INTERVIEWEE: LEONARD M. ELSTAD

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. MC COMB

DATE: February 14, 1969

Mc: First of all, to identify the tape. This is an interview with Dr. Leonard M. Elstad, who is the president of Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C. The interview is at his office at the college in the Hall Memorial Building. The date is February 14, 1969. The time is 10 a.m. in the morning, and my name is David McComb.

Dr. Elstad, can you tell me something about the background of the college?

E: Yes, I'll be glad to. In 1857 a man brought a group of little handicapped children down from New York City on a drive for funds so that he could start a school for these handicapped children. He would take them into the wealthy parts of the city, and he'd put on a little dance in the streets, and then he would pass the hat. This practice became known to the Honorable Amos Kendall, who was Postmaster General in Presidents Jackson's and Van Buren's Cabinet, and he was very much incensed by this practice. He made a study of it, and he found the man to be incompetent, and the courts declared him incompetent. He took these little children out to our campus, which was then the farm of the Honorable Amos Kendall, and he determined he'd start a school for these children. The first man to be his educational head was Edward Minor Gallaudet, who was the youngest son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who started the first free public school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, a hundred and fifty-one years ago in 1817.

M: It might be useful for the purpose of the tape to point out that Gallaudet is spelled an unusual way.

E: G-a-l-l-a-u-d-e-t, and people the first few times they pronounce it, they pronounce it [he gives two pronunciations of the name]. But it's a French Huguenot name.

He got this young man to be his educational head. He was only twenty years old, graduated from Trinity College. They went up to Congress and had a school chartered in 1857. The school ran for seven years and grew to be around fifty children, some of whom had reached the place where they could go on to college, but of course no hearing college in those days would take a deaf student. So they decided they'd go up and have a college chartered by Congress. This wasn't as easy as it seemed. There was objection to it, but it finally passed, and Abraham Lincoln signed our charter in 1864. We were the only college specifically chartered to educate the deaf then, and a hundred and five years later we're still the only liberal arts college for the deaf in the world.

M: Were the handicaps restricted to being deaf?

E: In the beginning, there were deaf, blind, and mentally retarded for a year or two. But the blind were then taken away and put in another school, and it became for the deaf from about 1860 on.

M: Did the finances for the college come from the federal government that early?

E: Being chartered by Congress, we've always had this financial connection. We are a private corporation, financially aided by the government. We and Howard University have the same status, and we're the only two that have it. The government builds all the buildings, pays for them, and gives us up to 65 to 70-percent of our operating funds. Now we have two Congressmen on our Board, and we have one Senator. The Senator is appointed by the Vice President, and the Congressmen by the Speaker of

the House. This has held true all along. With this operation then, we have never had to turn down a single student for financial reasons.

M: Do you make up the rest of your finances from tuition?

E: From tuition and from any source that we can get money. But deafness doesn't create much of a financial appeal. Even Helen Keller, who was both deaf and blind, had made the statement in her late years that if she had her life to live over again, she would have given more time to the deaf because, of the two handicaps, that is the greater.

I would like to explain that a bit. Perhaps you don't want to tape this, but I think it's an interesting story. The communication problem of course is the thing that holds the deaf child back. If he is born deaf, he never learns what a hearing child learns at his mother's knee--mothers and sisters--and he has to be taught everything, spoonfed educationally. The biggest problem he has is the English language. We don't think of that, but the little hearing child is learning language all the time while he's lying in the cradle growing up. The deaf child gets none of this unless he had some hearing before he became deaf.

Just to illustrate the difficulties of the English language, I have a poem I like to recite which indicates the double meanings of words:

Where can a man buy a cap for his knee, or a key for the lock of his hair,
Can his eyes be called a school because there are pupils there?
In the crown of his head what gems are found,
Who travels the bridge on his nose,
Can he use when building the roof in his mouth,
The nails on the end of his toes.

Can the crook of his elbow be sent to jail

So what did it do (?)

How does he sharpen his shoulder blades

I'm hanged if I know, do you?

Can he sit in the shade of the palm of his hand,

Or beat the drum in his ear,

Can the calf of his leg eat the corn on his toe

Then why not grow corn on ear.

This is very silly, but it's the English language. If you ask, "Do you know how to keep from getting stiff in the joints," the answer is "Stay out of them." That's good advice. But this is a play on words. The deaf child does not play with words. He works with them. We have verbs that have as many as thirty-four shades of meanings, and they're never going to get all of these, but they get enough of them. That's why there's one college for the deaf in the world. It's because the road to higher education is so slow and so difficult that very few make it.

M: Where does that poem come from?

E: I don't know who wrote it. It's an anonymous one. But it quickly illustrates the things that are so apparent to us are stumbling blocks to the deaf. Puns! Play on words! They don't get them, you see. So it's a problem.

M: And you would agree then with Helen Keller that blindness is the less of the--

E: Oh yes, it's a greater educational handicap. Now a blind person can go to a hearing college with a reader, but a deaf student has trouble going to a hearing college, because he can't read lips that well. Lip reading is an art, and some have it and some don't have it. And there are words

that don't show on the lips. Take father, mother, brother, beautiful, love, tomorrow--those are all outside words. But how about these? Dinner, uncles, cousins, sister. You heard those as well as the others, but you didn't see any movement. If you don't see the word, you can't read it, you see. That's the trouble with lip reading.

M: Just out of curiosity, since I am from the academic world, how do you go about giving lectures?

E: We use what we call the simultaneous method. We use the manual alphabet, which is A, B, C, D, E, F, G. We spell words out. But we also use the sign language. From now on I will sign-speak to you at the same time, and what you can't get on lips if you were reading lips, you will get from my hands, Say, "My sister and I went to town yesterday afternoon." Now, if I said, "My sister and I," you wouldn't know what the word sister was because it doesn't show on the lips. You'd say, "Now, who's he talking about? My what?" So you'd be worrying about that ward sister while the rest was going on, and that's the trouble with lip reading. You can see a sentence, you don't get a key word, another sentence you don't get a key word, and another one perhaps. And then a key word shows up. "Oh, that's what she's talking about." Then the rest falls in line. You're getting ideas from key words.

And when you go through life having to get conversation from key words, you're in trouble. Because some people sit with their hands in front of their lips this way when they speak. Or they're moving all the time. They look down, up, they're all over the place. And that's why a professor in a hearing college is impossible to lip read, because he's at the blackboard or he's walking back and forth, or sitting on the table swinging his legs, or twirling his glasses or doing something to distract from the lips. Or the lights are bad. Every time he moves they

have to refocus their attention, and that gets very tiresome, because you're just concentrating on lips all the time. So lip reading is not the sole solution, these are reasons for having a Gallaudet College.

These students can go to a hearing college and perhaps get the book learning. But what is education? It's more than book learning. It's living a life and being somebody. We have fifty or sixty organizations here. That's fifty-sixty presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, treasurers. We have student self-government. They run their own show--pretty well considering they have just as many troubles as hearing college students have. We had a boycott here awhile ago. We've had a strike for a day for better food--things like that. They do everything hearing students do and do them just as well, but they couldn't do them if they were in a hearing college because they'd just be one of many and they'd never get a chance. That's why we feel there should be a Gallaudet.

M: Do your students come to you with the knowledge of lip reading or--?

E: All deaf students today are started out orally, as we call it, learning to read the lips and to speak as well as they can. That's why we don't use the words deaf and dumb any more in this country, because the deaf are not dumb. They can speak--some very well, some poorly, some not at all, but there are very few of them who can't speak at all. So deaf and dumb is wrong. Deaf mutes is another one we don't use. Now in England, and in other foreign countries, they still use only lip reading, I asked them why they did. One said, "Well, our charitable gifts stopped immediately or dropped down perceptibly as soon as we dropped the word dumb, because people are not sorry for the deaf. But deaf and dumb--that's a terrific handicap." So they put the word dumb back in again so they could continue to get the charitable gifts.

The general public has very little knowledge of deafness because there are only 200,000 deaf people, roughly estimated, and about 200,000,000 hearing people. Now the 200,000 to the 200,000,000 is too big a difference. So we're continually trying to get the deaf before the public. That's why we have our dramatics here. There's a National Theater of the Deaf today. We have a modern dance team here. They even went out to Chicago, were flown out there to dance at Mrs. Humphrey's tea on one of the first days of the convention out there. This group of deaf modern dancers here. Some of these are totally deaf. They have no hearing at all, and some have a little hearing.

My cook told me one day, "I listened to a program this morning. It was a question and answer this man puts on. A woman called in and said, 'I went to Gallaudet College last night and saw a dramatic show they put on. I'd always felt ill at ease with the deaf, felt sorry for them because of their difficulty and handicap. But I came away from there with great respect for them and with a whole new approach to it because they can do things that hearing people do, and perhaps even do them better.'"

Our daughter saw "Hamlet." In fact, she really didn't want to go. She's a lawyer now in New York. She came down to visit, I asked, "Why don't you go and look at it."

She said, "I think it would spoil Hamlet for me if I went over to see that."

I said, "That's a nasty thing to say in the first place because your father is president of the college. Why don't you go over and at least look at it!" She went over and she stayed the full three hours.

She came back and said, "Dad, I think I understand Hamlet better today than I've ever understood it. That was terrific."

In their sign language they dramatize everything they say and their facial expressions help them. So they are natural dramatists and the plays they put on are terrific.

M: Do you have to do any remedial work when the students come here?

E: They're usually not ready for college because there are no high schools for the deaf in this country. The schools go up to around the eighth or ninth grade as a rule. So, when they come to us, they take an examination not for the freshman class but for what we call a preparatory class. We have around three hundred in that class each fall. Of that group, about fifty will eventually go into the freshman class after a month or so. But the rest will stay in a class in which we give them a crash course. If they need mathematics mostly, they will get a heavy dosage of that. If they need social studies--what they need, they'll get. We have a tutorial center and we will pick up the stragglers in that even. So at the end of that time, they can go into the freshman class.

Our dropouts are not as great as they are in some schools, but in my opinion too large yet. And it isn't that they can't do it. But remember, they are about two years older than the average student coming into a preparatory class or a freshman class. Because of their difficulties, it has taken them about two years longer to get where they are. When a student today becomes eighteen-nineteen years of age, he has that urge to go out and earn money, get a job, buy a car, get married and start a family. Say "four more years"--heaven forbid! But now they are beginning to see that you're going to have more education to get a good job, and so they're coming in greater numbers, or they'll dropout, and then come back later: "I've got to have it! Can I come back?" And they do come back, and they do better.

M: You must have a problem getting teaching personnel, is that right?

E: It's surprising. Our salary scale is not as good as it should be, and that's being discussed now by our budgeteers here. We feel that we should pay a little bit more because a person who can teach history in a hearing college can't come here and teach history until he gets this added communication ability. My successor is sitting in the next office here. He's the former dean of the School of Education at Tennessee, Dr. Merrill, and he is taking a crash course in the language of signs. He has had students teach him as well as adults. And this is good for him. I didn't have that when I came here. I learned it in a class. But you can sit down with a student and one who doesn't speak to you--she doesn't speak to him, she could but she doesn't, and that's good, because he has to use his hands, you see. Now he's enjoying it and he's doing very well. He takes over on July first. I think this is a good arrangement. He's my special assistant now until July first. Then he takes over, and I'm out in the world.

M: But you can get personnel?

E: Yes. That's the question. Surprisingly enough, we don't have too great difficulty. But they've got an adjustment to make. They say, "Why should I learn another language?" But they do, and they usually do very well.

M: Gallaudet is connected with Health, Education, and Welfare, is that right?

E: That's right. We started out in the Department of Interior, then went into the Social Security Agency, and then, when the Department of HEW was established, we went with that. It's a wonderful connection.

M: You're satisfied with the connection?

E: Very well. It's fine. You'd think that where there's such a heavy

subsidy that there would be heavy controls. I suppose that danger is always there, depending on who's in what position, but so far it's a fiscal arrangement. We've never really been under the Office of Education. So we have no difficulty with that. This whole thing--when I came here in 1945, we had a hundred and fifty students and thirty staff members, and now twenty-four years later, we have close to a thousand students and a staff of over two hundred.

M: That's almost a ninety percent increase.

E: It shows that the interest is there. There are no more deaf students today, but they're being better trained from preschool up, and there's more interest. There's more need for college education today. It used to be because of this terrible discussion we've had on oralism and manualism. You see, the Gallaudets were for using any means of communication which would impart knowledge. The Alexander Graham Bell people--they're still strong--felt that you shouldn't use the hands because if you use the hands, students won't use the lips. They've got a point--up to a point. I had the wonderful experience of spending seven years in operating a private oral school for the deaf in New York City. I'm thankful that I had those seven years. We slapped the hands down if they used them. We'd have a party every Friday night. It was a dress party, big dinner; kids would sit around the room and we'd have a dance and we'd play games, but if we saw any signing used there, we'd see them tomorrow and say, "Don't you ever do that again." I had one punishment. They'd stand up in front of a long full-length mirror, and I'd have them swing their arms until they got so tired they'd sit down.

This was a crime against youth, and I found out after seven years of that that my watchword which was "normalcy" was wrong. Make them normal, speak well enough to be understood, lip read well enough to get along without any signs or anything like that was the goal, but we weren't producing. But I thank God I had that experience because I know what plus things there are about the oral method of education and what the minuses are, and there are both. There's no pat answer to this thing. But the adult deaf use the language of signs and the manual alphabet, and we're doing all we can to get them to speak at the same time. We call that the simultaneous method--blend everything. If they've got a little hearing, use a hearing aid; and if they can read lips, use lip reading; if they can read the manual alphabet, use that and the sign language. Use it altogether and everybody is happy. If we had a deaf person sitting in here now and I was signing to you and they'd see that, they wouldn't have to worry about what I was saying, but if they had to read my lips, they couldn't do that because I speak too fast any way.

I'm going down to Florida tomorrow morning. I'll use signs there. I'm going to speak to a deaf group of the GCAA--Gallaudet College Alumni Association--and I'm going to explain the state of the union [spelled out in sign language] at Gallaudet College. And I'm writing the lecture now. This is lecture. This is preaching--that's fine. They'll all understand it. Perhaps I'll give it myself, or the superintendent of that school who is a very good signer, may sign and I will speak. It'll be a little easier for me, but I can do it both ways. It sometimes is a little better because I slow down a little bit when I have to sign it myself--this is myself, you see; that's you, me, myself [signing].

M: In your connection with the federal government, do you go through the Secretary?

E: We go through the Secretary of H.E.W., and we're on our budgets right now for 1971. We first prepare the budget for HEW which goes to the Bureau of the Budget before becoming a part of the President's full budget. Then we go before the House appropriation committee and the Senate appropriation committee. For years, we appeared before Senator Hill, and we're sorry he's gone. It used to be Mr. Fogarty in the House, and we're sorry he's gone.

M: They were good friends?

E: They were very good friends. You should have been here the morning when the President came out here on a surprise visit. My desk was over here then. We were just ready to begin the academic procession down to the graduation exercises; Fogarty was to be the speaker that morning--Congressman Fogarty. He was standing right about here when the telephone rang. It was Mr. Moyer from the White House. He said, "It looks as if the President is coming to your graduation."

I said, "No! What'll we do with him!" And I meant it. Because when your program is all set, and the President comes, you don't know what's going to happen.

So he said, "Well, don't worry. I'll call you back in ten minutes. By the way, how long is the speech?"

I looked up at Congressman Fogarty and asked, "Fogarty, how long is your speech?"

He said, "Who wants to know?"

I said, "The President of the United States."

He got red and said, "Is he coming?"

I said, "Yes, he's coming. I think he is, but they're going to call back."

And sure enough he called back in ten minutes and said, "He'll be there."

The reason he came that morning was that Eloise Thornberry, Mr. Thornberry's wife, had been a guest in the White House Sunday night--this was Monday morning--and he said: "Eloise, where are you going tomorrow? What's your program for tomorrow?"

She said, "Oh, I'm going out to the graduation at Gallaudet in the morning."

He said, "So am I."

She says, "You mean it?"

He says, "Yes." So the next morning she came out with him. And this was another indication of his interest here. Just because of that connection.

M: Then you might explain for the benefit of the tape the connection with the Thornberrys.

E: Yes. Mr. Thornberry took Mr. Johnson's place in the House when Mr. Johnson became Senator. The fifteen years or so he was here as a Congressman he was on our Board of Directors because we felt it was excellent because his mother and father were deaf, and also had taught in the school for the Deaf in Austin, Texas--the State School for the Deaf there. The first contact on this was when Mr. Johnson was still Senator. Thornberry asked me to come down to the Capitol one day and speak in the Capitol dining room to a Texas delegation with their visitors. There were about ten Congressmen there with several visitors.

As we sat down, Mr. Johnson didn't sit down. He went and in his fine political way, which I think is best representated by the way he did it, he spoke to each visitor there, patted them on the back and said, "Anything I can do for you I'll do it." I heard some of these remarks, just wonderful! Then he came and sat down. He turned to me, we had

finished eating, and said, "Mr. President, there's something you ought to do."

I said, "What is that?"

He said, "You ought to name one of your buildings for Mrs. Thornberry."

I said, "Well, we've never done that."

He said, "There's got to be a first time some time."

I says, "Well, I'll talk to my board about it."

He said, "You do that." So we have a Mary L. Thornberry Hearing and Speech Center over here. That was the first contact.

Then when he became President, he came out to our centennial. And then he came on this surprise visit, of course, to graduation in 1966. Those were the two contacts.

M: In this surprise visit in 1966, did he give a speech?

E: This was interesting. As we came into the auditorium--this was a complete surprise to the crowd of course, his chair had been brought in and it's quite a wide folding chair. I saw it there and said, "Where did that chair come from?" But as we marched out on the stage then, he sat in it. It was right behind the rostrum. Mr. Fogarty made his speech, and Mr. Johnson applauded at the right time and everything was fine. Then he turned to me when the speech was over and said, "Now, what are you going to do?"

I said, "We have the presentation of diplomas now." You could tell he thought there was a big class. There were more than a hundred in the class. He said, "Well, I don't believe I can stay for that."

I said, "Well, aren't you going to speak to the students?"

He said, "That's what I'll do, and then I'll go." Of course that

worked out very well. He gave a very fine impromptu speech, which was interpreted to the students by an official interpreter. Then he went out and that was it.

M: Do you remember what he said?

E: We have a copy of it. A very good speech.

M: Did the students appreciate it?

E: Oh yes. He is very gracious that way. He certainly knew how to deal with people--knows how to deal with people.

M: What did he do when he came to the centennial celebration?

E: He had been in New York all day. When he came out here it was raining. He came out to the student union. We expected him. This had been worked out for days. We had all the TV setting just exactly where he wanted it. As he came out of the car it was raining. We saw about thirty students over by the corner of the building, and he just walked right across the lawn and shook hands with all of them. Those poor guards with him don't like this. While he walked down the hall, he saw Valenti and said, "Valenti, what are you doing here? I thought I told you to go home."

Valenti said, "I just wanted to be sure everything was all right."

He said, "Where's your wife?"

"She's sitting over there." He went over and kissed her, and then he went up the middle aisle in the dining hall where we thought he would go.

But afterwards, when he'd finished, he went table-hopping. He came down and sashayed in-between tables all the way down the side of the room, which was customary, I guess, with him. That was quite an occasion.

M: You mentioned that he was one of the few Presidents to take an active interest in the college?

E: Yes. Up until his visits here, we had one by General Grant--President Grant--then one by President Garfield, and one by President Teddy Roosevelt. Those were the only Presidents who ever came to the campus, so this was quite a change.

M: Did he ever talk to you about the college on your visits to the White House?

E: No, we never had an opportunity to sit down and discuss anything. I've never been that close to him. But we certainly do appreciate his interest in deafness and the handicapped, and that has done a lot for the deaf. It's surprising how many people talk about that when you discuss the college with them. But there's a reason for it, you see--a very fine little mother with whom he was very much impressed, and he never forgot it.

Now Mrs. Thornberry is on our Board of Directors. Her husband was formerly, and she is now. Our board has recently been enlarged from thirteen members to twenty-one members, and she's one of the new members. We have two women on the Board now and we will have four deaf men on the board. We have two at the present time and two more being added. We think it's important for the deaf to be represented on this Board.

Incidentally, the deaf are becoming very vocal today. They're well organized. They're a small minority, but the National Association of the Deaf, which is their organization, has its home office now in the District of Columbia here with a full-time director, a very active organization. There's a new organization--the COSD--now, the Council on Services to the Deaf, which has representatives from most of the national organizations dealing with deafness. They have this one group organized to pull them all together so that those who work with the deaf won't go off in all directions--duplication and things like that. Very excellent.

M: Let me ask you a little bit about your background at this point. You apparently have been connected with the college for quite awhile, have you not?

E: I was a senior at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1922, a major in education. This shouldn't be on tape, but I was very shy in those days, and I thought, "isn't this ridiculous!" A shy person going into education, because you deal with people all of the time, and people kind of bothered me. I never felt quite at home with large groups of people. I thought here I'm going into education, and especially women bothered me, I thought: "Why did I do this!"

About March a man from the college, one of the professors here, went out to Minnesota on a visit. The president of the college told him to stop at my college and talk to a few of the seniors to see if they'd be interested in the education of the deaf, because there had been some from my college who had succeeded. I was one of the boys he talked to. I kind of laughed to myself, saying, "here I've been worrying about going into education, and here I'm asked to go where I can't even communicate. How could I be interested in that!"

It kept coming back to me in the next few weeks, so I wrote for more information to Dr. Hall here. He answered my questions and I thought satisfactorily. Before I knew it, I had signed up to come as a graduate student. Then I worried from March until September. I will never forget the morning I stepped off the train out here at the station. I walked out and took a look at that Capitol, lost my nerve, turned around and went into the station; I think if I had had money, I'd have gone home. But I had something to eat and felt a little stronger; got on a streetcar and came out to the college.

There was a wonderful view as you come up 8th Street on the streetcar in those days. You see the tower there with the bell in it. I knew this was Gallaudet because I had seen the tower in pictures. I walked up the walk with my bags. We have a door down in this old building that's shaped like an old coffin. They call it "coffin door." Boy, that was almost my death when I walked through that. But Dr. Hall was there, a big fellow and a very happy fellow. He met me and I was impressed with him right away. From then on--and that was 1922, forty-seven years ago--I've been connected with the college.

I took the training that year. Then a series of events took place. One of the professors in English and History died, and I was asked if I would be interested in that. I stayed and taught English and History for a year. We have a laboratory school here in the Kendall School which we use for a teacher training facility. The woman principal got married, so I took her job for a year. The second year, I married my wife, who taught here. So I got my wife here, too. Then that third year, I got an offer to go to New York to be an assistant in a private school up there. I decided to take that thousand dollars increase in salary so my wife and I could start raising a family.

I stayed there for seven years and then went out to Minnesota to head the State School for the Deaf in that state for thirteen years. In 1945 I was offered the presidency here--to be the third president of Gallaudet College in a hundred and five years. The first one Gallaudet (forty-six years), Dr. Hall (thirty-five years), and I'm finishing twenty-four. That adds up to quite a lot.

M: The Board of Directors selected you?

E: That's right.

M: This doesn't require any Senate confirmation or anything like that?

E: No. My successor was chosen with strong faculty and Board support. I just can't believe that it all turned out smoothly as it did, because it had worried me. You always worry about who's going to take your place, you know, after you've been in a place a long time. But this man appealed to me right from the beginning. He has had that necessary connection with a large hearing university, you see, which I think is necessary. There are educators of the deaf in the country who also have earned doctorates--mine was an honorary one. That was all right in that day, but it doesn't go today. I wanted it to be a hearing university man with experience. He's the Dean of the School of Education at the University of Tennessee. He has been successful. He brings all that know-how here, you see, from a hearing university and puts in into our program. It's just exactly what the "doctor" ordered. And to this day I have not heard of one criticism of the choice--even from the people who wanted it and didn't get it. They have to admit that this is a good choice. So I think the days look very bright for the future.

M: Is it fair to ask what you're going to do?

E: I hope to continue working with deafness. I'm a member of Rotary. Rotary is an International Organization. It's my opinion that Rotary ought to be doing more for international projects. We have fourteen nations represented in our enrollment here of deaf students, and they have a difficult time here. Sometimes the language bothers them, and they need a little extra time. I want to start a campaign. It's called Rotary Dollars for Overseas Deaf Scholars. It has kind of got a ring to it, you see. All I want is one dollar once a year from each Rotarian. Now there are 3200 in this

district and there are 3000 in the Virginia district. If I can get those 6200 men to give me one dollar once a year, there's no problem. You only need to reach in your pocket and take out a dollar. They do that in the Lions Clubs every week. They have to pitch in a dollar for something or other. I want it once a year. That does two things. It helps the deaf students financially, but once a year a person pulls out a dollar and gives it to a fund helping deaf students from other nations. It's deafness, you see. It connects them with the project.

I would like to make a speech the first time to each club. There are fifty-two clubs in this district. I would make fifty-two speeches on this idea and tell some of what I've been telling you here, you see, on deafness that people don't know. They are usually enthusiastic about it when they hear it. This is something different. I think this thing can spread. There are 625,000 Rotarians in the world.

I was in South Africa in 1966 at their invitation--visiting all of the schools of the deaf in that nation. I spoke to a group in Capetown one night--at a small party. I said, "If you'll give me five minutes, I'd like to tell you about a little project I have." I told them about this Rotary Dollars for Overseas Deaf Scholars. They thought it was a terrific idea. "You take care of the United States. We'll take care of South Africa." And that's true. They would. I know in India--we've had several students from India--I'm sure they would be just as interested. So that's going to be my project. It is starting out slowly, and I hope it'll spread.

This fund then will be to help deaf students come over here and get an education, ostensibly so that they can go back and be an inspiration to the deaf in their own countries. Sometimes they don't go back, and that's bad. Or to bring teachers from other nations here to learn

how to teach the deaf, and then to go back and teach. That's a dangerous thing, too, because they don't always want to go back. They can get a better job here. So I would like to send a teacher from here to Burma or wherever it is, Ceylon, and they would teach the teachers there.

That teacher going down there is not going to get enough money, so we'd have to make up the difference between her salary here and what she would get down there--pay her way down and pay her way back with this fund, you see. I think that would be the best way to help the deaf in other nations. In other nations a deaf person is a second-third class citizen. In this country he's a first-class citizen all the way. He gets all the privileges, and it's up to him whether he succeeds or not. If we can give him an education, he can do it. We've got examples to prove it. Now, in other nations, the industries will not accept them; the professions will not accept them because--"How can he--he's deaf, he can't do it!"

I remember in West Berlin I spoke to a group of teachers there. A deaf student--our first one from Germany--was in the audience. I explained, "this young fellow" was going to come over in the fall. You could almost see them shake their heads, "He can't go to college. He's deaf." I had him say a few words to them. Any teacher of the deaf who hears a deaf voice and pronunciation knows if a student is deaf or not. They knew then that he was deaf.

There was an interesting incident there--this shouldn't be on tape--but I was the fourth speaker that morning. You know, you say a paragraph and then the interpreter says it in German--oh, terribly boring (this is the sign for boring), and they were bored. I could see that. They had had four speeches, and I was the fifth one. I said to my interpreter, "Geischburger, let's try something. Let's have them stand up

and stretch a little bit. They'll feel better when they sit down."

He said, "You can't do that."

I said, "Why not?"

He said, "They've never done it before."

I said, "Why not! Let's try it."

He said, "No, I'd rather you wouldn't."

"Well," I said, "I'd rather you would, so you tell them." So he did. And sure enough, they didn't get up. They'd look at each other. Then one of them, I guess, got embarrassed and slowly got to his feet, and then another one--pretty soon, they all stood up and laughed and smiled.

Well, this deaf fellow had seen this. That fall he came over here--the first student we'd had from Germany. He was a short fellow. He was the last student I introduced at the opening night when we introduced all the new students--some three hundred. He walked over to the middle of the stage in auditorium and said, "Everybody up!" I thought, what is he doing! And then it hit me. He was trying a little of the same stunt I'd tried over there. He was bored. He'd been sitting there while two hundred and fifty students had been introduced, and he was tired. I explained this to the students, and they enjoyed it. Well, we got off the subject here.

M: Before I close this interview, let me give you an open-ended question. Is there anything I should have asked you about that I didn't, or any comments you wish to make?

E: I think we've covered the fact that no student is denied entrance because of money. I think this is important. I think this is right, because it's bad enough to have the handicap of deafness. If you've worked hard enough to attain college, at the time when you can go to college,

you should have a right to go through with it. And we've been able to do that.

Girls and boys? There are more boys than girls. The girls like that, of course. Do the deaf get married? Yes, they do, and they are just as successful--I wouldn't say any more successful--than hearing marriages. Their children will in most instances be hearing children because, unless there's a long history of deafness on both sides of the family, there'll not be deafness in the children. Deaf parents are good parents because they are proud of their children, and they bring them up--educate them--because they know the value of an education. They will sacrifice for their hearing children. People ask, "Well, how do they ever learn to speak? If the parents are deaf and don't speak, how do they learn?" They play with children in the neighborhood, and they learn from them. And, as I say, most parents today can speak well enough so that the children can understand them.

One thing I didn't say. We have forty deaf instructors on our staff out of two hundred. These instructors have gotten their undergraduate degrees from Gallaudet, but some of them have gotten them from hearing colleges. But they've gotten their graduate degrees from hearing colleges and universities, and some of them are going on for their doctorates. The salary scale is the same for the deaf as it is for hearing, and, of course, that's right. These are excellent teachers. Deafness doesn't make a person a good teacher, but if he's a good teacher and he happens to be deaf, he's a better teacher because the students look at him, and say, "Well, I guess I should be able to do it. He did it." They get inspiration from them.

M: That's splendid. I thank you for your time. I appreciate the interview.

E: It's a pleasure. I think this idea of a library is wonderful. I have

visited Truman's, and it's a real education to go through a building like that.

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By Leonard Elstad

to the

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