write that? I don't want it to get lost. I'm going to say [write] that I asked, "Why?" and you said, "It's part of the story." Okay?

13-00:28:16
Marcus: [nods]

13-00:28:44
Ehrlich: [types just her title] Does that answer you?

13-00:29:14
Marcus: For the oral history— [Marcus is reading over her shoulder]

13-00:29:23
Ehrlich: You want me to add that? [laughs]

13-00:29:24
Marcus: Yes. [laughter]

13-00:29:28
Ehrlich: Actually—[continues typing]

13-00:29:54
Marcus: At UC, Berkeley.

13-00:30:01
Ehrlich: Okay, I don't know if the camera is getting this. Neil wants to know my name and title. And he wants the full thing. And he wants it written down.

13-00:30:11
Marcus: Yes.

13-00:30:15
Ehrlich: And I am obliging. [continues typing]

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: I just asked you "why?" You said, "Because it's part of the story." The answer is Esther Ehrlich, interviewer/project manager of the Artists with Disabilities oral history project, Regional Oral History Office, UC, Berkeley. Okay?

Neil Marcus: right ob!

Neil Marcus: right on!

Esther Ehrlich: I'm wondering about the role of editing with you and your writing. Some of the time when I see your work, it looks a lot like this instant messaging—Neil-style—no capitals at the beginning of sentences, short cuts in spelling, etc. Sometimes it's more "traditional." Can you talk about the choices you make in terms of editing?

Neil Marcus: i always think my main job is to get it out.... editing can be done later.since my energy is limited ,i want to get it out first.

Esther Ehrlich: Is there some way that it feels more realistically like your work when it's in the style that most reflects you and the particular way that your body works?

Neil Marcus: it.....should//////////look[[[[[[[[[[[[like————this/r e a l l Y. yes i feel like proper and all uniformly 'correct' is NOT me. actually,my handwriting is REALLY me.

Esther Ehrlich: I've noticed that you recycle little snippets in your work and that you also use the words of other people, changed to suit you, in your writing. Can you say anything about these choices?

13-00:45:49

Marcus: What do you mean by the word "snippets?"

13-00:46:02

Ehrlich: Little phrases will come up over and over again, like, "my life is a dance," or, some of the things that I read in your journal. There would be just a couple of sentences that would come up in this context and then would come up again later in a different, you know—

Marcus: [nods]

13-00:46:37

Ehrlich: There would be certain phrases that I'd read over and over again. I was curious about it. How conscious it was and whether it had to do with being attached to certain phrases or whether you actually aren't even aware of it and thought you were rewriting them, coming to them new?

And the words of other people, it's not *exactly* that, but I think you know what I mean.

13-00:47:13

Marcus: Yeah.

13-00:47:32

Ehrlich: Can you give me a sec? I'm just going to say that we talked, so that we can chart that.

[Resume Instant Messaging]

Esther Ehrlich: We switched to talking for a minute or so here.

Neil Marcus: i have a few thoughts that summerize me and i keep returning to these even when im writing something 'new' like i keep talking about me being so upset becuz the school bully was NICE to me age 8. its one major theme that i like saying./writing/telling ["Disability is not a brave struggle or courage in the face of adversity. Disability is an art, an ingenious way to live.' This is another theme." dictated by Marcus to Ehrlich during editing]

13-00:55:57

Ehrlich: I think we'd better stop, even though we're on a roll.

13-00:56:13

Marcus: What do you think?

13-00:56:23

Ehrlich: I think we should stop.

13-00:56:27

Marcus: [nods and gestures with a thumbs up]

[end of session 5]

Interview 6: September 23, 2004

Begin Interview 6. Instant messaging only.

Neil Marcus: im here 1030

Esther Ehrlich: Neil Marcus Interview 9/23/04

Esther Ehrlich: This is interview 6 with Neil Marcus. Today we are not in the same room together. Instead, Neil is at home and I am in the office. Neil and I decided to try this arrangement in order to offer him more comfort and conserve some energy. Are you ready to begin, Neil?

Neil Marcus: yes im ready.

Esther Ehrlich: So, we ended the last interview talking about your writing, and I'd like to continue there. I'm wondering about the role of other people's writing in your work. For example, what can you tell me about the piece about breakdancers that was written by the editor of the *Express* and that you adapted?

Neil Marcus: sometimes i see such similarities in other liberation movements that by mere changing a word or 2 can make it fit with disability. the piece u mentioned made me see disabled people as breakdancers. i like novel ideas.

Esther Ehrlich: Are you aware of how the work of other writers has influenced your work? The actual words, or rhythms, or mood...

Neil Marcus: yes definitely story tellers such as Spalding Gray, Garrison [Keil] or, Whoopi Goldberg... i've actually seen and met 2 of them. my mother is a storyteller. im very much a person of the spoken word.

Neil Marcus: maybe because i dont speak alot?

Esther Ehrlich: When you write, do you speak the words aloud to yourself in your head? Some writers speak their writing aloud to themselves as part of the process of creating; they need to hear it.

Neil Marcus: yes i do. the voice in my head HAS VERY rich and poetic qualities. i love Richard Burton's voice... John Edwards too. -vice pres candidate-

Esther Ehrlich: This morning I got a message from you on my answering machine in a robot voice.

Neil Marcus: i want so badly to hear my own voice in new ways. i was experimenting with 'text to speech software'. doesnt quite satisfy my urge.

Esther Ehrlich: How has it been for you to have others speak your words in your performance work?

Neil Marcus: its quite lovely tho ive never SEEN the play live cuz im in it. i think i could learn to love my very own voice too. ive heard some say that its beautiful. i can almost see that as true too.

Esther Ehrlich: Yes.

Neil Marcus: you agree? theres beauty in it? how? (if i may ask)?

Esther Ehrlich: It demands full attention. It is always unexpected and changing.

Esther Ehrlich: Do you still carry your pre-dystonia voice inside you?

Neil Marcus: yes. i

Neil Marcus: yes i do. perhaps its the main one i hear?

Esther Ehrlich: A young boy's voice?

Neil Marcus: richard burton

Neil Marcus: from the film 'nit of the iguana'

Esther Ehrlich: (smile) How old were you when speaking became difficult—age eight?

Neil Marcus: yes also there was a period when i couldnt speak due to my twistings.....

Esther Ehrlich: What do you remember from that time?

Neil Marcus: can u narrow the question?

Esther Ehrlich: I was wondering what you remember of the experience of not being able to speak at all.

Neil Marcus: i remember i used a word boardthats really all i remember. **i dont** remember feeling it was hard and i think my listening skills were excellent.

Esther Ehrlich: How about a break?

Neil Marcus: how long?

Esther Ehrlich: Ten minutes?

Neil Marcus: yes,,bye

Esther Ehrlich: Bye until 11:40.

Neil Marcus is idle at 11:37:57 AM.

Esther Ehrlich: Back from our break. In thinking about voice and communication, I'm interested in the Rolling Stone interview. What can you tell me about that?

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 11:44:17 AM.

Neil Marcus: that interview was with myself as the interviewer.....i made it up...its all 'as if'

Esther Ehrlich: I suspected as much! So it's another example of playing with words/voices...

Neil Marcus: i find it a good way to 'get it out' make all the salient points.

Esther Ehrlich: In your writing, you've said that the language of disability—crippled, handicapped, disabled—just doesn't make it. What do these words mean to you and what can you imagine would be better?

Neil Marcus: i was thinking about that today. the most commonly used phrase is the disabled movent or 'disabled rights movent'. i was thinking that 'liberation' is a word that should? be in there. disabled LIBERATION. and of couse i think it begins with liberating ones SELF. and i believe the arts ccan play a big role in that.....i pre-wrote something last niite,,is it ok to send it now?

Esther Ehrlich: Into this text?

Neil Marcus: yes

Esther Ehrlich: Sure.

Neil Marcus: I wanna talk about DANCE. Perhaps its true meaning iis to express the essential beauty of life...and....of the human form. I like this idea. I like to think it pertains to me and MY body..'disabled body'

<>I love the idea that im a dancer rather than a spastic quadraplegic. I love the notion that 'dancers' have a lot to learn from disability. The movie flashdance was totally inspiring to me as was Saturday nite fever and even 'pumping iron'-the film-.to me it was all about disability.....aspiring to be what yo want to be. When maybe others encourage you to keep hiding. I could sing in the rain. I could dance with a mop. Yay for dance at the forefront of the disability movement. We belong there.

I was always a very active disabled person. In spite of its seeming sevrriity and using a

wheelchair ,I could wrestle on the floor, roll down grassy slopes.climb fences. Many people told me ii had the musculature and grace of a dancer even through and maybe enhanced by my SPASTICITY. GREAT IDEA. I discovered a Friday nite dance jam where I fit in perfectly. If u kno of the contact improv form, its all about whatever it takes to achieve a perfect balance. That's me in a nutshell. The dance community was interesting to me. Even more that disabled people could be in it and even ADD a lot too it. I loved that idea.

Neil Marcus: (i had troouble sending that....had to divide it up.can fix iit later?

Esther Ehrlich: Yes. No problem. [text fixed during editing]

Esther Ehrlich: You've talked about dance being an attitude, an idea in the mind.

Neil Marcus: yes i think its true. i think a lot of remy's work speaks to his. he recently choreographed a piece for axis. its called dance in a winged chair. its all about dance in a chair tho not necessarily meaning 'wheel' chair. oh my god ITS BRILLIANT.

Esther Ehrlich: In what way?

Neil Marcus: theres so many paradoxes in it. u can dance without moving. a chair is a stage. nothing is something and one can interpet anything.and on and on...very RICH

Esther Ehrlich: One of the ideas you've expressed re. dancing is that while other dancers are working hard to get their bodies to execute difficult moves, to control their bodies and enact ideas, you are working to get your body to relax, to simply be who you are on stage. Is there more you can say about this experience?

Neil Marcus: i think youve said it very well. i guess i can add that maybe being who you are is the greatest dramae ever to take place.

Esther Ehrlich: I think this would be a good time to take a longer break for lunch. Will it work for you to meet again at 2:00?

Neil Marcus: i dont think this belief is well known. maybe its xtra important in our liberation.

Neil Marcus: yes 2pm is good

Esther Ehrlich: I'll "see" you then.

Neil Marcus: bye thanku.i love chatting

Neil Marcus: bye

Neil Marcus signed off at 12:46:06 PM.

Neil Marcus signed on at 1:56:22 PM.

Neil Marcus: im here

Esther Ehrlich: Hi Neil. You talk about the power of touch for you (and everyone...) What's the connection between touch and dance?

Neil Marcus: wow. for me it was an essential(touch) form of communication with others that has given me a lot of strength. i get a lot of touch/support thru dance.so many people go without. i use the strength i get in order to reach out to the world.

Neil Marcus: in contact improv one literaly depends on anothers body to do the dance.they depend on my body equally as well.

Esther Ehrlich: What role has dance training/learning technique had in your dance life?

Neil Marcus: the 'technique' is being me.and willing to put myself 'out there'. being out there has been my training. spastic dancer,good title for a book (smile)

Esther Ehrlich: Haven't you taught your "technique" to others, too?

Esther Ehrlich: In a class, I mean.

Neil Marcus: yes i have.i dont mean to sound like a preacher BUT a lot of the technique

comes from what i learned in co-counselling. i am fortunate to have this basic knowledge.

Esther Ehrlich: What has your contact with AXIS Dance Company been?

Neil Marcus: in the mid 80's they had a weekly dance jam. thru the years ive always kept in touch. i want to choreograph for them,thats a dream i have.

Esther Ehrlich: On your resume it says that you were a "Guest Director" in 1994. What was that connection?

Neil Marcus: i think it was refering to directing one class they had at the jam.

Esther Ehrlich: What would it mean to you to choreograph for AXIS?

Neil Marcus: i think i have something to offer. in the realm of theatrics and humor perhaps. and also im not sure if theyve ever worked with 'spastic' people. are they afraid of it? is it too taboo?

Esther Ehrlich: What is it, do you think, that makes spasticity off-limits?

Neil Marcus: for the general public i feel it is.not sure why .im talking about the u.s. dont kno about other countries.perhaps its a 'god fearing' /'sin' thing. i got around the taboo in storm reading . we made it acceptable and palatable.

Esther Ehrlich: I'd like to hear more about your relationship with other artists and networking. Sue Schweik mentioned your "soirees." Will you talk about them?

Neil Marcus: i turned my bedroom into a small theater with a stage.i love bringing people together. ii kno a lot of interesting people. i did this right after a major surgery i had in 2001. the theater called barefoot, worked! well

Esther Ehrlich: What kinds of performances?

Neil Marcus: hindi songs,plays,storytelling,cooking shows...you name it.

Esther Ehrlich: And the audience?

Neil Marcus: they were all invited.friends

Esther Ehrlich: It sounds like you've continued the tradition of your parents—a house filled with interesting, artistic people...

Neil Marcus: Xactly

Esther Ehrlich: You've mentioned recent surgeries, but we haven't really talked about them. Sue Schweik mentioned a letter that you wrote to your doctor before a major surgery. Would you tell me more about it?

Neil Marcus: it was my attempt to let him kno that i wanted to make a human connection with him. basically i said that i was interested in neuro-philosophy myself and i asked him what he enjoyed about doin brain surgery. he replied he really enjoyed fixing thingsmy spinal cord was being crushed at the neck.

Esther Ehrlich: Maybe we could include the letter in this oral history. [Editors note: See appendix] Did writing to him shift your relationship to your surgery?

Neil Marcus: in my eyes it was a connection.maybe he chuckled

Esther Ehrlich: Should we take a short break and then finish up?

Neil Marcus: yes 15 minutes?

Esther Ehrlich: Okay. Let's start again at 3:35. And finish up by 4:00!

Neil Marcus: ok

Neil Marcus is idle at 3:31:24 PM.

Neil Marcus is no longer idle at 3:31:25 PM.

Neil Marcus: Im back

Esther Ehrlich: Hi, Neil.

Neil Marcus: hi

Esther Ehrlich: So is there anything you'd like to say about your surgeries?

Neil Marcus: i turned that one into a semi-italian opera piece called **THE SILVER CORD** my mom translated it into italian

Neil Marcus: i like the idea of humanizing medicine

Esther Ehrlich: Does that mean you actually did something during the surgery? Or wrote about it afterwards?

Neil Marcus: i wrote it before the surgery.it helped me thru it

Esther Ehrlich: What was the surgery?

Neil Marcus: removing a disc and securing the neck with a titanium plate

Esther Ehrlich: And who have you shared the piece with?

Neil Marcus: my friends. its a small gentle poem.

Neil Marcus: with the flavor of opera

Esther Ehrlich: I've been told about another major surgery that involved implants and a plan you had re. those implants and art.

Neil Marcus: i had a brain implant which is quite a scary thing.i talked about it a lot before tring to ease my fears.turning brain surgery into art was an attempt at levity. its hard to go thru.its hard to be in the position i'm in.

Esther Ehrlich: Did the surgery end up offering you anything useful?

Neil Marcus: im not sre.its not over yet.theres more decisions to make.possibly more surgery

Esther Ehrlich: So this is some of the "negative" stuff that we talked about before...the harder side of disability that isn't as easy to talk about, yes?

Neil Marcus: yes..did we write that?

Esther Ehrlich: We talked about it a few interviews ago. You talked about the pressure to be positive and shared your "Fuck Hope," poem.

Neil Marcus: good.its on the record then -big smile-

Esther Ehrlich: Yes, Neil.

Esther Ehrlich: (smiling, too.)

Neil Marcus: mmmmmmmmmmm.good

Esther Ehrlich: So, we need to head towards winding up now. But let's first explore your future plans. You mentioned that you and Roger have been talking about some new version of *Storm Reading*. And there's your dream of choreographing for *AXIS*. What else have you got percolating?

Neil Marcus: my book about my life.

Esther Ehrlich: A pretty big endeavor, I'd guess...

Neil Marcus: esther this talk is amazing .its like speaking for the first time in my life.thank you

Esther Ehrlich: Thank you, Neil. It's been a tremendous pleasure.

[end of interview]

Appendix A

Note: The following email from Neil Marcus is in response to an email from Esther Ehrlich, which she sent after the final interview. She asked him to clarify what he meant in that interview when he wrote that he felt that "...he was speaking for the first time."

I want to assume for now that I have not spoken for 50 years. That's how old I am...50.

I have not spoken because my speech has been physically very difficult due to my disability and because of the world I live in...it is very fast paced and impatient.

I've probably internalized a lot of these feelings inside so I too have become impatient with myself.

That's to put it mildly, every time I try to speak, I give up. I don't say what I want to say. I edit my thoughts down to their very simplest and most understandable form. "yes.no.nothing really. I really can't say. It's a long story. These are phrases I say often. If I have to say 'Salvador dali' instead of Bertrand Russell', because it's easier to start a word with an d rather than a b and it's easier to follow the started s word with a d word that ends with an I rather than begin a word with the b sound that is followed by a word with an ru sound...I will

It's not that I don't have things to say. I think I have a lot to say. It's just too frustrating. It's difficult. It's a pain. It's a struggle. It's tiring. It's not worth it. Etc.

I was attending a medical lecture today and the doctor spoke of receiving a humanitarian exception from the FDA to do a certain operation involving brain implants on people like me who have dystonia. 'That sounds fishy', I thought. HUMANITARIAN? Sounds like the FDA was taking pity on us. This is a perfect example of what I thought. What I wanted to say, create a stir, challenge the status quo. And what I did say which was something very simple like, 'don't you think people who have brain surgery, need more psychological support?'

In truth I really do and can speak. In truth too, it is frequently not very satisfying. I want to talk about complicated things. I want to be asked complicated questions. I want to discuss Complex ideas. I want to speak about all the things I write about. Isn't that how we know we really exist in the world? Through our use of language

Well, recently I have discovered my fucking tongue.

It came about because I was asked by the university to tell my oral history as a disabled artist...for their archives .for an oral history of disabled performers website. I couldn't pass this up and as I thought about it more I thought that we would communicate by writing back and forth similar to speaking but it gave me a lot more freedom than my voice could. And I would

be on a more equal plane with my interviewer and wouldn't be constrained by feeling inadequate. slow. labored. simplistic.

It fucking worked. I talked my head off. I can't stop.

One of the points I wanted to make in telling my life story was how much the gay liberation movement affected me. As a disabled person I was struggling with the issues of self-pride. "hiding" (my body) in a 'closet'. Struggling with all the issues of other people labeling me. Feeling uncomfortable about sex...well, here was a whole movement happening all around me that was addressing all of it. And being quite 'in your face' about it. I felt very welcomed by gay people..Very understood. And their culture was very inspiring to me. I drew on it for strength. I could learn a lot from it and apply it to my own life. To help me with my "people". To say that my "culture" disabled culture could be an equally powerful force in society.

To be honest with you, I should have been getting this kind of support from the disability 'liberation' movement but it seemed at the time we were just beginning to create such a movement. It was the early 70's.

At one of the workshops I was attending on social issues, there was a gay leader who was nicknamed 'the beast'. I wanted to be like him....totally defiant of social conditioning. Proud of himself (he roared a lot) and taught me to roar. Loving and very humorous. What a great friend he turned out to be. Im sure that all liberation movements have a lot that can be learned from. People who are 'so called' 'on the outside' of the 'mainstream' have often learned quite a lot about living and life

Appendix B

Email from Neil Marcus to surgeon

Dear sir,

here is important information about me that I wish you to have in light of the upcoming decisions to be made on courses of action.

In all humbleness I say to you I live a magnificent life. I am a poet a playwright a dancer an actor; I have played upon many of our countriys great stages. Im an adventurer. Ive

lived and traveled in Alaska spending days resting on moss covered glaciers. Life is good tho often hard.

Obviously I am no super man. i Have a wealth of information about life..my life..physicality..humans existence in this world..

please factor this information in the equation

respectfully
neil...

Dr Sheridan,

as much as any Body can look forward to surgery, I am looking forward to June 20th. I found the surgery on the internet and it seems quite

straightforward. Clean out and Fuse 3rd and 4th vertebrae c3 c4

I feel hopeful and confident!

Being somewhat of a neuro Philosopher myself, I will try as best I can to stay calm and not be moved by my fears.

I have these questions:

1. can you tell me a little about yourself. Maybe what you love about neuro Science?

Appendix C

Letter to doctor and poem, "Silver Cord"

hi dr fross,

i must admit now that i cannot hop anymore as i did up til now and walking has become almost impossible [even a few steps] and my muscles all over seem weaker almost like drained from extreme exertion and tingly.

i wonder if my neck is causing this or what?

i am getting physical therapy and massage?

i think i need a checkup and plan a stragy.

thanks, neeil

oh damn the doctor cursed when she checked me out. this is not good. theres been quite a change since last time. im sorry buddy[she calls me buddy] youre probably going to need surgery. spinal cord is being slowly crushed. Im setting you up with a neurosugeon right away. Time is of the essence.

I thought of life being a paralyzed person. Hard to think too long about it. And death and being cared for and nursing homes. I did go live with my parents until the operation.

so the dr tells me that it looks like I'm gonna have to have surgery and that its gonna be a not so fun summer. I don't flinch.

As were leaving tho I tell my mom who has been waiting in the waiting room, "dads gonna need help". I tell her as he has gone to the bathroom, 'he needs you. We all conduct ourselves very matter of factly though my neice puts her hand on my shoulder as everybody tries to talk about my future.

"I went to the bathroom ,says my dad," because I needed to cry". I realized what was ahead. A long hard road.

So ive been lying very still for a month. My family has been caring for me. My sister has been staying with me at my folks house. Everybodys tense tho they try not to show it. My folks feel bad that t h e y cannot care for me as much as I need.

I cry as I tell my sister, "I didnt mean to put you through this." Shes been with me 24 hours a day.i wasnt sleeping because every time I lay down id stop breathing. I couldn't eat. I was choking with every bite. I spent the major part of every day coughing and clearing my throat. Trying to keep from breathing the mucus that was stuck there . Id forget how to breathe. Id wake her up in the night

"whats happening to me, I'd ask her? What kind of test is this?"

I'm happy to be with you she'd say.

when I was strong enough to watch tv, the first thing I watched was Aliens
 late one night when I couldn't sleep.
 The kite I flew before surgery got caught in a tree. I had to get a new one.
 Kites. Strings.cords. Chords. Threads. Italian operas. I think I could write
 an italian opera.it doesnt matter that I don't speak italian. I feel the opera
 in my (bones) I'm living it.

Silver Cord

It's about the silver cord
 Out of which we arrived
 At our momentary existence.

E in riguardo alla spina dorsale d'argento
 Che ci ha dato nascita
 Da quale siamo arrivati
 A nostra breve esistenza.

Are we forever bound by that silver cord?
 What happens if it snaps?
 Are we free or bound even tighter by memory
 And our heart's desire?

Siamo legati in eternita questo condotto?
 Che cosa succede se la spina si rompe?
 Saremo liberi o prigionieri del nostro ricordo
 E il bramo di nostro cuore?

-neil marcus
 translation by Lydia Marcus