



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Transcript of interview with Rube Goldberg

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

Oral History Interview with Rube Goldberg

1970

New York City

Interviewer: Emily Nathan

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 10.1. Some formatting has been changed for web presentation.

Speakers are indicated by their initials.

Interview

EN: Emily Nathan

RG: Rube Goldberg

EN: Mr. Goldberg, I understand the exhibition of your work in Washington is going to go way back into your past. It'll really be an enormous retrospective.

RG: Yes. I'm very pleased. I think it's going to be one of the best things that's . . . gonna . . . to be sort of the climax of my career. I don't want to say that it's like looking at your own obituary [Laughs], you know, when, when they glorify somebody . . .

EN: Looking at your own life, I would say.

RG: Yeah, when they glorify somebody later in life, or they generally do it after he's gone, but I'm still here and I guess I'll be here after November the 24th when the show opens . . . [Laughs]

EN: [Laughs] I'm sure you will.

RG: . . . and, uh, I'm very pleased, because they, uh, they're doing it so thoroughly; they have so many, you know. They think of so many that things I've forgotten; they have drawings that I've forgotten. They have illustrations . . .

EN: How did they find the ones you had forgotten?

RG: Well, I don't know. They dug them up, they just, uh . . . Most of my work is at the University of California, in the Bancroft library, which is my alma mater, at Berkeley. I wasn't . . . they didn't have any riots in those days.

EN: No.

RG: And, uh, I've got about six thousand cartoons up there, also books and papers. So this young lady went out there and rummaged through the stuff and, see, I think she got a copy of the yearbook and college . . . she even got some of the things I did when I was in high school . . .

EN: Really?

RG: . . . and they have a drawing there that I made when I was twelve years old. I used to go to the . . . I didn't have any real art training, but when I was about twelve and thirteen, another boy and I went to a sign painter's house every Friday night and took lessons. He was a good painter; he was a sign painter because he had to make a living, and we used to go there and, oh, I enjoyed that tremendously and I . . . My son had one of the drawings that I made, quite a large drawing 'cause it was copied from a print . . .

EN: . . . which your mother must have saved.

RG: Yeah, and, uh, so George got it, and the girl took it, and it's going to be in the show.

EN: That's wonderful. And it will go into your cartoons, and newspaper cartoons and . . .

RG: Oh, yes, and I even got a, you know, I . . . I've forgotten so many things. I started doing sports cartoons . . .

EN: Yes.

RG: . . . in 1905, before you were born. And uh, that's the only opening there was, for a young cartoonist to get, the sports cartoons or editorial cartoons . . .

EN: Yeah.

RG: . . . so I did sports cartoons. And my brother sent me a book of clippings of sports cartoons that I made in 1908 and 1909, and they were, they were . . .

EN: How wonderful!

RG: . . . very interesting. I looked at 'em and I couldn't believe that I did 'em, because I did one every day. It was a half page in the paper.

EN: Ooph, three hundred sixty-five, well, not quite, three hundred and sixty a year, about.

RG: Yeah. I didn't write because in the corps I took mining engineering of all things and, you know, they, they graduate a mining engineer as a sort of an illiterate. They didn't have any cultural courses at all at that time; they do now. And, uh, when I went to a fight up in Reno, I was working on the San Francisco Bulletin, and I went up to a fight up in Reno where Jeffries gave away his title in 1905. And I was making cartoons and the fella who was doing the writing, a sports writer, got drunk.

EN: Hmm, that was your good fortune.

RG: See, the editor wired me. He says, "Send in stories." Well, I says, "I don't write, I . . ." He says, "Send 'em in, right away; anybody can write." [Laughter] So I've been writing off and on ever since.

EN: And when did you start making those wonderful, great contraptions, those . . .

RG: Well, now, I started that . . .

EN: . . . machinations?

RG: I started that, oh, I guess about, I don't know exactly, early 1912, 13, 14 . . .

EN: Did you know how they were going to turn out when you began one?

RG: No.

EN: Or did you just have an idea of something?

RG: No, well, I had the items [? idea?], a very definite idea. I've told this story very often. And when I, when I was taking a course in analytic mechanics, the professor had a big machine that each student had to experiment with and get an answer. And you had to find the weight of the earth with this contraption. There was a whole room full of retorts and Bunsen burners and beakers and motors. And, uh, I did that, and there was nothing more ridiculous to me than finding the weight of the earth because I didn't care how much the earth weighed.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: And later on, uh, I didn't have any idea that this would be . . . I thought this was very useless, you know. I had no idea that this was going to come in handy in my cartoon work later on. And, uh, I didn't know, I just hark back to this thing and say, this is funny, and that's the way people, people, uh, go to a great extreme to accomplish very little.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: So I added midgets and I added stale bullets. I added monkeys; I added incongruous elements.

EN: Yes.

RG: And this was all a kind of a progressive thing, you know, like a chain reaction.

EN: Yeah.

RG: One thing led to another and then you started with something and you finished with another, and, uh, these

inventions. I incorporated those in my regular cartoons and, for some reason or other, they were taken up. They stood out and I'm typed as an inventor; I'm a crazy inventor . . .

EN: [Laughs] And . . .

RG: . . . and my name is in the dictionary and I'm very pleased.

EN: As an inventor, hmm?

RG: Yes, and

EN: Mmhmm, can find [or "define"] you under many categories.

RG: Yeah. So I'm very pleased that this happened but it wasn't really planned.

EN: Yes.

RG: I, I didn't say this is going to make me famous or this is going to come out the way it did. It just happened that the public happened to, uh, appreciate the satirical quality of these crazy things.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: They're not so crazy because I think the world's just about that way now.

EN: That's right.

RG: They talk about peace all the time.

EN: This was one of the first things that you did, wasn't it? [Noises in the background suggest she is picking up an object.]

RG: Yeah, one of the earlier ones, yeah.

EN: The one relating to peace, uh, some thirty years ago?

RG: Oh, thirty years ago.

EN: More?

RG: No, this was

EN: More than that?

RG: Uh, what is this, 1970?

EN: Yeah.

RG: Well, I did this in about 1913.

EN: Well, I meant, I meant the one that was, uh, related to peace and the crazy world. I guess you've done more than one of those.

RG: Oh, yes.

EN: But I was thinking of one

RG: I did one, I did editorial cartoons later on.

EN: Yes.

RG: And then I had one called "Peace Today." It won the Pulitzer Prize. [Indecipherable]

EN: I think I think this was what I was . . . getting mixed . . .

RG: Well, I mean, today, I mean, they're fighting wars to make peace. Well, that's about the worst way you can go about it. [Chuckles]

EN: Yeah. Well, three of these contraptions and inventions will be in your show in actual

RG: Yes.

EN: Three-dimensional?

RG: Yes. Yeah, there's one, there's one, there's one that I worked on for about a year, last year; it was in the Hammer show. It was an alarm clock.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I won't describe it to you, it'll take too long.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: Uh, starts in with the garbage man, picking up the garbage at six o'clock in the morning. This doesn't move. And, as a rope goes through the window, it's attached to a mule's neck and it pulls the rope and the mule kicks over a pedestal with a statue of an Indian with a bow and arrow, and the bow punctures an ice bucket. And the ice falls on a set of false teeth which start to chatter, and that bites an elephant's tail and the elephant, I hope I remember this, the elephant lifts his trunk and starts a mechanism of a toy maestro leading a sad quartet. And the quartet sings and the girl breaks down crying into a plant and the plant grows and tickles a man's feet, who is sitting on a, a very complicated-looking apparatus, and starts rocking and, uh, that works a crane which pulls up the bed that the sleeper's in and he slides into a pair of slippers which are on wheels and they propel him into the bathroom. [Both laugh] But this doesn't really move. They have two there that move.

EN: Two that do move?

RG: Yeah, one is, uh, they're going to use it, you know, for people that come in to see the show, at the Smithsonian.

EN: Yes?

RG: They take their own picture. I think they're charged something for it. Want me to describe that?

EN: Yes, that sounds

RG: Well, you sit . . . they photographed me sitting on it the other day. You sit on a kind of a bellows chair-cushion. And it blows air into a sail, a little sailboat, and the sailboat moves along and, and hits a hand with a pointer in it, with a finger, the finger's out like a pointer. The finger punctures a balloon (they'll have to get a lot of balloons). And then there's a dictator standing right there, very funny-looking dictator, that they rigged up with medals, you know.

EN: Yes.

RG: And he thinks he's shot and he falls over on a bulb and the bulb takes the picture.

EN: [Laughter.]

RG: You're not sitting much. And it works!

EN: And is the picture then developed while you're waiting?

RG: And they give you the picture.

EN: Oh, this is real magic!

RG: Each person that's in there . . . Then they have another one. It's a little . . . it isn't so involved. I think it's just going to be a . . . You put a piece of paper under, under a sort of a stamp, and it comes down and stamps my autograph on the paper.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: You'll get my autograph.

EN: Oh, how wonderful!

RG: Yeah, and they do that; they did it beautifully.

EN: Yes, that's really marvelous.

RG: And they have a big plan and they know exactly where everything is going. And nothing is haphazard. They know where the sculpture is going, and the cartoons. And they're going to have a little theatre, and they dug up, from about 1916, when I was courting my wife, my present wife, been married about fifty-four years. And I was doing animated . . . I tried to do animated cartoons. I used to have this little studio, but I had to give it up, because it was too much with my writing and my cartoons.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: So they have several films that I made.

EN: They do? How did they find . . . ?

RG: I don't know where they ever found them.

EN: You don't know where they were? They were not . . . ?

RG: I don't know where they were.

EN: . . . part of what you gave your alma mater?

RG: Yeah. I . . . no, no. That wasn't . . . I don't think they were in that. And then I did a moving picture called "Soup to Nuts" and they got a film of that. I went out to Hollywood . . .

EN: Great.

RG: . . . and wrote a picture. I was there about three months. They found so many odd things.

EN: Well, that will make for a very, very fascinating show.

RG: Well, I hope so.

EN: Can't help but do that.

RG: Yeah. I hope some of the . . . You know, some of the early things look kind of crude to a person after all these years, you know.

EN: You feel as if, was this really me?

RG: Well, you know, when you start in, you look . . . if you look at some of the cartoons, some of the early cartoons of Blondie, or Bring Up Father, or Brian [?], they look pretty crude, but the essence is there, there's something there.

EN: Of course.

RG: There's something there that made people, uh, enjoy them.

EN: Well, I think when you bring together a life's work or someone with great talent, it's a fascinating thing for people to see. It really gives them a feeling of how this person . . .

RG: You're looking at a whole career, yeah.

EN: . . . created what he did.

RG: Yeah.

EN: Yes, it is a whole career.

RG: Yeah, and uh, I've done, you know, different things. It is . . . I don't think it's going to be very monotonous.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: I think there's a great, quite a variety of things there that will be interesting and it'll be sort of gay, you know, when I had my sculptures show (I've had three of them). I had one at Brentanos and two at the Hammer, it was different than the average art show. People were in there laughing, and they were happy.

EN: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

RG: Uh, they generally are pretty miserable.

EN: It's like a real moment today.

RG: Yeah, it's like a mausoleum when you go to any of these Madison Avenue . . .

EN: Mmhmm, that's right.

RG: You're almost afraid to breathe.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: There's a snooty little girl there that, you know, says, "Whaddya want, you wanna buy something?" [Laughs]
But they all, they all had a good time.

EN: They enjoyed it.

RG: It was human and, uh, they're not as, they're not grotesque. They're not like cartoons.

EN: Mmhmm. But they are somewhat satirical in a kindly way, aren't they?

RG: Yes. For instance, I'm making one now of a grandfather's little boy with a shopping cart.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: You can see them over there.

EN: Yes.

RG: I'm, I'm having a man make a little shopping cart.

EN: Yes.

RG: Well, that's human . . .

EN: Yeah.

RG: . . . and there's something a little extra.

EN: You started sculpture when you were eighty years old, didn't you?

RG: Yeah, I did.

EN: A whole new career?

RG: I did, I did one or two things before that. I did a, I did a grotesque-looking trophy that's given every year to the outstanding cartoonist of the year. And it's called Reuben, which is named after me.

EN: Oh, I know the Reuben.

RG: There it is, standing over there.

EN: Mmm.

RG: And I . . . took me twenty-two years to win it myself. [Laughs]

EN: [Laughs]

RG: And they're gonna have that in the show.

EN: Oh. The . . .

RG: But otherwise I, I never did any sculpture at all. I didn't know how to go about it. I just bought some clay, and some sticks, tools and all and I didn't know you had to use an armature, you know. You use an armature; it's a wire frame and you build the clay around that. Well, I made one without an armature and it was pretty good, but it was about half the size the next day. It shrunk.

EN: Oh, didn't hold its shape?

RG: But I discovered these things . . .

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: It was just the mechanics and, uh, without being, you know, conceited, there wasn't much for me to learn because it was a continuation . . .

EN: Yes?

RG: . . . of what I had been doing.

EN: Yes.

RG: And, uh, had to put a little more anatomy in it; that'll be a little more realism, but, uh, I found it all right and it seemed to work out very well.

EN: And the sculpture itself is, uh, your imaginary characters and also real people, aren't . . . there's quite a . . .

RG: Yes, there's one of John Steinbeck I got as a commission.

EN: Mmm.

RG: His wife has one. I always make two and he posed for that.

EN: Yes.

RG: And then I made one of Johnson, made one of Bobby Kennedy and . . . I've made two well-known heads.

EN: Yes.

RG: But I, I enjoy action pictures.

EN: Yes, this little man on the shelf who is dancing . . .

RG: Yeah?

EN: . . . or skating?

RG: Yeah. Well, he's a tightrope walker.

EN: Oh, I see, yes.

RG: That one there . . .

EN: Mmm.

RG: You know, at some . . . I don't . . . Well, you see, they'll have to be cast in bronze, and it's quite an expensive operation. I make them in clay . . .

EN: Yes?

RG: . . . and sometimes, if I'm not quite satisfied or not, I don't have a cast.

EN: I see you have de Gaulle up there, don't you?

RG: Yes, de Gaulle, yeah. That's gonna be in the show.

EN: Mmm.

RG: But that's only in plaster. I had another head which was made in bronze. But they want that. And I did one of Khrushchev, and uh, Castro.

EN: Did you actually meet them?

RG: Khrushchev, Castro, Mussolini, and Hitler.

EN: Oh, you did . . . ?

RG: All in one base and I call it "The Four Winds."

EN: [Laughs]

RG: [Laughs] I don't know whether they'll have that in the . . . That, that's, that'll have to be on loan.

EN: Mmhmm, mmhmm. Have, have your, uh, sculpture shows been in other cities?

RG: Well, yes, yes.

EN: In New York?

RG: In several, they had some of them out in California.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I think they're some out there now.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: But, uh, New York is my base of operation.

EN: Ah, "Foolish Questions" was your first popular cartoon.

RG: Yeah.

EN: That . . .

RG: I came to New York and I got a job on The Evening Mail, which doesn't exist anymore.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: In fact, I worked on The Mail, and The Sun, and The Journal, which are all out of business. I didn't put them out of business.

EN: I worked on The Sun too.

RG: Oh, you did?

EN: It was my first job.

RG: Was, was Ed Friendly there? Was he the . . .

EN: Yes.

RG: . . . business manager?

EN: Yes.

RG: He just died.

EN: Yes, I saw that.

RG: He was a very good friend of mine.

EN: Yeah.

RG: Frank O'Brian was the . . . when I went to work there, I hadn't done, I had been doing, uh, you know, the comic stuff all those years and, and they offered me a chance to do editorial cartoons so I took it.

EN: Mmm.

RG: And there was a fellow named Frank O'Brian . . .

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: Was he the editor there?

EN: Eh, no.

RG: Pete Spieve? [Somewhat indecipherable]

EN: Ed Barnett [Bartnett?] was the city editor.

RG: Well, Frank O'Brian was the managing editor.

EN: Mmm.

RG: And I went to him and I was scared to death. I says, "What is your policy?" He says, "We're against, uh, rape, arson, and murder."

EN: [Laughs]

RG: And I says, "And what e- yo-?" And he says, "That's all."

EN: [Laughs]

RG: [Laughs] So I said . . .

EN: Like . . .

RG: . . . "okay" and we agreed very well.

EN: . . . like Coolidge against sin. [Laughs]

RG: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs] That's pretty, pretty clean, uh, policy.

EN: You know, some of the titles of your, uh, scripts are almost Shakespearean in their familiarity. I remember this from my childhood. My mother used to say it all the time: "Mike and Ike, they look alike."

RG: Yeah.

EN: And this was, really, just like Shakespeare, you know. Where did this come from . . .

RG: Yeah.

EN: . . . and it's re-, so very [indecipherable]

RG: Well, they were two little fellows and they looked alike. I, I didn't, I just used them in different ways, but never, I never could work out, uh, a scheme where they'd get mixed up as twins.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: . . . 'cause it's a little confusing.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: And "Foolish Questions," I did that. I had a . . . they put me on a three-months trial when I came to New York, at fifty dollars a week, on The Mail. And at the end of three months I hit on "Foolish Questions." You know, "Are you back in town?" you know.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: "No, I'm up in the balloon shoeing a horse." [Undecipherable]

EN: [Laughs]

RG: Uh, it just, you know . . . People ask, "Are you getting a shave?" "No, I'm having the snow scratched off my face."

EN: [Laughs]

RG: And, uh, that made a big hit and people sent in foolish questions and they telephoned, so The Mail thought they had something that was pretty good.

EN: [Laughs] Some of these questions I think are asked of people coming from disasters, quickly, on television or radio. Just this kind of thing. If they . . .

RG: Yeah.

EN: . . . fell in the water, was it wet?

RG: Yeah, are you hurt?

EN: How do you feel?

RG: Are you hurt? You know, just fell off a building and all, you know. [Laughs]

EN: Yes, yeah.

RG: It's a natural thing and, uh, there was a fellow by the name of Franklin P. Adams; I don't know if you ever knew . . .

EN: Oh, FPA? Of course.

RG: Yeah, FPA. Well, he had an office next to me. And he was the one that suggested "Foolish Questions." And, uh, he was a little remorseful because, when I came there, they had a . . . quite a respect for his opinion, and he told 'em not to hire me. He didn't like my work.

EN: He did? [Laughs]

RG: Yeah [Laughs]. So later on we became very good friends.

EN: [Laughs] He was proved wrong.

RG: Yeah. When I did sports cartoons, I used to uh, go to fights. You, you know, this is a propos what's happening today. I was full of ambition. And I didn't make it my time, the time that I gave, what kids today give looking at the clock. You know. When I look at some of this early work, uh, it scares me because I used to go to a fight, come back at eleven o'clock, make a cartoon, write a story, and then come back the next day and go to work.

EN: And enjoyed every minute of it.

RG: Yeah.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: And when fights were illegal, I'd go to Philadelphia. And I'd come back on what they called the mil train; it got in a two o'clock. And I'd go back to The Mail building, and I had to walk up eleven flights of steps. And did the cartoon. And I did all that because . . . not because I was . . .

EN: No.

RG: . . . uh, you know, I was a martyr or anything, because I . . .

EN: Because you enjoyed it.

RG: . . . I wanted to do it, I . . .

EN: Yeah.

RG: I wanted to make good.

EN: Yeah. Well, I, I've often thought this is a great kind of, of thrill and enjoyment, that many young people don't realize. Uh, because they feel that it must be fit within a given time and, and this real enthusiasm for what they're doing.

RG: No, and then there aren't many kids that know what they want to do. You know.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I knew what I wanted to do, and I knew that I, I had to make good and I, because I had great doubts about whether I would . . . get to where I wanted to. But, uh, I was full of ambition; I did all this work and I was very lucky it came out. I, I think you have to be very lucky. Luck . . . I'm a great believer . . .

EN: Yes?

RG: . . . in luck, not a roulette wheel luck . . .

EN: Yes.

RG: . . . but luck in, in connection with, uh, your effort.

EN: It's very important, certainly.

RG: Yeah, it's a very, it's a very fortunate thing to have the right talent to, to uh, give at the right time. I mean . . .

EN: Timing is also . . .

RG: The public has to be receptive. Uh, I, I'd be afraid to start doing today what I did . . .

EN: When?

RG: . . . sixty years ago.

EN: Well, if perhaps, if you had known what you know today, you would . . .

RG: Well, maybe I wouldn't.

EN: . . . have been afraid sixty years ago, you know. [Laughs]

RG: Well, maybe I wouldn't have the same approach. But, uh, the public has to be ready to accept what, what you, uh, want to contribute.

EN: Well, you obviously enjoyed your eighty-seven years, which I can hardly believe they are, eighty-seven . . .

RG: Yeah, well . . .

EN: . . . years, I sit and look at you . . .

RG: Uh, I just had an operation last March which was rather serious and I'm recuperating now. I'm on a very bland diet. But, uh, I'm lucky, I was just lucky, that's all. Most of my contemporaries are, uh, gone. I . . .

EN: Well, you, you were lucky.

RG: . . . I had a . . .

EN: But you also gave a great deal to it.

RG: Yeah, yeah. Well, I . . .

EN: And had a great talent and, as you say, you knew what you wanted.

RG: I knew what I wanted to do and I didn't ask for anything. I didn't ask for anything, for nothing. And I, uh, I wonder how anybody can think his personality changes with his success. I've had quite a bit of success but I feel that I'm just the same person as I always was.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I'm still ambitious which is, sounds kind of silly for a guy eighty-seven years old . . .

EN: I don't think it sounds silly at all.

RG: . . . but, uh, I think, I wrote a little thing, and I said that, they have a big to-do when you're born. Father passes out cigars, and that is a big event. And there's also a big event when you die. Friends, everybody goes, goes to the funeral; they stand around and about you. But those two events are not as important as the thing in between.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: [Laughs] The thing in between there called life, and if you, if you use that, if you use that constructively and, uh, and, for all that it's worth, then, then I think you've got a good life. I, I don't think anybody's continually happy, uh, except idiots, you know. You know, you have to have little moments of depression. But I, uh, I consider myself very lucky.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I, I was never hungry. I came to New York and I had two hundred dollars, from San Francisco, and a diamond ring which my father gave me. He said "You can hock this if, in case you ever get into trouble or . . ."

EN: Your security.

RG: Yeah, and I gave it to my wife for an engagement ring.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: [Laughs] So . . .

EN: You didn't have to use it?

RG: . . . I'm very thankful, I am. And uh, I'm glad that I still have my hands and my eyes to work with.

EN: Well, you obviously have not only those but a great insight when you look . . .

RG: Well.

EN: . . . at your sculpture that you . . .

RG: Yeah, you know, and of course I don't want to discuss what's, what, uh, you know, this generation gap and all these different words that they use, "charisma," and, you know. There's a lot of "Syndrome," a lotta new words invented . . .

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: But they forget the, the old, some of the old words are "truth, " and "ambition," and, and uh, "competition," "Freedom." I don't know, there's a lotta silly old words we used to have which I think are still authentic.

EN: [Laughs] Not so silly.

RG: No. Uh, but, uh, what's happening today. I, uh, when you get older, you should get more mellow. Instead of being cranky, you know, they have a, a kind of an image of older people, they're cranky, and senile . . .

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: . . . selfish and all that. Well, I think you should get mellow and I can see the other side; I can see the sides of both arguments.

EN: Yes.

RG: Naturally, I'm conservative; I'm a Republican. I always was. My father was . . . that doesn't mean anything. But, I'm a, you know, I, I always finish up saying, well, my, my thinking is, it isn't bad.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: No matter what these young fellas say.

EN: Yes, Well, that's, that's a good feeling to have.

RG: Yeah, yeah. I, I don't think I'm always right. But I don't think young people are always right, either.

EN: No, 'course not. Nobody is.

RG: And young people don't know where they're going. I've been. [Laughs]

EN: [Laughs]

RG: So, so, that's, uh, I got that edge, anyway. And I've met all kinds of people, oh, God, presidents and everybody else, and, I'm not too impressed with celebrity, with names now.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I mean, I, I wouldn't go out of my way to, to, uh, meet a name. I, I go out of my, uh, way to meet somebody I admire.

EN: Yes.

RG: But, uh, in, in Washington, names come up a lot, which is all right with me.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: I hope the President comes to the show.

EN: Oh, I, I, he has to!

RG: I think so.

EN: [Laughs] Well, it will be there for about six months.

RG: It says from four to six months, yeah.

EN: Well, that will give everyone an opportunity to spend . . .

RG: Yeah.

EN: . . . some time . . .

RG: We'll, we'll be there for the opening; they're going to have a dinner and a . . .

EN: It sounds as if, uh . . .

RG: . . . very formal opening.

EN: . . . it would take a, at least a half, a day to absorb and then . . .

RG: Oh, yes, I

EN: . . . come back and look again when you're . . .

RG: Yeah.

EN: . . . more familiar.

RG: Yeah. And as, uh, as I, as I said, it's a . . . it's a very . . . it's the highlight of my life. I don't know wh . . . I don't know which is a, you know a David Frost always says "What is the most exciting that ever happened to you?" Well, I don't know.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: I went to jail once.

EN: You did? [Laughs]

RG: Yeah, when I came here they had a sports writer on The Mail, and he and I went up to cover a fight and, in those days, uh, you know, a game wasn't too straight. There was a little finagling and, and this sports writer used to make, uh, they called it moonlighting, used to make extra money as a referee. And he was the referee of this fight. Up in Harlem, it was. So I was sitting there at ringside and he was up in the ring, and he came over to me. He says, "We have no stop watch; we have no time keeper." He says, uh, and he knew I had a stop watch 'cause it was given to me by some sports promoters in San Francisco when I left. So he says, "Will you keep time?" I says, "Sure, I'll keep time." I thought I, I was quite a guy.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: You know, I had only come to New York; I had only been here a few months and, uh, I looked at the watch and . . . a minute, on the minute I pulled the bell, and about after oh, after three quarters of the minute a lotta cops came up in the ring, you know. It was illegal, you know, they used to make these, uh, these raids, you know . . .

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: . . . token raids, they were all in on it. And a fella put his hand on my shoulder. He says, "C'm on . . . come to the police station." I says, "Well, why?" He says, "You're the timekeeper, you're one of the officials."

EN: [Laughs] Oh, my heavens!

RG: [Laughs] So I went there and, and, and they uh, I saw this fella Bagley, who was this referee, and two fighters, and they went over to the sergeant's desk and talked, and they went out and they left me there.

EN: [Laughs] How unkind!

RG: [Undecipherable] You know, I was new at it and they asked me if I could put up a five hundred dollar bond.

EN: Whoof!

RG: And I says, "I haven't got five hundred dollars!" And there was an old fighter named Gus Ropuon [sp?]. I don't know, this isn't too important, and he put up his house. He had a house there and he put it on my bond.

EN: Well, that was nice of him.

RG: And the next day I asked this fella, I says, "Why, why did you, why go out and leave me?," you know. He says, "I thought you . . . I thought it was a joke; I thought you were getting a story!" [Laughs]

EN: [Laughs] Oh dear!

RG: So that, that is my . . .

EN: That was quite an experience.

RG: . . . experience in jail.

EN: [Laughs] A short one . . .

RG: Yeah.

EN: . . . fortunately.

RG: But, uh, I studied, as I said before, I studied engineering because my father thought that all cartoonists were, you know, good-for-nothing, Bohemians, and couldn't make a living drawing pictures.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: So he was paying for it and I was, and he and I got along very well and so I, I got a diploma. Here it is right here.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: 1904. And I worked at it six months . . . when I was . . .

EN: You knew it was not for you.

RG: Naw. And during my college, at the end of the junior year I worked in a mine. Then I, then I knew I was . . .

EN: As a miner?

RG: Yeah, well, for six weeks I went down two thousand feet . . .

EN: Oooo!

RG: . . . in a gold mine, shoveling, my hands were like ribbons and uh . . .

EN: That was not for you either.

RG: I said this is not for me. But that was part of the, part of the course.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: I didn't want to say I was afraid, which I was; I was scared to death.

EN: [Laughs]

RG: But I stuck it out.

EN: Well, I shall certainly look forward to the exhibition at the Smithsonian . . .

RG: Yeah, well, that's uh . . .

EN: . . . at the Museum of . . .

RG: I am too.

EN: . . . History and Technology.

RG: Yeah.

EN: Isn't it?

RG: Yep. I am, too. The, ah, Smithsonian Institution, that is.

EN: That's right.

RG: People call it the Institute.

EN: Yes. Institution is . . .

RG: Institution.

EN: . . . what it is.

RG: And Dr. Boorstin is the head of, I don't know if he's the head of the whole thing or the head of . . .

EN: He's Director of the Museum of History and Technology.

RG: Yeah, History and Technology.

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: And he is the one, I says, "How'd ya happen to dream this up? How'd ya happen to . . .?" "Well, we wanted to," he says. "This is my first big, uh, effort," and he says, I, I want to put everything I can into it."

EN: Mmhmm.

RG: He's only been there a few months, you know.

EN: Yes.

RG: Six to eight months.

EN: Well, I shall certainly look forward to it and I thank you very, very much.

RG: Well, I am too, and, uh, I'm pretty confident now that it's coming off. I'm not a bit afraid . . . [Laughs]

EN: [Laughs]

RG: . . . but anything can happen.

EN: [Laughs]

[BREAK IN TAPE]

EN: Thank you, Rube Goldberg. Dan, I'm putting the introduction on now, if you want to pick it up. [I'm talking with Rube Goldberg at his studio in New York. An exhibition of his long and varied career will be shown in Washington at the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology. The first Rube Goldberg cartoon appeared in 1905. And, while he still turns out an occasional hilarious carton, he devotes most of his time to his sculpture.]