

Pittsburgh Oral Histories
Pennsylvania Department
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh



AF

Interviewed by Barry Chad

Interviewed at his apartment, South Side, Pittsburgh

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Interviewer's Note

Here is a man of Faith, a seeker and a poet, who had been a follower of Pittsburgh's, charismatic healer and early TV evangelist, Kathryn Kuhlman. A convert to Roman Catholicism. A member of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International. A student at Pitt's Library School—its inaugural class—rubbing shoulders in the '60s with the early local giants of the profession—Harold Lancour, Margaret Hodges, Elizabeth Nesbitt, Allen Kent. But, more than anything else, today, a poet.

Interview

[bc is looking at a copy of AF's resume that he has handed to me. I question him as I read through it.]

AF: I was [working] up in Allentown for ten months in the Senior Center up there in the Methodist Church.

bc: You've had experience with OCLC [Online Computer Library Center].

AF: Yes, with the Interlibrary Loan. That was at Carnegie Museum library.

bc: You also worked at the History Center.

AF: For about a year-and-a-half. When it was in Oakland on Bigelow. I remember meeting Mr. [David] McCullough. Eleanor Schano was there too.

bc: You worked at the VA Hospital library.

AF: Yes, the patient library.

bc: Grove City. Is that where you're from?

AF: No, I'm from Bridgeville originally. Grove City College was my alma mater for undergraduate. Bachelor of Arts. For my first two years I went to Maryville College [in Tennessee.]

bc: How did you come to go to Tennessee?

AF: Well, I was trying to find a cheaper college; and it was Presbyterian. (I'm a Catholic convert now.) But it appealed to me so I went there for two years. Then transferred to Grove City. Got my Bachelor's.

bc: You were in the Army just about the time that Elvis Presley was getting out.

AF: In Germany, yeah. Near Stuttgart.

bc: Bibliotherapy.

AF: I was at Woodville State Hospital. I worked there for three years in the library. We used different methods—we showed movies there, played board games, and read books and so on....

bc: This was your typical State Hospital.

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

AF: State Hospital. Woodville. They closed that now.
bc: Did you study Bibliotherapy? Or did you improvise?
AF: Sort of improvised, I guess. [He chuckles.]
bc: Did you manage to get the patients' attention?
AF: To some extent. [He chuckles again.] There were some stories there.
bc: Kathryn Kuhlman Concert Choir?
AF: Yes, I sang in the Choir.
bc: This is some time ago.
AF: Some time ago.
bc: Were you a follower of, disciple of Kathryn Kuhlman?
AF: Yes, at that time I was, yes.
bc: I guess then that you've read...
AF: ...[her books] I Believe in Miracles and God Can Do It Again, which was the second one. And there was another little red book she had; [and] her songbook, The People Sing with Kathryn Kuhlman.
bc: Did you meet her?
AF: Oh yeah. I met her.
bc: What kind of a presence did she have?
AF: Well, a little strange, I guess you'd say.... I remember when I met her when I first came to the choir, she said, "Welllllll, Hiiiiiii! Welcome to the Choir!" She was very outspoken. And then when we were in the Choir we went up to Youngstown [Ohio] on Sundays and sang in Stambaugh Auditorium. And she would pass by us there in the Choir; she'd touch us and we'd fall under the power of God. It was the power that God gave her. She'd touch us and we'd fall over.
bc: I remember watching her on TV. She had a very dramatic manner.
AF: And she had that radio program. I think it was on around 3:00 on a Pittsburgh station. She had her own studio at the Carlton House. She'd say, "Hello there. Have you been waiting for me? Oh I just knew you would. No matter what happened at work today. As long as God is still on His throne, and hears and answers prayer, everything will come out...all right."
bc: Wow, you've got it down.
AF: Yeah, I heard it so many times.
bc: Yeah, that kind of speech can be very reassuring, very reassuring.
AF: That's right. A lot of people followed her. There were a lot of healings that took place. People were saved; they were born again; they were baptized in the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues, and all kinds of spiritual gifts.
bc: Where did you see her? Was it over on the North Side?
AF: Yes, at the old Carnegie Library. The Lecture Hall. [I also saw her at] the First Presbyterian Church Downtown, Stambaugh Auditorium in Youngstown, Ohio. And, of course, she had a syndicated TV program from California once a month at the Shrine Auditorium.
bc: I see here on your resume you worked at both American University and Gallaudet University. How did you get involved with Gallaudet?
AF: My fiancée at that time got a job at the Library of Congress as a descriptive cataloger and I followed her down there and I got a job at Gallaudet University. (They called it a college then.) And I took a crash course in sign language. I taught there for a year: Beginning Reference at the Library. Lucille Pendell was the

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

Librarian. She was quite well known in library circles especially down there. And then I worked at American University for a while. I also worked at Prince Georges County Library, Hyattsville, Maryland. [Eventually] I came back to Pennsylvania.

bc: What kind of an experience was it working at Gallaudet?

AF: Some of [the students were completely] deaf, some of them had some hearing, some could read lips, but they all used sign language, the American Sign Language. And so I taught that course in Beginning Reference and it was well-attended. They were the dearest people. Of course a lot of them didn't consider it to be much of a disability. They'd speak a mile-a-minute. They had their own swear words. It was an enriching experience. The year I was there they had a celebration—a hundred years before that time Lincoln had signed the charter for establishing Gallaudet College. And President [Lyndon] Johnson was there at a dinner. I was there. And, at the end of his speech, he came down through the tables and I was at one of the last tables and he shook hands. That was an interesting experience.

bc: I taught “Bibliographic Instruction” (now it's called “Information Literacy”) at the Community College of Allegheny County. How did you communicate the more complicated notions of library use?

AF: I spelled a lot of the words out because I didn't know the sign language like somebody who had known it quite well.

bc: What classification system did you use there?

AF: They used the Dewey [Decimal] System.

We used a lot of visual aids too.

bc: Did you look upon Reference Work as a challenge?

AF: Yes I did. I liked it in Library School.

bc: Yes, you mentioned some of your professors.

AF: Dr. Andrew Osborne. He was from Tasmania. He was “a Lubetsky man.” [AF is referring to Seymour Lubetsky, author of Principles of Cataloging.] He was a cataloger. He had worked at the National Library of Medicine and at the Library of Congress with Archibald MacLeish. And Mr. Harrison—[that was a course] on The History of the Book. Hazel Johnson. And, of course, Dr. [Harold] Lancour, [the first Dean of the University of Pittsburgh's Library School]. Allen Kent—that was the beginning of automation [in libraries]. [Kent was editor of Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science.] And Elizabeth Nesbitt [for whom the Elizabeth Nesbitt Room at the School of Information Sciences and which maintains special collections related to the history of children and their books and media is named]. She was a storyteller. And Margaret Hodges.

bc: So you got to meet all the great ones.... You graduated in '63.

AF: It's all changed since then.

bc: I came to Pitt's Library School because I tried Drexel. It did not work for me. While Pitt has, and it still does to a large degree, I believe, a very humanistic approach to libraries and to information science.

AF: I liked that Allen Kent class. I was living in Shadyside at that time until I got my MLS [Master of Library Science].

bc: Was it a year program then?

AF: Yes, it was three trimesters.

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

I was in the first class at the Cathedral of Learning [at the University of Pittsburgh] after Carnegie Mellon had given up the charter for the Library School. We were the first class and we met in the Cathedral of Learning for our classes.

bc: You were the first class when it—the Library School—came to Pitt?

AF: First class, yes.

bc: That was before they moved into that Brutalist building on Bellefield. [We both laugh about the architecture of that building.]

AF: I walk by there when I'm coming down from the VA sometimes. Yeah, it's a strange-looking building.

bc: Why did you go into Library Science?

AF: Well, I took a test. I was at the VA Hospital and took some tests and they said, You'd be good as a librarian.

bc: The VA told you to become a librarian!

AF: So I started taking courses and got my degree.

bc: What was your undergraduate work in college?

AF: English. I had minors in History, French, and Education.

I took Eighteenth Century literature, Shakespeare, and American literature. We had a professor up at Grove City whose name was Easter. We called him "Happy" Easter. [AF chuckles.]

I taught school for a year up at Cochran Area Joint Schools. That's up near Meadville. I taught English and French there. I finally decided on Library Science.

bc: Do you still keep up with your French?

AF: I have some French songs that I play.

I was in a lot of plays in high school and college. I belonged to Theta Alpha Phi. It was a dramatics fraternity. I was in a lot of plays. Mostly at Maryville College, but some at Grove City. I was in "Winterset" [by Maxwell Anderson] at Grove City.

bc: Grove City has a Presbyterian background.

AF: Yes, Presbyterian. Maryville was southern Presbyterian.

bc: Since we're still talking about libraries, let's talk about the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. How did you come to work there?

AF: I went to the Department of Aging Downtown; I guess it's partly the Department of Labor. I applied for it. I worked at the Museum library for a while and then that turned into a regular job. I worked there about seven years.

bc: I also saw on your resume that you weren't doing strictly Interlibrary Loan.

AF: I assisted the curators with the catalog. I guess it's all automated now, but it wasn't then. They just had files. I helped them find materials in the Museum library. And then they had departmental libraries there too. [Also] people would write in; they'd want copies of information on birds and insects.... I'd copy them and send them out and do the invoices, wrap up books to send out....

bc: [We talk about the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D. C., about rare books, about the Carnegie Museum's and the Carnegie Library's Audubon Folios.]

bc: You have a lot of volunteer work under your belt.

AF: Yes I do. I did some volunteer work up at the St. Paul Monastery [on the South Side] one summer in the food bank up there. And also at the food bank on South Side here at the Brashear Center. I have lunch over there a lot. For 50 cents

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

you can't beat it. [He laughs.] Now I belong to St. Vincent de Paul. I work down at the food bank at the parish center on 13th Street on Wednesdays. Homeless people and people-in-need.

bc: What was your childhood like? your parents? what did they do for a living?

AF: My mother was a nurse in the First World War at Hoboken, New Jersey. She and my aunt were stationed at the port of embarkation and debarkation for the troops that came back and forth from overseas. She said she held many a hand. She and my Aunt Irene went over to Manhattan to hear Al Jolson and my aunt went to sleep. (I don't know how you'd ever sleep through that, but she did. [AF laughs.] It must have been a lullaby or something.) Then my mother was a public health nurse in Youngstown, on North Side, and then she worked at Kane Hospital. My father died when I was 13. He worked at the GE in Bridgeville. (They called it "the glass house.") He was 54 when he passed away. I was 13; my sister was 15. Then we went to California for a year, lived with my aunt in Ventura, California. I went to junior high school out there. My mother and my sister wanted to come back to Pennsylvania; so we came back.

bc: You've traveled about some. Did you ever get to France?

AF: I was stationed in Germany. Friends of mine were stationed in Paris. They worked at the Paris Air Passenger Center. And I went to visit them for a week when I was stationed in Germany. I took a leave and stayed with them. They lived on the Left Bank. I toured a little around Paris there. Went to the American Embassy and the Opera House and saw the Seine River and the bookstalls, Notre Dame, the replica of the Statue of Liberty (in the Seine River.) I went over to see that; there was a lady there selling ice cream. [AF then said to her in French that he wanted a chocolate ice cream cone.] She had to repeat [what I said], you know. She knew what I meant: I wanted a chocolate ice cream cone. [AF laughs.] She had to repeat it though.

bc: Had you been to college before you went in the Service?

AF: Yes, college was before. I was drafted. I was at Grove City and I didn't join ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]. Seven days before I was to begin a teaching job at Coraopolis Junior High School, I got my "greetings" from Uncle Sam. So I went over on a boat from Brooklyn Navy Yard on the S. S. Upshur. It took about twelve or 14 days to get over there on the boat. Went to Bremerhaven and then down through Heidelberg and so on and into Stuttgart. Seventh Army Headquarters. I was there for 16 months. Clerk typist in the Infantry. I was in the Seventh Army Chorus over there in Germany. I wanted to join the Repertory Theater Company, but I felt, Oh, I'm a soldier; you know, I might as well stick with the gang. I did. Gary Crosby, Bing Crosby's son, was stationed at our post. I met him; he came up to the office. He put on a variety show. He couldn't sing like his father, but he gave a good show.

[bc reads from the resume:] Broadcast for the Blind—radio information series.

AF: Right down the street here. I did that for about a year. We read newspapers, local newspapers for the blind and visually-handicapped on a radio station.

bc: Did you have to have a special radio to pick it up?

AF: Yes. I read there for quite a while.

bc: And you've been involved with choirs for quite some time.

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

AF: I started out with our choir at the Bethany Presbyterian Church in Bridgeville and then I sang with the chorus in high school, and County Chorus. With District Chorus I saw the singer from Smithton, Shirley Jones. And the Seventh Army Chorus, of course, I was in that. I sing in the St. Adalbert Choir now. I sing tenor.
bc: You mention this on your resume—your conversion from Presbyterianism to Catholicism.

AF: The Holy Spirit led me from the Presbyterian Church to Kathryn Kuhlman, back to the Presbyterian Church to the Episcopal Church for three years and finally now I'll have my third anniversary as a Roman Catholic in April.

bc: I can understand your experiences with various denominations. Currently myself I am unchurched.

AF: I was at the Trinity Cathedral [Episcopal] for three years. I said, Well, I might as well go all the way; I've come this far. [AF laughs.] I was confirmed in that Church and then, well really, the Holy Spirit led me to the Catholic Church. And that's where I am. And the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International, I belong to them. That's kind of petered out in this area, but it's big overseas. It's ecumenical. I used to go to the meetings over at Tivoli's in Penn Hills. We had a monthly meeting. They're strong on faith healing, speaking in tongues, spiritual gifts, singing, and worship.

bc: By the way, you've got a great sense of humor. And you've had a very very busy life.

AF: I wrote some poetry. I'll show you my book of poetry. The one on "Pennsylvania" I like the best.

[His book of poems is Reflections—Inspirations And Poems of Praise. n.p. : n.p., 2002.] I've written some since, [but most of these are over the years.] Friends of mine did the book for me. [Spiral-bound, 25 pages.] [This, the poem on Pennsylvania] would be nice set to music. I have a little tune for it.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania, my dear home,
Pennsylvania, 'neath God's blue dome.
Rolling hills and verdant vales,
Firey mills and flashing rails.
Thy grand coverlet of green,
Spread about, a glistening sheen.
Coal and oil from thy dear breast,
Wheat and corn seen from mountain crest.
I walk your valleys, climb your hills
Wade your streams and fish your rills.
Hunt your buck, stalk your doe;
You're in my heart where I go.
Constitution and Liberty Bell—resound
The freedom Gospel tell.
Pennsylvania, soon or late;
You're that great, Pennsylvania, Keystone State!
Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania!

Pennsylvania, beneath the blue,
To you our hearts will always be true.
Pennsylvania, like Canaan land,

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

Is under the rule of an almighty hand.
A God that loves us, and a God that cares,
A God who hears and answers prayers.
Your mountain laurel, your ruffed grouse brown,
Make the hills like a soft silken down.
Moonlit Ohio, gently flowing Mon,
From border to bank, you flow on.
Flow on O rivers and Pennsylvania streams,
You fulfill our wildest dreams.
Placid lakes and mountains high—
Valleys deep between them lie.
Good night, Pennsylvania, but never goodbye,
O Keystone State in our hearts will lie.
In dark of night, in the pallid gloom
We remember your snows and your April bloom.
A toast to you—Pennsylvania the great!
Forever we're yours O Keystone State.
Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania!

Memory

My memory where have you gone?
My mirror—mind of variegated color when you went into
shade
My better, bitter self went with you.
What is required to resurrect us is inexplicable as your
sudden
Retreat and recalcitrance and reticence.
Give me another look at living
And I will live, alive and be giving.

A Tribute to the Burgh

Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, where the 3 rivers meet
Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, a name so sweet!
Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, the whole world at your feet!

I have seen your Allegheny,
I have seen your mighty Mon
Agree together to form the Ohio at the dawn.

I have seen your houses spring from the hills,
I have seen your soot-blackened empty mills.

I have heard your music,
I have heard your songs.
When I am away, for you, my heart longs.

Your symphony strikes up another tune.
It's never too late, it's never too soon,
To view your alabaster buildings under the moon.
They tower to the sky like men of steel and glass,
Ever swaying slightly as they let the wind pass.
Sunset on the OHIO,
Sunset at the POINT,
Sunset at the FOUNTAIN!
Pittsburgh! Pittsburgh!

Pittsburgh Oral Histories

By day or night
You are like a mighty bird in flight!
May God grant you peace alright,
As we salute you, As we say, goodnight!

bc: Let me wind up with my standard question: how has Pittsburgh changed over the years?

AF: South Side has changed a lot. There are more bars. [We both laugh at the truth of his remark.] I remember years ago when we had Bressler's Seafood and there was a shoe store, a men's store, the Autenreith's Five and Ten, all kinds of nice little shops along here. They had a number of bars, but not this many. 100 liquor licenses on South Side! 100!

bc: Do you get down to the Southside Works?

AF: They're going to build a big beer garden, a big German beer garden. Of course I'll be up there linking arms and singing *Ein Prosit*, you know. [He remarks sarcastically and then laughs.]

There used to be more department stores [in the city]: Frank and Seder; Rosenbaum's; Gimbels; Kaufmann's; Boggs and Buhl. They're all gone now. We had such nice movie theaters too: the Loewe's Penn, the Warner.... I like the Heinz Hall. I go there to the Symphony. We get free tickets to the Symphony. [Then too there was the] Civic Light Opera at Pitt Stadium [where it premiered in 1946].

bc: Thanks very much. You've worked in libraries for over 40 years. And so our interview, our conversation has been really easy since we share the same profession. Thank you again.