THELMA D. TOOLE COLLECTION

(Mss 173)

Inventory

Earl K. Long Library
University of New Orleans

August 1985

Contents

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Summary

Size: 9 items (videotapes)

Geographic locations: New Orleans, La.

Inclusive dates: 1982

Summary: Videotaped interviews of Thelma Ducoing Toole (died August 17, 1984) reminiscing about her son, John Kennedy Toole (1937 - 1969), author of A Confederacy of Dunces (Baton Rouge, 1980). W. Kenneth Holditch (Professor of English) conducted the interviews, and videotape recordings of same were edited by Michael J. Adler (Television Production Manager, Audio-Visual Center), Barbara B.
Biographical Note

According to Literature Resource Center, John Kennedy Toole was born in 1937 in New Orleans, La., and committed suicide, March 26, 1969, in Biloxi, Miss. The only child of John (a car salesman) and Thelma (a teacher; maiden name, Ducoing) Toole, he received a bachelor's degree from Tulane University in 1958 and a Master of Arts from Columbia University in 1959. Toole also pursued graduate studies at Tulane University in the mid-1960s. He taught at colleges in New York and Louisiana, including the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, and St. Mary's Dominican College, New Orleans, La., 1959-1968. Toole also served in the U.S. Army, 1962-63.

While stationed with the Army in Puerto Rico, Toole wrote a novel, A Confederacy of Dunces. Simon & Schuster rejected it in 1966, and it remained unpublished when Toole committed suicide in 1969. During the next seven years, his mother submitted the novel to eight more publishers, all of whom rejected it. In 1976 she thrust the manuscript upon novelist Walker Percy, who agreed, reluctantly, to read it. He perused the opening pages of the smudged carbon copy, "first with the sinking feeling that it was not bad enough to quit, then with a prickle of interest, then a growing excitement, and finally an incredulity: surely it was not possible it was so good."

Percy recommended A Confederacy of Dunces to Louisiana State University Press, a scholarly publisher that had accepted only a few novels in the past. The book was published in the spring of 1980, and by summer Toole was, posthumously, a successful author, critically and commercially. Confederacy went through five printings, a total of 45,000 hardcover copies—an amazing number for an academic press. The novel was selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club, Grove Press bought the paperback rights,
and Twentieth Century-Fox bought the movie rights. The hardcover edition made local best-seller lists in several cities, and the Grove edition was number one on the *New York Times* trade paperback best-seller list for over a month. To cap the book's success, it received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1981. Subsequently Toole’s earlier novel, *The Neon Bible*, was published (Grove Press, 1989), but it never achieved *Confederacy*’s success.


**Container List**

Two, sixty minute, master videos in color, comprising parts 1 and 2 of the production, *I Walk in the World for My Son: An Interview With Thelma Ducoing Toole.*

Six, twenty minute, unedited videotapes in color, and one, thirty minute, unedited videotape in color recorded in the production of aforecited master videotapes.

Three sheets of handwritten questions and notes for three of the unedited videotapes.

Master Videotapes of *I Walk in the World for My Son: An Interview With Thelma Ducoing Toole.*

| 173-1 | Part 1 (one 60 minute videotape). |
| 173-2 | Part 2 (one 60 minute videotape). |

| 173-3– | 173-9 | Unedited videotapes of Thelma Ducoing Toole (six 20-minute videotapes; one 30-minute videotape). |

| 173-10 | Handwritten questions and notes in unknown hand (3 sheets, n.d.). |
Index Terms

Confederacy of Dunces, A (book)
Holditch, W. Kenneth
I Walk in the World for My Son (videorecording)
Louisiana State University Press
Percy, Walker
Toole, John Kennedy
Toole, Thelma Ducoing