

Ben Kartman

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The pages that follow constitute the transcript of an interview conducted as part of the Wilmette Public Library District's Oral History program, started in 1975 by a committee of the Friends of the Wilmette Public Library which has been chaired since its inception by Rhea Adler, a resident of the Village of Wilmette since 1932.

A copy of the tape on which this transcript is based is available for circulation, and may be obtained by checking with a Reference Librarian concerning circulation procedures.

This program would not have been possible without the cooperation of the many long-time residents of the Village interested in helping to preserve particulars of a fascinating past, and the patience, energy and effort of a small but dedicated group of interviewers, transcribers and typists who share the belief that the past is too important to be forgotten.

Richard E. Thompson Director

## ABSTRACT

Interviewee: Ben Kartman

Interviewer: Rhea Adler

Date of Interview: March 4, 1982

Early years in Wilmette · three residences

Two sons · University of Iowa · University of Illinois

Years at University of Illinois · Editor of Illinois Daily

· preceded by (Scotty) James Reston He was followed by Jack Mabley who later joined him on staff of

Chicago Daily News

Volunteered for Chicago Metropolitan YMCA many years; on Board seven years; Board of Directors of Association for Family Living

Transferred his allegiance to Wilmette Volunteer Pool · 16 years

Volunteered in various schools · basic composition, reading

Editorial consultant to Hollister Press for 6 years · Joanne Prime Shade

United Fund; Volunteer Pool; swim teacher to retarded

Experience with blind · taught swimming · Tommy Sullivan

Discussion of %volunteering+

Types needed as volunteers in today's community

Ben Kartman

BK: Ben Kartman.

RA: And where do you live?

BK: 208 Golf Terrace.

RA: And how long have you lived here?

BK: I've lived in this house almost 32 years, but I've lived in Wilmette 42. This is my third house in Wilmette.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: My first house was at 626 Washington and my wife for a long time had her eye on the house next door, the corner house at 630, but it was a rental and the owner lived in California and wasn't interested in selling. When he died the house was put on the market, so we made a bid on it and we bought the house and we moved next door. It was a lovely old house, a big house, three stories, six bedrooms, two and a half baths. It was much more house than we needed, but my wife had her heart set on it and so we bought it, and at the time my older son was just about ready - he had just graduated from New Trier and was ready to enter college in the fall and my second son was just entering New Trier so we really didn't need a house that size.

RA: Where did your son go to college?

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BK: Pardon me?

RA: Where did your oldest son go to college?

BK: He went to the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

RA: We have two graduates from there.

BK: Oh, really? Well, he was - he got his degree in speech therapy....

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ã at the University of Iowa and he got a master's degree in audiology at the University of Illinois which was my alma mater.

RA: And ours.

BK: Yours too?

RA: Yes.

BK: Well, I was editor of the Daily Illini there so I got my start in journalism.

RA: I saw your name in the last Alumni News.

BK: Oh, really?

RA: Yes.

BK: Somebody else mentioned it to me - Bob Cox, but I don't get the Alumni News.

RA: Oh, don't you? Well, as a matter of fact I saved it.

BK: Oh, really?

RA: hoping to bring it today, and forgot it.

BK: What was the reference?

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RA: It was just that you followed or preceded James Reston.

BK: Oh, yes. That's quite a few years. I also preceded Jack Mabley.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ..who represented the Illini sometime in the early 40's.

RA: A long time before Jack Mabley cause his wife took care of our children....

BK: Oh, really?

RA: ....baby sat for them.

BK: Well, it's funny. When Jack Mabley graduated he was - he came to work for the Chicago Daily News and I had already been working on the Daily News for a good many years and he was introduced and he said, "I'm sick and tired of hearing your name."

He said, "I've been hearing it for four years."

And here's the reason for that. What happened

is - it was a strange situation. When I was

editor of the Daily Illini we started covering

both the campuses - both the towns. In addition

to campuses we covered Champaign and Urbana....

RA: Yes.

BK: ...so we published year round including the Christmas holidays. The only time we suspended was for a couple of weeks between the end of summer session and the opening of school in the fall and I felt

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the year I was editor everybody on the staff should have a partial Christmas vacation so I sent one group home for the first week and kept one group there and at the end of the week I let the second group go assuming the others would come back and nobody came back and I was left with just a sports editor, Tommy Morrow, who later became a columnist for The Tribune. Tommy lived in Champaign so I did have a sports editor, but for about three or four days until I could bring the staff back, I was doing the whole job myself. I was covering (indistinct) the police department, the city hall, also all the campus streets, going in and writing it all, editing it, writing the headlines, laying out the paper, making up the paper.

RA: It must have increased your circulation tremendously (laughter). Did it?

BK: It did. Yes, but I had to do this whole job....

RA: Yourself?

BK: ....myself, except for the sports which I knew nothing about anyway. I'm lucky to have a sports reporter so I became a legend in the Daily Illini offices and I've heard by the grapevine every once in a while, when something would go wrong. We never had this trouble when Ben Kartman was putting out

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the paper all by himself. We never had to yell for copy once.+So this is what Jack Mabley was referring to (laughter) and I don't blame him for it.

RA: Well, we were contemporaries of Scotty Reston and so this is why I was particularly interested in your having done it since I knew I was going to interview you.

BK: Yes, to get back to the Daily Illini, but I'm getting a little bit aside from what (indistinct)...

RA: Well, it's your background then.

BK: But this, I think, is interesting. I went down there. I had made up my mind when high school (a senior in high school to be a newspaper reporter. I went to the University of Illinois and I wanted to get practical experience so I decided to try out for the Daily Illini and as a freshman I applied. I went in day after day after day. They never had any assignments for me so I stopped going in. I figured they just weren't interested in me or in having me on the staff. My sophomore year I decided that I was going to try again. I still wanted the experience. I never had any idea that I was going to become editor. This was not what I was looking for. I was



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just looking for the experience. I went in again and the assignment editor, Paul Hubbard, whom I came to know very well. He also ended up on the Tribune. He was sitting at the assignment desk typing up the assignments for the day and I was standing close enough to the typewriter, but hanging over the back of the typewriter and I was able to read the assignments and I noticed that some of them had no reporter names after them. They hadn't been assigned. So Paul said to me, "Do you have any special interests?" And I said, "Yes, music." This was a lie. I don't know a thing about music. I never had any musical education at all. I like music, but that's about it. I had seen the name John Phillip Sousa on the assignment sheet. So he said to me, "Good. How would you like to interview John Phillip Sousa? He's coming in on the Illinois Central this afternoon." So I met John Phillip Sousa, interviewed him at the station, drove to the campus with him by cab, had a good talk and wrote the story which they ran on the front page with my by-line. From then on I had no more trouble getting assignments. At the end of my sophomore year I was named the most valuable male reporter and in my junior year

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I was one of ten or twelve junior news editors, all of whom were eligible for the editorship. There were two, %Chilly Homer+and %Beach+Carre, who were the front runners and %Chilly+or %Beach+would be the editor in our senior year and I had no idea I would ever achieve this, to the point where I didn't even apply. There was an Illini Board of Control, consisting of three faculty members and four student members, and there was a deadline for application and I happened to apply and I picked up with all this competition. I was walking down the campus one day, I ran into one of the faculty members from the Board of Control and he said, %Ben, we haven't received your application for the editorship and I said, %I'm not planning to apply.+And he said, %Why not?+And I said, %Because I don't think I've got a chance of getting it.+He said, %I would recommend you get your application in as quickly as you can.+It was almost at the deadline so I knocked out two or three paragraphs of what my policies would be and I was elected on the first ballot by a vote of five to two. This taught me a lesson. (Laughter) Don't take things for granted. (Laughter)

RA: That's right. That's right.

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BK: So much for that. Then, of course, I came to Chicago, but let's get to my volunteer work.

RA: Yes, except was the City News Bureau extent then?

BK: Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

RA: And did you ever work on the - you went directly to the.

BK: I went - the first - no. When I graduated I took a summer job [in Springfield as telegraph- man at the Illinois State Register, an affluent newspaper, at the munificent salary of \$25 a week and this was in the days of six day work week. I tried getting a job in Chicago, but nobody would have me because I didn't have Chicago experience. So I sent a resume out to papers throughout the state - downstate and I got a telegram from the Illinois State Register offering me a job as telegraph editor at \$25 a week so I reported for work in the middle of the week on a Wednesday and my first pay envelope contained twelve and a half dollars on Saturday. A week later my pay envelope contained \$30. I got a \$5 raise after three days on the job and by the end of the summer I was earning \$45 a week. The telegraph editor had to handle the AP+and UP copies, the country correspondence, pictures, (indistinct) picture, captions and make- up. In addi-

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tion to that I was writing an occasional editorial, contributing to a humor column on the editorial page, chasing around with the police reporter with whom I shared an apartment on his assignments and I was really enjoying the job tremendously, but I hated Springfield. This was long before the days of air conditioning and it was...

RA: And were you in the depression at that time?

BK: Oh, well, it was no, we weren't in the depression. It was '23, but there was a recession.

RA: Yes.

BK: It wasn't quite a depression, but even then \$25 was no money so, anyway, I hated Springfield because it was so hot and sultry and so I got a call from the University asking me to come back on the faculty in the fall. So I went back the end of September and I worked just one summer in Springfield. In the fall I was back on the campus as graduate manager of all student publications, director of the journalistic laboratory and instructor of English and Journalism.

RA: Oh.

BK: And I stayed there for two and a half years and then I came up to Chicago and tried again to get on the Chicago Daily News which was my first choice and

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(indistinct) said, %You have to have Chicago experience?+I said, %how do you get Chicago experience?+And they said, %On one of the smaller papers.+So I went to the Chicago Journal.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: And I got a job as a copywriter.

RA: The evening Journal?

BK: That's right and after about six weeks I was the number two man on the copy desk because they had a revolving door there. Copywriters (laughter) would come and go and after I'd been on the copy desk there for about five months I got a call from the Daily News offering me a job on the Daily News copy desk. In other words, after....

RA: Who was editor then?

BK: Of which paper?

RA: Of the Daily News.

BK: The Chicago Daily News, it was Charles Dennis and Henry Justin Smith of (indistinct).

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: Walter Strong was the publisher.

RA: Yes,

BK: He was a nephew by marriage of Victor Lawson. Victor Lawson had just passed away.

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I went to work there in 1926, a few months after Lawson died and I stayed there for 19 years, two years on the copy desk and seventeen years as night make-up editor.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: And from there I went - but the ironic part to me was the fact that after five months - I qualified for a job on the Chicago Daily News where they had turned me down five weeks earlier.

RA: And in the meantime you must have come to Wilmette, did you - somewhere along the line?

BK: Yeh, then I moved, see I stayed with the Daily News until December 1944. I started in February 1926 - I was there almost nineteen years and we moved out here in 1940 so I was still with the Daily News for another four years after I moved out here. Then I went from the Daily News to Coronet magazine and I stayed with them until they moved the whole operation away to New York.

RA: Um- hum.

BK: And then I freelanced for one year and then I became editor-in-chief of Family Weekly, a brand new Sunday supplement.

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RA: Um hum.

BK: That was designed specifically for second size newspapers all over the country, the paper that could not get This Week, Parade or American Weekly and now This Week and American Weekly are gone. They have been for years. Parade and Family Weekly are still running and are still prospering.

BA: Oh, yes. This is interesting and you were at the same time doing volunteer work in Chicago.

BK: Yeah. Well, I was on the Board of the Association for Family Living for twelve years. I was president for two and I was on the Board of Directors of the Society of Midland Authors and president for four years and I was on the Board of the Youth Orchestra of Greater Chicago for about ten years. My son was in the orchestra, but he was at New Trier, but long after he had graduated from New Trier and Cornell University, I was still on the Board. Then also after I had gone to Lawson YMCA when I was 60 years old to learn to swim, I was on the Lawson Board of Directors. I stayed on that Board for seven years and by that time, of course, I'd been living up in Wilmette for some time and I'd had requests from local agencies. Because of my background they felt that I could be

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helpful to them, mainly in public relations and also I would give what time I had to agencies closer to home. I figured I'd given in % my stint and so I became much more active here in Wilmette.

RA: Who was Director of the Association for Family Living when you were active?

BK: Freida Kemm. Freida Kemm. In fact, it was Freida who got me on the Board of Directors. She was a close friend of mine. I've known Freida for many, many years and it was - at the time it was - it was the oldest counseling agency in the city of Chicago. Of course, its been gone now....

RA: For a long time. Yes, it was.

BK: And I succeeded Rhoda Pritzker. She was President just before.

RA: Um hum.

RA: My daughter was there when Rhoda Pritzker was there as office secretary.

BK: But after I came out here to Wilmette then my first association with volunteer work - what started the whole thing - was with the Wilmette Volunteer Pool. I mean in a big way, and I've been on Volunteer Pool Board for 16 years, ever since it started and for 16 years I've been handling their public relations.



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RA: I'm interested · I was just going to ask you how long the volunteer pool had been..

BK: Yes, it started when....

RA: I remember when it started I filled out an application and I've done several things....

BK: Yes, well, through the volunteer pool I have talked at every school in Wilmette, I've conducted writing workshops with Howard Junior High School and writers' workshops for after school programs where I've conducted the first two or three sessions and had a published novelist, a published writer of children's books and a published poet. And this went on for about six or eight weeks and it was so well received that the following year they made a program during the classroom period so more of the children could participate in it....

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ....which was an after school program.

RA: Yes. I see.

BK: And then I talked on · whenever they would be learning about newspaper, I'd talk about newspapers · how a newspaper is put together, what makes news and how....

RA: And you taught the composition of....

BK: Well, then I've also · yes · I've also taught

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as a volunteer at New Trier in their Community Programs for Alternative Education at New Trier West. This was a special program available only to juniors and seniors who qualified and it was supposed to be Advanced Composition, but it turned out to be Basic Composition. I discovered very quickly that the - that somewhere along the line they had missed the boat.

RA: Well, they'd been doing alternative uh - yes and no -

BK: Yes, that's right. I mean....

RA: They don't have to have composition.

BK: Some of the schools don't. here again Marie Murphy, for example, - I talked up there a year ago. A little more than a year ago I talked to the two fifth grade classes, two sessions of each class. This was in an assembly situation.

RA: Um hum.

BK: One of the teachers said to me, "Would you like to see some of the things that my students have written in my class? There were two different classes and she had the children bring some of the things with them. One by one they brought them up. They were good.

RA: Um hum.

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BK: And they were well written. I complimented children. I made a few grammatical changes · corrections. I made sure they understood about everything and I was so impressed by the fact that she said they would do some writing in her classroom every day....

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ....and this is how they learn.

RA: Marie Murphy herself would be most gratified to know that....

BK: Well, this was really an eye opener to me. And anyway when this thing was all over, this was shortly before · I had to work there last year · this was really around November · I was 80 years old · and through the coordinator, one of the volunteer coordinators, the teachers got wind of my birthday so the day before my birthday, which was on a Sunday, in the Saturday mail I got a big manila envelope containing 24 handmade birthday cards from the children.

RA: For goodness sakes.

BK: I still have them in my desk drawer.

RA: Oh, marvelous.

BK: From the children in one of the classes, a couple of weeks later I got another envelope from the other teacher's class with 24 thank you notes.

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RA: Oh, for goodness sakes. (Laughter)

BK: And this is....

RA: This is meaningful.

BK: This is where I get my kicks.

RA: Yes.

BK: And now, of course, for the second year I've been teaching the basics of reading, writing and tutoring fifth graders at Central School.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: And I have seven on Monday mornings and seven on Wednesday morning. They come for about an hour. I give each group four weeks. Then I pick on two more groups and so by the end of the school year I will have tutored every fifth grade child in the four fifth grade classrooms at Central School in writing.

RA: Wonderful.

BK: And I'm enjoying it thoroughly and it fits in very (indistinct) and I feel the time to get them is right then....

RA: That's right.

BK: Before they make bad habits, before they fall behind.

RA: It is so true but, you know, uh one of our neighbors over here on Laurel, uh, Mrs. Smith - , uh, Jean Reeder Smith.

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Oh, I know her · Lucia Smith

Sure, uh, who teaches at Northwestern University and along with helping him do his typing and everything, she teaches at Northwestern and began by teaching people deficient in English and deficient in writing. Uh huh. And when you have to get that far before it gets caught, it seems so sad!

BK: I actually, I was supposed to do this · my original idea was to tutor on a one· to· one basis and I thought I'd get some more Wilmette people who were qualified to do the tutoring too. I did get one, Marge flerguth Perkins. She's the wife of Bob Perkins who has a column in the Chicago Sun Times.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ....and Marge was a feature writer for the Hollister newspaper?

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: When I was Editorial Consultant.

RA: I see.

BK: While I was still working for Family Weekly....

RA: For Hollister's people or Pioneer?

BK: For six years I was editorial consultant for the Hollister newspaper and they hired Marge as a feature writer. I knew Marge when she was Marge Silsbie, in

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those days.

PA: Oh, yes.

BK: You see I knew she was a very talented writer and I had dealt with her for Family Weekly and she accepted the job on condition that nobody but I would handle her copy.

PA: Oh, yes.

BK: So for about two and a half years I had to read everything she wrote for the Hollister paper.

PA: Oh yes.

BK: And, incidentally, I want to say that I retired from Hollister newspapers after six years as editorial consultant. Much to my surprise a farewell luncheon party at the Villa Moderne, and it was a very nice affair with the entire editorial staff there....

PA: Um hum.

BK: ....and they presented me with a lot of gag gifts and a mock-up of the Evanston Review with my picture on the cover and things like this - a funny story inside and then there was a poem about Boo - Ben - Adam and so forth and I got some very nice gifts, too, and I got a plaque which I still have in my living room which reads, "To Ben Kartman who did so much to help an editorial staff into a national prize winner from

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1960 to 1966, our deepest gratitude for your dedicated willingness to share your wealth of experience and talents with us+from the Hollister newspaper editorial staff and I treasure that.

RA: Well, you should treasure it. I think the Rollister press is to be congratulated in having Ben Kartman as well as Ben Kartman for having contributed because Hollister Press and Pioneer Press was unique.

BK: I suppose.

RA: And Pioneer Press could use, if I may be so bold as to say, another Ben Kartman.

BK: (Laughter) Well, that's another story. I happen to.

RA: Well, the turnover is so great there.

BK: Yes, but not only that they have people who have been there quite a long time who still don't know some of the basics. Their Editor-in-Chief, Walter Kelly - well, off and on for about five years now I've been conducting classes for (indistinct) language, reporting, copy editor, managing editor, sports writing. I know nothing about sports but

(indistinct) now sports editor asked me, "Would you conduct some classes for me and my sports writing staff?" I said, "Of course, I'd like to, but I don't.

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know anything about sports, but I do know about writing.

RA: This is marvelous for on the job training. Did you know Peter Akers?

BK: Oh, sure.

RA: Well, Pete said to me once . I said something about Northwestern Journalism School and Pete's comment

was, %You can't learn journalism in a classroom.+

Stuffy+Walters said the same thing.

RA: Yes, and his wife's name is spelled a little differently than mine. She was Reha and I'm Rhea.

The H is....

RA: I pronounce my Ray.

BK: Yes, that's right.

RA: But she pronounces her Reha. She's still living in Indiana.

BK: You mentioned %Stuffy+Walters. You know I resigned from the Chicago Daily News just before John . I'm trying to think of his . the publisher of the paper....

BK: John Knight. Yes. Just before John Knight bought the paper. I resigned a couple of months earlier but I stayed at their request to handle their Christmas



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book section. In addition to being night makeup editor, I was associate literary editor. I did reviews, edited all the copy and made up the entire 32 or 36- page section. When I met ~~%~~Stuffy+Walters he said ~~%~~ou took one look and me and decided to quit.+(laughter)

RA: That sounds like him. lie was a good newspaperman.

BK: Yes, he was.

RA: He surely was.

BK: You know, what Pete Akers said about journalism schools is only partly true. How much you can learn in journalism school depends on the instructor. I taught in the evening division of the Hedill School of Journalism for 14 years. I taught magazine article writing. I also taught several quarters on the Evanston campus if I could fit it into the working schedule as editor of the Sunday supplement, Family Weekly. They would call me and say, ~~%~~Can you take a quarter in magazine article writing or in basic composition?+And if I could fit it into my schedule, I did it. I teach by showing my students all the things they themselves are doing right or wrong. I~~ø~~ give them writing assignments, which I~~ø~~ correct as if I were editing them for publication.

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I can't tell them, I could quote you the rules of grammar until you're blue in the face, but you can't learn more from things you do right or wrong. You're not going to learn. I have to show you by example and even magazine article writers are required to write three full length articles in the semester, but the evening division is on the semester. Before they let them write, instead of just writing an article and looking for an article, I would ask them to submit an idea and then we would discuss the idea - what possible market is there, what magazine might be interested in the subject. If we can't decide on one we thought was a good prospect, it's okay. Do it thoroughly. Conduct enough research to do it clearly, to present the idea to a magazine and see if the subject interested them and if it does - if he gives you a go ahead, at least you know he's interested. The rest depends on you. I say then do the rest of the research and do a complete article. Quite a few of the articles written in my class were sold. ~~Kiwanis~~ magazine, Chicago Commerce, magazines like that. One student of mine, Ed May, sold all three articles that he wrote for my class including one to Family Weekly and one to the Tribune magazine

and as a result of that he got other writing assignments and for about two and a half or three years after he graduated from Medill, he was working on the Buffalo Evening News. He won a Pulitzer price for a series he did on the welfare mess in New York State and I read about it in the Sun Times and I called him in Buffalo to congratulate him and he said, "By rights, Ben, half that prize belongs to you." (Laughter) I said, "Ed, no." I said, "That's an exaggeration." I said, "The only thing I take credit for is recognizing talent when I see it and giving it a helping hand." Well, as a result of that Pulitzer Prize, he did an article for Harper's magazine and then went on and did a book called The Waste of Americans published by Harper and Row of which I have a copy, with a beautiful inscription in which he tells me I started him on the road to writing that book and this is where, I think, my rewards are.

RA: My granddaughter is on The Daily at Northwestern. She'd love to have a course from you.

BK: Oh. (Laughter)

RA: She's a music school major, but she's in her junior year thinking she wants to go into the publishing business.

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BK: Oh, really?

REt: Yes.

BK: But I think you can learn - the purpose of a good instructor is to give them a headstart and get them to learn the basics and what's right and what's wrong, but you can't do that by lecturing.

RA: No, and you obviously - it's one thing to know it, but it's another thing to teach it.

BK: That's right.

RA: And not every good person is a good teacher....

BK: Well....

RA: . . .in their field.

BK: Well, uh, well, I have always thought of it in one way at every level.. I do the same thing with the kids at Central School. I give them a writing assignment every week and they sit around a table in the library and I go through each paper, pointing out the things I like, the things I think could be better expressed and so forth, correcting the misspelled words (Laughter) and the bad punctuation and so forth, but this is how they learn.

RA: Of course.

BK: I had one student at Northwestern who I was teaching on the Evanston Campus and this was sophomores and

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Juniors. It was supposed to be Basic Composition. They came to me after class one day and they said to me, %Now I can see all the things I've been doing wrong.q

RA: Urn hum.

BK: He said, %My last instructor would just give me for spelling, %or+for grammar and this sort of thing.+But that didn't teach him.

RA: Um Hum.

BK: You have to show them how.

RA: That's right. Now let's get to your volunteer work and your volunteer work in the village because I know you've done many more things.

BK: Well, through the volunteer pool (indistinct)Land Public Relations Chairman for three years at that time · have we talked about Joanne?

RA: No, we haven't.

BK: Well, at that time I had a lot of contact with Joanne Prim Shade. She was feature writer for the Wilmette Life. I went into the office and I had a meeting with the Editor· in Chief and the Managing Editor of the paper and a couple of reporters. I had brought in a blueprint blueprint of what publicity I wanted for the entire campaign which included a feature story ·

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one a week · on each of the thirteen agencies which carried the...

RA: Now you're speaking of Joanne?

BK: That's right. Joanne. When I talked to her on the phone · when she called me she introduced herself now as Joanne Shade.

RA: Oh, does she?

BK: Oh yes, but her name is Joanne Prim Shade.

RA: I know she used that professionally.

BK: Oh, yes. That's right. That's her by-line, too. But, anyway, Joanne did all these feature stories on the agencies. I presented her with all the basic material · a package on each agency, giving her all the background, current contacts, pictures and if she ran into any problems in contacting the people, she'd call me and I'd open the door for her and see that she got the information so we worked together very closely on that.

RA: She did some wonderful stories, when she was on the Pioneer Press.

BK: She's was an excellent feature writer · very good · and she still is.

RA: At 11ev organization, her command of the language....

BK: And I was really responsible for the job she is

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working on right now with the YMCA,

RA: Oh, yes. -

BK: You see I knew that she was planning to make a change or wanting to make a change and I was involved with the YMCA as Chairman of the Public Relations Committee for Metropolitan Life and I felt they needed to beef up their public relations staff and so I recommended her and after several interviews she was hired and she's doing an excellent job for them.

RA: I gather she is.

BK: And then in addition to the United Fund and at the same time - during the same three years - I was handling the public relations for the year round Blood Donor Program here in Wilmette and worked with Dr. Sloan when he was Director then then when Jay Bloom took over. After a while I stopped doing that to go on to other things (indistinct) and, of course, was on the Board of the Community Concert Association for six years and was President for two. I'd only been on the Board a year when they slated me for President. I said, "Look, I haven't even gotten my feet wet yet. I haven't been on the Board long enough." And they assured me it wouldn't involve too much on this sort of thing so I agreed against my

Ben Kartman, cont. 29

better judgment and I ran against snags. (Laughter) I really and truly did.

(Laughter) Oh, I was going to say were they true?

BK: (Laughter) Now they said, %All you have to do is preside at an occasional Board meeting when they choose the artists and so forth. I ran into so many things. I ran into a strike · a mover\$ strike · when they couldnq get a piano moved....

RA: Oh, dear.

BK: ....(Laughter) to Howard Junior High School for one of the concerts for the accompanist for a violinist and I just managed to get a piano there two or three hours before the concert.

RA: For goodness sake.

BK: I called · I made a dozen phone calls. I called New York and told them · %Columbia Artists. We may have to use the Howard Junior High School piano.+ (Laughter). They said, %We donq perform unless you get either a Steinway or one of the other concert pianos..

RA: Yes.

BK: So by the skin of my teeth I got one delivered lin time. Then we had a Russian ballet, this was not the classical ballet. They wore heavy,



Ben Kartman, cont. 30

stomping boots and I was told they were going to tear up the stage and it would cost about \$800 to get it repaired ....and all that sort of thing and so I played around with the idea of having some heavy duty linoleum which would have cost more than \$800. (Laughter) The end result was . . . they finally solved the situation by sprinkling sugar water on the stage and giving it time to dry and after the concert they had to wipe it all away.

RA: Oh, that's fascinating.

BK: (Laughter) I didn't know that was possible. Then of course I had to get permission from Howard Junior High School. (Laughter)...

RA: To do the sugar water?

BK: ~ ..to do this to do the sugar water (laughter).

RA: Well, that Howard Junior High School problem is a whole other ball of wax.

BK: That's right. That's coming up again. Well so then anyway the concert at both schools and every once in a while some agency will call and ask me to help them out with some special publicity. For example, when the Knights of Columbus were celebrating their Diamond Jubilee a year ago in October, Gary S., who 4 was the Grand Knight at the time, asked me if I would

Ben Kartman, cont. 31

help them with the publicity so I just took over and (indistinct) we got (indistinct). The whole thing was nailed down in two covers and we did a couple of feature stories in advance of a cover story and, of course, I had to be there when the cover pictures were being taken and all that. The end result was gratifying to me.

RA: Yes.

BK: It's a worthwhile agency. Gary and I - that's another thing - Gary and I worked together on the Fourth of July celebration. I've been handling publicity - this will be my eighth year

RA: Oh

BK: of handling the publicity for the Fourth of July celebration and the Knights of Columbus have been paying for the dump truck and operating this and turning the proceeds back to the Committee....

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ....to be used for fireworks supplies every year.

RA: I see.

BK: So it was through this connection that Gary asked me if I would handle the public relations for this Diamond Jubilee and then the Troop 9 Boy Scouts of which Joe Berol is the founder....

Ben Kartman, cont. 32

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ....were celebrating their silver anniversary last February · a year ago · and he asked me if I would handle their · all their publicity.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: And then last December I handled the publicity again for the Pancake Breakfast (Laughter). Every once in a while if it's an agency and I feel it's doing something for the community and I can help then, then I'm ready to do it. It had reached the point though at one time when Dave Leach, who was the editor of the Communicator, called me....

RA: This is young David Leach?

BK: David Leach · he's the Assistant Administrator....

RA: Yes. I think of David Leach as · I knew his father and mother for years.

BK: Yes. And I know David, the editor of the Communicator. Well, anyway, I placed a lot of my material with him in the Communicator. He reserves the June issue cover for me for the fourth of July celebration, but a couple of times he's called me and said, %Ben, are you handling the publicity for such and such an agency?+And I've said no....

RA: Um hum.

Ben Kartman, cont. 33

BK: why....why did you call me? And he said, %Well, you're handling it for so many. I just took it for granted you might be handling it for this one, too.+

RA: Yes.

BK: But I say if it's an agency that's making a contribution to the community and I can help them.

RA: Well, you are....

BK: If I have the time - if I can make the time enough (indistinct) with the Wilmette Volunteer Pool. Occasionally they've come to me asking me to take on an assignment and I couldn't do it and it just didn't fit into my schedule for some reason, but I said if you can reschedule it, I'd be glad to do it and almost invariably they have been able to do that.

RA: Um hum.

BK: Rather than just turn them down.

RA: Um hum. Oh, yes. Well, few people have given as much of themselves to the community as you....

BK: Well, the community has given a lot to me.

RA: I feel this way, too.

BK: People have asked me why do you stay in this climate? I'm retired - I've been retired for almost seventeen years. You can move to California, Florida, Arizona. I have a son in San Francisco. I have a grand-

Ben Kartman, cont. 34

daughter in Miami · I have a grandson in Tucson. I

wouldn't want to live anywhere but Wilmette. To me · I would feel lost.

RA: Well, we had two on the west coast and one on the east coast but we are Midwesterners, born and bred sixty miles from here. My family came out here in 1837 and have lived here for generations. I have five generations of my family but, most of all, I have my doctors here.

BK: Oh, really.

RA: That is the other thing (Laughter) and I have found that people who go other places find that there....

BK: Who is your doctor?

RA: Well, I have several. (Laughter)

BK: Oh, yes · several. (Laughter)

4 10 RA: I have a lot of quirks, too, and so we won't go into that (Laughter).

BK: Oh, yes. (Laughter)

RA: They're all at Evanston Hospital at any rate and my husband can walk across the golf course. His doctor is farther west and operates at another hospital and I tell him, "Look, you can't expect me to come see you if you're hospitalized because I'm not going out to River Road to the hospital.+(Laughter)

Ben Kartman, cont. 35

BK: Well, I had to use one doctor · it was in the Cos Building · Dr. Robb.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: I had tendonitis at one time....

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ,...and he's awfully good.

RA: Yes. I know a Dr. Robb.

BK: I used him two or three times, but recently back in October I decided I was overdue for a complete physical. I hadn't had one in about six years. I was feeling fine. I knew I had high blood pressure, but it was under control and I had been doctoring for it

· taking my medicine regularly, but I felt I should have another complete physical so my son and daughter-in-law recommended a doctor up in Highland Park at the Ravinia Associates of Internal Medicine.

RA: I see.

BK: Well, the doctor that they suggested · a Dr.

Blackburn · was not available, but one of the other doctors on the staff, Dr. Feingold, was. Excellent doctor.

RA: Good.

BK: So I went up there. I spent almost two hours undergoing tests · every test you can imagine.

Ben Kartman, cont. 36

RA: Um hum.

BK: They gave me a chest xray, a cardiogram, blood samples, blood pressure,  
· urinalysis · the works ·

RA: Yes.

BK: eyes, ears, everything...

BK: Eighteen tests in all and when I was all through the doctor said to me, %~~ad~~  
like to see you for a few minutes in my office before you leave.+Here comes the  
bad news. (Laughter) So I walked into his office and he was sitting at his desk  
and he had the printout of the cardiogram....

RA: Yes.

BK: ....and he started looking at and he said to me, %~~ou~~ are in very good health.  
We didn~~q~~ find a thing  
wrong with you.+

RA: That~~s~~ wonderful to hear at your age (Laughter).

BK: That~~s~~ right.

RA: ....or any age.

BK: I was walking on air when I walked out because at my age · I~~d~~ be eighty  
years old, eighty one years old, next Monday.

RA: Ummm.

BK: But as I~~ve~~ said I wrote an article in a magazine · I haven~~d~~ gotten back yet  
· that I~~q~~n consulting edi·

Ben Kartman, cont. 37

tor for about my experience in learning to swim - it had to do with physical fitness.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: How I learned the importance of physical fitness the hard way after three ulcers.

RA: Oh.

BK: And I decided to....

RA: Oh, I wondered....

BK: I decided to make a change in my lifestyle and I told that whole story about the physical exam in this article. I'd give you a copy.

RA: Oh, I would love it.

BK: And that's something else I did, that I did for pay. They called me. They needed editorial help and so I went to work for them as editorial consultant.

RA: What's the magazine?

BK: I'd show it to you. I have a copy of it here. It's called Court Sports magazine.

RA: Oh.

BK: And it's out on the newstands and distributed only through tennis and racquet ball clubs.

RA: Oh, you told me about this sometime back.

BK: That's right. Well, anyway, in this issue even though I have to have my - my title is Consulting Editor, I really have been functioning as



Ben Kartman, cont. 38

Editor-in-Chief because they have no other editor. The publisher has a title of Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, but he has no editorial background.

RA: I see.

BK: And so they called me to see if I could help them and I've been working on it since and in this issue I did the cover story on Tracy Austin under a by-line - under a pen name.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: I had to use my own name on the article I told you about about my physical....

RA: Swimming. Yes. and you didn't learn to swim until....

BK: ....until I was sixty. (Laughter) Anyway, I tell the story of this exam right here in the article and, uh, elsewhere in this issue someone's emphasizing the importance of interrelated elements for achieving physical fitness - regular exercise, proper diet, a positive mental attitude all of which I've covered in this article.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: And based on my own experience, I agree with them wholeheartedly. Then I did the Tracy Austin under a pen name because I couldn't use my own name on both articles and about three weeks ago there was a sports

Ben Kartman, cont. 39

show at McCormick Place and Tracy Austin was there and the young fellow Peter on the staff, who does all the marketing communications breakthrough and who got me involved in the first place, was there and he called me one Friday morning and he said, %Ben, I was at the Sports Show yesterday and I have a compliment for you.+And I said, %What\$ that?+He said, %I talked to Tracy Austin and she told me how much she likes your article.+

RA: Oh, how wonderful.

BK: Isn't that gratifying?

RA: She's a favorite of Johnny, uh, on CBS .

RA: John, urn .

BK: Johnny Morris.

RA: Morris. Yes.

BK: You can have this. I have extra copies.

RA: Oh, thank you, Ben. She's a favorite of mine, too.

BK: Well, to get back to the volunteer work and to the volunteer pool. Two of my volunteer activities and I don't do them anymore, but I did the two different programs for a total of about ten years was teaching blind and retarded children to swim....

RA: How marvelous.

Ben Kartman, cont. 40

BK: ... through the volunteer pool. North Shore Association for the Retarded called the volunteer pool and asked them anybody on their roles could give them a hand with a swim program at the Evanston Y for a kid from this school. So they called me and I said, %Yes.+And they said, %All you have to do is help get them through the locker room routine, showered, into the pool and on to the gym. They were supposed to go to the gym first for calisthenics and then the staff will take over.+That didn't seem like too much of a job and I said, %Fine.+And I did that for a couple of weeks and then a blind lad joined the group and he could not go through the exercise program running track and all that kind of thing....

RA: Um hum.

BK: ....and so they said, %Why don't you take him right into the pool and work with him?+

RA: On a one to one basis.

BK: So then two more blind boys along the way joined the group.

RA: Oh, yes. a

BK: They enrolled at the North Shore Association for the Retarded and they came so I ended up working with

Ben Kartman, cont. 41

three boys at one time · three blind boys · in the pool and I would take them one at a time in each session. Each session was for an hour and a half and after I did this for several years, Tim and Gary · the youngest ones · they were swimming quite quickly. The third one, Steve, I finally had to get off with. He just could not learn to lose his fear of the water. He was fine just as long as he had something to hang onto

WA: Yes, um hum

BK: ...my hands or something like that, but I couldn't get him to push off on his own.

WA: I know what it is to teach people who have a fear of swimming because I taught at the University of Illinois

BK: Oh, really.

RA: Phys. Ed. junior and....

RA: ....I had my sister · in · law · who is now my sister · in · law · was in class · she was a freshman and she had · well, maybe not in your day, but in mine you had to be able to swim in order to graduate.

BK: That's right.

RA: She wanted to get it out of the way while I was teaching, but one day she lost her confidence halfway

Ben Kartman, cont. 42

across the pool and went down and I had to extend the pole to her and she never did pass the test.

BK: Did she graduate?

RA: No. No.

BK: But I got a dispensation from the Pope. I couldn't learn either, but because of my....

RA: They required it when you....

BK: ....Yes, but I got a dispensation from (indistinct) (Laughter)

RA: I haven't heard the name %Tommy Arkie Clark+in years.

BK: He made it possible for me to graduate even though I couldn't swim....

RA: Oh, for goodness sakes.

BK: ....but anyway, then after I'd been working on this program a while they started a new program at National College of Education, using the National College pool, but it was still for the North Shore Association of the Retarded - severely retarded young children. There were one or two there who still weren't toilet trained and the volunteers or staff people working with them had to change them before taking them into the pool, but I got to work with a little seven year old boy, Tommy Sullivan, who was petrified of the water. He screamed and had no

Ben Kartman, cont. 43

speech, had no speech, but he screamed and yelled. I had to literally drag him into the water, holding him in my arms, and little by little I got him accustomed to the water. It took weeks before I could get him to put his feet down on the floor of the pool so I could walk him across the pool and then I put a flotation device on him - first a life jacket, then a life belt and so forth and little by little by little he was getting accustomed to the water - he learned to like the water....

RA: Um hum.

BK: ....and this was, we had three programs a year - spring, summer and fall - no winter program - and in the summer program which ended in August, they had a Parents' Visitation Day and I had met Tommy's mother a couple of times - a lovely woman who lived out here in Wilmette, Rosemary Sullivan, and she came to the pool on the visitors' day - on a Tuesday and this was a twice a week program and I told her, I said, "Tommy is making good progress and I said I think that at the rate he's going, by the end of the program in August he should be able to take a few strokes. Two days later I took off his life belt and he swam three lengths of the pool....

Ben Kartman, cont. 44

RA: Oh.

BK: (Laughter)....and he's been swimming ever since.

RA: How wonderful. It must give him a great....

BK: Everybody was yelling, "Tommy's swimming. Tommy's swimming." And from then on - then it took me a while to get him down in the deep water. He was so used to going in down the stairs. That's one place I couldn't get him down there so I decided one day, I know he can swim that well and that he might as well be swimming in the deep water and away from this crowd - all the rest of them - so I decided to have him swim alongside me from the shallow end to the deep end which he did and I turned him in that direction and we swam to the end and then we stayed down there swimming widths out of the way of everyone. After that I would take Tommy down to the deep end and the two of us would get in and the two of us would be the only ones at the deep end of the pool. His mother told me that sometime later, they went to Palm Springs for Christmas vacation and she said, "Tommy was in the pool constantly." She told me, "You opened up a whole new life for him."

RA: Oh.

Ben Kartman, cont. 45

BK: He loved it.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: Now, of course, I gave that up about three years ago.

RA: Oh, did you?

BK: But there was no further need - the young fellow that took over the program was so disorganized and I would waste so much time.

RA: Yes

BK: I'd get there and they weren't there. The bus wasn't there and I'd have to wait an hour for the bus to arrive. And another time he took off with a kid back to school and left me with one little boy that I was still dressing in the locker room downstairs and I got upstairs and they were gone and I had to call the school and wait for somebody to come back and pick him up and I had to sit in the office of the principal for a half hour or three quarters of an hour with the little boy. I couldn't leave him alone.

RA: This - in any volunteer job there's such a difference in whether you're working with a well organized person. I am having that same experience at Newberry Library.

BK: Um hum.



Ben Kartman, cont. 46

RA: For several years I've worked in the Local and Family history Department and the young librarian is so well organized. It's amazing and now I'm down in Archives and it's wild because there's no organization to anything. They take in acquisitions, you know and then acquisitions pile up and there's really only one paid person to catalogue them and do everything so now as a volunteer I'm making decisions that I don't feel qualified....

BK: No, the person running a program can make or break the program. Now toward the end - first of all the young woman, (indistinct), was excellent. She, Linda Baldes, was the one who got me involved in the first place and she was so good and so dependable but she decided to move back to Sioux City, Iowa, She got a job offer there. That was her home town and this young fellow was put in charge and the program went down hill. We started out originally - there must have been a dozen volunteers and then some of the staff people. One by one the volunteers all dropped out. And at the end, for the last couple of years I was the only volunteer left. And finally I just gave up.

RA: This is sad

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BK: I would get down there · I got down to the Evanston Y one day and I got there just as the bus was arriving and I would run into him and he'd say, "Ben, the pool is closed today."

RA: Oh, dear.

BK: And I'd ask him, "Why in the hell didn't you call me?" He'd say, "I just found out about it myself at 11:00 o'clock this morning." I said, "It's 1:30. The program was 1:30 to 3:00 o'clock. I made a special trip in the winter into Evanston to find out that the pool is closed, I turned around and went back home and then he left me with that kid..."

RA: There's a knack about handling volunteers. I've been a lifetime volunteer. I've never worked for pay · only briefly, but for a long time the professionals felt threatened by volunteers and they went out of style, but now institutions are so in need of volunteers that crying.

BK: Of course today, more than ever · volunteers are needed more than ever. So many of your agencies could not carry on their programs without volunteer help. They just don't have the money for them.

RA: They're trained people · maybe you could start a course

Ben Kartman, cont. 48

then in how to handle volunteers.

BK: But you'd be surprised the number of people right here in Wilmette who have the time - they're retired

- they're semi-retired. You cannot get them interested in going out to work.

RA: Bored to death they are.

BK: They're just not interested. One of them told me flatly, "I won't do anything I'm not getting paid for."

RA: You see that is today's philosophy - now on my street over on my corner - down that block of Laurel Avenue I was called by a PTA person and asked to put a PTA sign in my window that I was home and that a child could come to my house. They meet on my corner to get the bus. I'm not home enough because I volunteer two days a week at the Wilmette Library, one day a week at Newberry....

BK: Of course.

RA: ....and I volunteer Up at Winnetka Library in department so. that this....

BK: I'm in the same situation. I'm not home an awful lot.

Now three times a week at least I go into Chicago to swim.

RA: Yes.

Ben Kartnran, cont. 49

BK: I work out at a brand new YMCA, New City · Isham Y+not very far from Cabrini Green.

RA: How interesting!

BK: A seven million dollar %+that hasn't even been dedicated yet. It opened up a year ago. They're just celebrating their first anniversary.

RA: I saw Isham Center advertised and was interested because a relative of mine married Dr. Isham.

BK: Oh, really?

RA: Yes.

BK: Well, the Isham\$ you know · there was an old Isham Y. It was so run down · so dilapidated, it finally was raised and they put this beautiful seven million dollar facility with a child development center and a kindergarten and....

RA: I saw it from the L!

BK: ....and child care.

BK: Right. You can see it from the L. It's a multicolored brick building. They have a beautiful olympic size pool.

RA: Ohhhh.

BK: And it's · at 3:45 about two-thirds of the pool is turned over to the kids after school.

RA: I see.

Ben Kartnan, cont. 50

BK: But up until that time - when I get down there between 2:30 and 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, I usually have the pool all to myself.

RA: For heaven's sakes.

BK: Maybe two or three people in the pool and they have a wonderful whirlpool.

After my swim I spend about ten minutes in the whirlpool (laughter)....

RA: Oh, great.

BK: ...completely relaxed....

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: ....and it's wonderful so I'm not home a great deal and I'm at Central School on Monday and Wednesday mornings. I have other things to do and people will always call and say "I can never reach you." I think I'm home quite a bit (laughter) but they say, "I can never reach you."

A: Yes.

BK: And then I have Board meetings in the evening. Yes.

I still have Board meetings in the volunteer pool. I have Board meetings with the Historical Society and so they think of you as retired.

RA: That you have nothing to do.

BK: And that you lie around the house all day.

Ben Kartman, cont. 51

RA: And most of those people are the busiest people I know · the retired people.

BK: Okay, now to get back to this business of the swim pool and the retarded kids. This Tommy Sullivan and I were featured on Harry Porterfield's program, %Someone You Should Know.+

RA: Oh, CBS.

BK: Yes, he did. Several years ago · this goes back to 1976.

RA: Oh, yes.

BK: Today that program, %Someone You Should Know) is part of the Saturday night news at 6:00 o'clock and 10:00 o'clock.

RA: That's right.

BK: Harry Porterfield and a crew came out to National College and they filmed me in the pool with Tommy and they filmed me trying to get Tommy out of the pool and he was screaming and yelling · he wouldn't get out. I had told Harry when he interviewed me out of the pool that I used to have trouble getting him into the pool and now I have trouble getting him out of the pool. I was pushing him up the ladder and he was backing down and finally one of the staff people

Ben Kartman, cant. 52

grabbed his hands and pulled him up and he was still yelling and threw a tantrum on the deck of the pool and they got all that on the camera. (Laughter).

RA: That's marvelous. Well this - ub, I think people who feel either they haven't anything to contribute or they don't want to give it.,..

BK: Yes.

RA: ....really are so

BK: Well, you know, when the Volunteer Pool first started it was fashioned after the one in Winnetka.

RA: Yes.

BK: ....which was one of the first.

RA: Yes.

BK: And it was called - it started out being called the Wilmette Volunteer Talent Pool.

RA: Uh hum.

BK: And we dropped the talent because we called people to see if they'd be interviewed and they'd say %have no talent.+

Everyone has talent.

They equate talent with playing the violin or dancing and we'd say, %if you have time to give - if you have a couple of hours a week to give filing, making phone calls, checking our lists, our rolls to find a

Ben Kartman, cont. 53

suitable volunteer for a certain assignment - that's  
talent.

RA: Very interesting. I have answered requests from them, but I've never been  
really active on them.

BK: Well, as I say, I've been taking assignments. Every once in a while I'll get a  
call out of the blue.

RA: Yes.

BK: And some of them I have suggested like this tutoring at Central School.

RA: Yes.



