**Interview with Peter Simmons**

**We Won’t Go! (And We Don’t Want You To Go, Either)**

**Oral History Project**

**March 21, 2019**

This project is sponsored by the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum with funding provided by a Minnesota Historical,

Cultural and Heritage Grant.

© 2019 Department of Archives and Special Collections, University of Minnesota Libraries

**We Won’t Go! (And We Don’t Want You To Go, Either)**

**Oral History Project**

**Interview with Peter Simmons,**

**Barbara W. Sommer, Interviewer**

**March 21, 2019**

Name of interviewee: Peter Simmons - PS

Names of interviewer: Barbara W. Sommer - BWS

Recording 1

00:00:00 BWS: Today we’re doing an interview with Peter Simmons, one of the Minnesota 8 draft

raiders and organizer and interviewer of the We Won’t Go! (And We Don’t Want You To Go, Either) Oral History Project. This is a project supported by the Minnesota Historical Society Legacy Grant, done in partnership with the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum. It is March 21, 2019; we’re recording the interview at Washburn Library [Washburn Library, 5244 Lyndale Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN] Minneapolis, in the meeting room and my name is Barbara Sommer. I’m the interviewer.

So, Peter, what I’d like to start with is if you’d talk to us just briefly about your connection to the Minnesota 8 and to the history that we’re going to be talking about.

PS: All right. Well, on—what led up to all this is more complex, but briefly, on the evening/night of July 10, and running into July 11 of 1970, two other people and I were attempting to burglarize the draft board office for Winona County in Winona, Minnesota. We didn’t succeed. We were caught in the act, arrested, and thwarted in trying to do that so we didn’t succeed at all except succeeded in getting into the office and getting arrested later.

And there were, at that same time, several other groups that were trying to do the same sort of thing in other Minnesota towns that were not in the Twin Cities area. There were a total of five raids that were organized for that night. Three of them, including the one that I was involved in, everyone was caught and arrested. One of the raids was called off because it seemed like there were surveillance or alarm systems or risks that hadn’t been known beforehand, and the fifth one was in Wabasha, Minnesota, and that was successful. That board was entered and the 1A files were taken and disposed of, I was told later, off the bridge into the Mississippi River at Wabasha.

So again, that was all on the night of July tenth into the eleventh, 1970.

BWS: And that’s what started—that’s the key action that got—the first action that got you involved in all of this, is that correct?

PS: Well, it’s—

BWS: Or critical action?

PS: I was involved before but that’s what changed everything. And, although we didn’t call ourselves that, the local newspapers started to call us the Minnesota 8 pretty quickly because there were a total of eight of us who were arrested. And other people who had been in actions like this in other parts of the country usually it became customary to have them identified by the place they were and how many of them were arrested or charged. So that’s how we became the Minnesota 8.

BWS: So take us back. How did this start for you; this interest or the involvement that led to this action? What were some of the contributing factors, even going back before college, where you were before university that may have been a factor in all of this?

PS: Well, I thought about that a lot over the years and there’s—there were—so it was a long chain of events starting from my adolescence actually. A lot of people my age and older are acquainted with the expression from the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s, of people who grew up in far left families—the expression often was “red diaper babies,” people whose, children whose parents were in the Communist Party or Socialist Party and got brought up that way. Well, I wasn’t a red diaper baby, but I was sort of a pink diaper baby, I think, influenced a lot by my mother.

BWS: Her name is?

PS: My late mother, Mary Simmons. She was born in 1924, in Minneapolis and I was born in 1950 to her and my father, Peter, Peter Senior.; I’m Junior. Anyway, some of the—one of the first things that I remember about this continuum is standing in line waiting with her to vote in 1956 for Adlai Stevenson [Adlai Ewing Stevenson II (1900-1965)]. But she told me later

00:05:00 that the first time that she was ever able to vote in a national election, which would have been

 1948, she voted for Norman Thomas [Norman Mattoon Thomas (1884-1968)] who was the

 Socialist candidate and sort of went on from there.

I should add for sort of context that I grew up in far North Minneapolis and in a blue collar neighborhood and to a blue collar family and family background and was also a union family. I was; I’d been the third generation union member in my family, different unions, different trades, and my younger son is fourth generation. He’s a union carpenter.

Anyway, that had a good deal of bearing on some of the things that came later. But even before that, in about 1954 or ’55, or ’64 or ’65, when I was fourteen or fifteen years old, maybe sixteen years old, anyway, I—however this came about—I started reading Gandhi [Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)] and not just his autobiography, but I got my hands on collected newspaper writings of his when he was in India and before that when he was living in South Africa, where he really started out. He was an attorney there. So there were collections of these writings of his in the university library and my mother took me there to sort of wander around the library and so I was—an early contact with the university for me. So that had a big effect on me.

BWS: The writings that focused on peace or—?

PS: Well, nonviolent resistance.

BWS: Nonviolent resistance, okay.

PS: Yeah, and that’s—and how that worked and how successful it could be, that it wasn’t just the idea—it wasn’t passive resistance, which is what a lot of people like to label that, but it was very active but it didn’t involve force of arms. It involved lots of organizing and having a public presence and things like that, and communicating with other people. So that was sort of an underlying notion for me.

And at the same time, I mean, think 1964 to ’65, the civil rights movement was in full swing in this country and had been for a while and I had become really aware of that as an adolescent, partly because it got talked about at home and it was in the news everywhere all the time. And the—and maybe that’s why I was drawn to see what I could learn about Gandhi, because he was certainly referred to and known in the context of the civil rights movement. So whichever was the first of those things, they were both live notions or presences in my mind from my early middle teens on.

I had other exposures, too, and it was sort of one thing after another. One of the things that was most influential for me—it didn’t happen very often—but I mentioned my mother—well, my mother was a union teacher in the Roseville [Roseville, MN] school district and she was active in her union. And one of the things that she did—and I don’t know how this connection came about—but there was an organization in Louisville, Kentucky, called Southern Conference Educational Fund [Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) 1946-?] and they published a newspaper called the *Southern Patriot* [*Southern Patriot*, 1942-1976, New Orleans, LA; Louisville, KY; and Atlanta, GA.]

The primary person involved with that newspaper was a man named Carl Braden, B-r-a-d-e-n [Carl James Braden (d.1975)]; he was not very well-known at the time or later but of interest—and I’ll tell more about him—but he was married to Anne Braden, A-n-n-e Braden [Anne Gamrell McCarthy Braden (1924-2006)], who was a principal person in the Highlander School [previously known as the Highlander Folk School, now The Highlander Research and Education Center, New Market, TN, 1932-present] in Tennessee at that same time and beforehand.

Highlander School was well-known among leftists; it was, among other things, probably the best-known thing, it was the place where Rosa Parks [Rosa Louise McCauley Parks (1913-

00:10:00 2005)] was schooled in methods of resistance and political activity. But back to this with

Carl—so I never met Anne until some years later, but Carl came to Minneapolis a few times to visit his son, who was in school at Macalester College [Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN]. Well, however this connection happened between his organization and my mother and her union, at least two times that I remember clearly, he came to our house and talked to other teachers, union members and maybe others, too—did sort of a house meeting presentation about what his organization was doing as an overt fundraiser. They were really active union supporters and promoters at a time when millworkers in the middle and deep south were having lots of—well, there was a lot of organizing going on there and they were getting a lot of resistance. And also mine workers and also, he and Anne and Highlander were involved in desegregation efforts.

Interestingly, before I met him, Carl had been—Carl and Anne had helped an African-American family buy a house in a white area in Louisville and Carl, after all this was discovered, Carl was actually charged in Kentucky with sedition and spent some time in jail after that and, a few months anyway. So he was deep in things like this for a long time before I ever met him. But he talked about union organizing and union activity and how successful it could be and was being in parts of the country that we up here in Minnesota didn’t know or hear much about.

So he came and did that a couple times and it was very—I was really impressed with his portrayal of what this kind of political activity could be like and how successful it could be and it was, I mean, it was riveting to me as a youngster.

BWS: How old were you at this point?

PS: I was about fifteen or sixteen, something like that. To hear him talk about these things which were often seemed like very successful efforts and dynamic and exciting and engaging, I thought. I mean, as a youngster still in high school, I though this sounds great and it was inspiring. Anyway, so there is someone—and later on, after—again, before I knew him, Carl was actually cited for contempt for—of the House Committee on Un-American Activities [House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)] and spent a year in jail after doing that, too. This was in ’61 or ’62. So he was a real veteran activist and not afraid to stand up to people. So this was a presence that had an effect on me.

But wait, there’s more. In 1967 I was active in my high school trying to oppose the war, writing— the Vietnam War, which was heating up then—

BWS: Which high school?

BWS: I went to Brooklyn Center High School [Brooklyn Center High School, 6500 Humboldt Avenue North, Brooklyn Center, MN] in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. Graduated in 1967, but in ’66 and ’67, I wrote a couple of articles or editorials for the school paper. And also, not really related to that, I got in trouble for violating the dress code in the school. I was sent home from school; I think it was three days in a row, because I was wearing blue jeans and that was not allowed in this blue collar working class suburb. So that was my first sort of quasi civil disobedience was when I was sixteen years old.

Anyway, to jump ahead a little bit, I started at the university then in the fall of 1967.

BWS: Coming in as someone who was aware of the Vietnam and the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War?

PS: Yes, yes, very much.

BWS: Go ahead; you said fall of 1967?

PS: Right.

BWS: Why did—you chose the university for?

PS: Well, I’m not sure that I felt like I necessarily had much choice but it was the place and it was a big place, unlike my high school, which was a small place. My graduating class was only about a hundred. And so I was happy to go to the university and found it a very liberating

00:15:00 sort of experience because there were lots of other people there like me and that wasn’t true in

my high school. I was—there weren’t other people there who expressed ideas like mine or got in trouble for the things that I was vocal about.

Another thing, backing up a little bit, having to do with influences, there were always things in print around my house when I was growing up that were tilted in this sort of direction. I thought it was normal to have I.F. Stone’s [I. F. Stone (Isidor Feinstein Stone, (1907-1989)] newsletter [*I. F. Stone's Weekly* (1953–1971)] come every couple weeks or however often that was published. And we got *The Nation* magazine [*The Nation*, 1865-present] and talked about current events and—so things like this were around me all the time, just as casual reading matter and it influenced me one way or another steadily.

So I got to university and found that there were other people who knew who I.F. Stone was and were interested in, or feeling motivated about the civil rights movement, and so that was a great experience for me.

BWS: So you sought that out at the university or you looked for it?

PS: Well, it was pretty easy because there was ferment, I mean, things were really kicking up there and that happened more and more. In the spring of 19—late winter in early 1968, or the spring of 1968, I got involved with a group of people who, among other things, made a practice of going to Milwaukee [Milwaukee, WI] to take part in the open housing demonstrations that were happening then, and had been happening for some time. We formed an official student organization called Students for Integration, pretty mild sounding these days, but that was my first on-campus activity and we leafletted and picketed a little bit and took part in things. So that was my first exposure to campus activities that were outside of classwork.

Additionally, in the summer of 1968, when school was out for me, I didn’t go to summer session that year, I worked for that—during that summer—for United Farmworkers Grape Boycott, which was happening around the country and they had an office here and I worked for the—so that was my first union job. I worked for the union for five dollars a week. And I ran errands and distributed leaflets and things like that and got exposed to more union activity than what I’d gotten exposed to at home. So there’s this long continuity of union education exposure activity that sort of gave me an orientation to how things happen and what you have to do to make something happen that you want to have happen.

But, things changed a little bit by—or were changing a little bit. In the fall of 1968, I had to come to terms with Selective Service because I was about to be eighteen years old and at that time, well still, every young American man had to register with Selective Service upon turning eighteen years of age. And I was sort of struggling with that because I had also become acquainted with people on the university campus during my other activity there because it was all over the place. I mean, everyone was thinking about Selective Service and the draft and the war and I had to decide whether to register or not. I knew people who were non-registrants who were resisting the draft in that way and I knew, or at least knew of, people who had refused induction and so I was—I had a serious personal interest in all these things because it was personally, I mean, I had to go one way or the other.

I was acquainted with and sometimes well, around the people who were organizing against the draft on campus, an organization called Students Against Selective Service, which was a carefully chosen name, the initials meaning SASS, like sassing you back. Anyway, one of the

00:20:00 principal people in that organization was someone who I’ve known for a long time and still

today, Don Olson [Don Olson (1943-)]. He was actually one of the people arrested with me in Winona, the event that I talked about earlier.

And I remember it was sort of funny to me, but only sort of funny. I told him I was struggling with this. Do I want to register or not? Am I ready to go so far as an eighteen year old to defy the government in that sort of way? And in the end I decided that I would and that I would later on in fairly short order, be applying for Conscientious Objector status. Anyway, so I registered and I told Don about it because I’d been conferring with him and others about all this just sort of the anguish about, Where am I at and what to do? And Don said to me when I told him, he said, “So, you’re giving them legitimacy, eh?” [laughs]. He later on, didn’t remember saying that but it was—anyway, it was something that I remembered and still remember clearly, kind of amusing.

So again, this was in the fall of 1968. My birthday is on the first of October so I had to register or registered then or soon after that. And not long after that I had to—I went through the process of applying for Conscientious Objector status. My draft board, which was located in Robbinsdale [Robbinsdale, MN], an adjoining suburb to Brooklyn Center, was notorious for not granting people their applications for Conscientious Objector status unless they were like third generation Quakers or Seventh Day Adventist or something, those classic peace churches that were well-recognized. And I was none of those things; I didn’t have any church connections or background; came from a very secular household.

So they turned me down and this was in—well, it would have been sometime during the winter of ’68 into ’69. I don’t remember the dates exactly. And I wasn’t too surprised; I was disappointed, but not too surprised and so that sort of set things up for, Well, at some point—I assume that I had a student deferment status initially because those still existed then, so that was a 2S student deferment. But I knew that that wasn’t necessarily going to be protecting me forever or for long necessarily because you had to be in school steadily, you know. They didn’t; they would change your status pretty promptly if you dropped out for a quarter or something like that. So I was having to look the Selective Service situation right in the eye starting in, anyway, in 1969.

BWS: What was your draft number?

PS: It was, you know, I said before that it was—well, it was a very high draft number, but the lottery didn’t happen until later. The lottery didn’t happen until 1970 [December 1, 1969].

BWS: So you were still just dealing with the draft status without any of the other [lottery]? Okay.

PS: Like everybody else, you were either deferred or you weren’t deferred and so the lottery system didn’t come into play until at least a year later, late 1969 or very early 1970, I think. But when that did happen, I had a really high lottery number; it turned out I was immune.

But back to 1969, this is a more chain of events of people that influenced me, that led to my feeling like it was an okay thing; a right thing; a good thing; a normal, natural thing to engage in something that was overt resistance, instead of trying to sneak into some kind of a continuing student deferment. I mean, I knew people who I’d gone to school with who just declared that they were majoring in divinity because that was sort of a special extra entrée into a special kind of student deferment and I wasn’t going to do anything like that. But I had to—anyway, I had to grapple with all that.

00:25:00 But in early 1969, there was a group of people, including those who were involved with the

Draft Information Center, the Twin Cities Draft Information Center [Twin Cities Draft Information Center (TCDIC), 529 Cedar Street, Minneapolis, MN] which had started at least a couple of years beforehand in 1967. And I had gone there to get counseled about registration and applying for CO, Conscientious Objector status, so I was well-acquainted with them at a certain level.

BWS: And this is TCDIC?

PS: Yes. Right, T-C-D-I-C.

BWS: Yeah, which comes up later.

PS: Right. And so I knew about them and was connected to them as well as Students Against Selective Service; TCDIC was off campus but not far away and SASS was on campus. So in 1969, the people around the Twin Cities, and I don’t know who all they were exactly and how this came into being, but organized a summertime program to do sort of a continuing orientation teach-in, sort of, for anyone—students, probably student-aged people I guess. It wasn’t on campus but it was close off campus, called—this program was called Summer of ’69. And most of the summer, there were these gatherings that would happen right on the edge of the East Bank campus of the university in Minneapolis and people would talk about current events and foreign affairs, the sorts of things that didn’t get a lot of exposure in the news necessarily or background sort of things that didn’t—unless you read State Department bulletins, you wouldn’t hear about a lot of these things.

And I met a lot of people there then who had an influence on me, too. One of the particular people I remember who taught a class or did a talk, at least once, was David Pence, P-e-n-c-e [David Pence (1946-)]. He was an early draft resister and at that point in 1969, I think that he had refused induction already but I’m not absolutely certain of that but I think that’s true and he was a dynamic and inspiring and entertaining speaker. He was really good at that and he also had knowledge about, Why are we sending these people, meaning us, over to Southeast Asia? And what the bigger picture of foreign affairs was like. So David was inspiring.

BWS: He was from the University of Minnesota?

PS: I can’t remember if David was a student then. He had been at some point but he was from the Twin Cities area and so this was still hometown; he was a local guy. He didn’t come from somewhere else. So he was one of many people who were involved in this sort of informal education program, which was overtly leftist. I mean, there wasn’t anything hidden about that so people from lots of different organizational backgrounds came to this and I assume that I found out about it because I was on campus as a student.

One of the notable people that I met, sort of at arm’s length from Summer of ’69, was someone that Dave Pence arranged to bring to town, or had something to do with his coming to town, and whether it was during that summer or a little later in the year I don’t recall, but an older man named Aamon Hennessey. Aamon, A-a-m-o-n, who was—he was at least in his eighties, I think at that time, and he gave a talk that I went to someplace near the university campus. I think it was in a church basement. And Aamon Hennessey had been a well-known, sort of notorious activist in the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World, back in the 19-maybe

00:30:00 teens, twenties, certainly, and he was also a Catholic Worker. Dave Pence, by the way, was a

young Catholic who had been in seminary for a while and then he was doing these other organizing things near the university if not on campus.

And meeting Aamon Hennessey was quite something. He was unrepentant and outspoken and a real presence, sort of lion like in his way. And I learned later on, not only had he been a Catholic Worker, but he was really close to sort of a life partner for a while, I guess, with Dorothy Day [Dorothy Day (1897-1980)], who was the—really, for all practical purposes, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement in the United States.

So I’d been exposed to these people who were in—it seemed like more and more, espousing or talking about the idea of acting overtly illegally for the sake of some greater good, whatever their history had been and currently refusing induction, opposing the draft.

BWS: So they were taking action as well, do you think? Or did that not come—?

PS: Well, it was all going on at the same time; it was just, like I said before, ferment. People were, had been refusing induction or refusing to register for the draft for at least a couple years here in the Twin Cities area, and it was going on more and more. And I was at an age then where I was just coming in to the scene of needing to do one thing or another about conscription. And it happened that others who were older than I had been organizing around this for at least a couple years by the time it was 1969 and I was getting personally exposed to, and connected with some of these things.

Another thing that had—that was part of the Summer of ’69, was involvement of high school students who had the year before, at least, I believe in ’68, started forming something called the Minnesota Student Union and that was a Twin Cities area organization that involved young people, all of whom were a year or two younger than I was but I sort of hung out with them because everyone else was kind of imposingly adult to me and so a lot of good friends—I mean, a lot of good friends among the high school students were from suburbs and in the city, all over the Twin Cities—people I never would have run into otherwise. So that was pivotal for me, too, and there was, among those people, a lot of whom had come from Unitarian backgrounds—there was just a sort of general disposition to think in terms of injustice and resistance and what do we do and things like that.

So I had this long chain of influences that made it seem like natural, normal—what else would you do? when it came to the question of, Well, are you going to go along or are you going to do something that’s not so go along relating to the, what for me, was the major issue of the day, which was the war and conscription?

BWS: And that’s how you got started.

PS: Yeah, so I was ready. I mean, I was sort of ready to go and then—

BWS: Ready to—?

PS: I was ready to do something that was—I was ready to violate the law.

BWS: You’d come to that decision or [unclear]?

PS: I was disposed that way. I mean, I—

BWS: Maybe not a decision but yeah, that’s okay.

PS: Yeah, a little hard to say then. And again, this was before the lottery had happened so I figured that, well, I had registered for the draft but I would refuse induction if I was conscripted. Well, then it turned out that that wasn’t going to happen to me because my draft lottery number was something like three hundred fifty-nine. But also, I mean this was then

00:35:00 early in 1970, a lot of things were happening then.

For one thing, there was the Cambodia invasion. That was like the big national event. Nixon [U.S. President , Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994)] with his—had a secret plan for peace. Well, invading Cambodia turned out to be a part of it and the university campus went on strike and campuses all over the country either slowed way down because people were—students were boycotting their classes and demonstrating. And that certainly was true here. Mass demonstrations all over the place.

BWS: What impact did the election itself have? Were you involved with that at all?

PS: In 1968?

BWS: Yeah, [unclear] Here’s Nixon coming in and he’s had two years.

PS: Well, among other things, I wasn’t allowed to vote. I mean, we were all too young then; had to wait till you were twenty-one. So the youth sector was kind of written off. I mean, we were out in the streets and causing trouble and raising a ruckus and demonstrating in Washington; things like that. You know, the moratorium; mobilization against the war; those big marches in late 1969, in October and November. October I think was the march on the Pentagon in ’67, yeah, but in—yeah, that was earlier on, but after, I mean, Nixon was elected, like it or not, the big police riots in Chicago happened in 1968 during the Democratic National Convention there. So it seemed like everything was busting out.

BWS: Things like that were still setting—all of that was going on as you were starting out, yeah.

PS: Had been going on, yes.

BWS: Yeah, had been going on for some time. Just?

PS: It was just a steady progression of people.

BWS: So we’re back to 1970 and?

PS: Yeah, so I was still pretty closely in contact with people at TCDIC and I can’t remember just what I was doing in addition to being a sometime student then, but—

BWS: What do you mean sometime student?

PS: Well, I was in and out of school a couple times. I was—I dropped—actually, I dropped out of school in spring quarter of 1968. I was just crushed by the assassination of Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)].

BWS: Did you go hear, see him on campus at all?

PS: No, I—that—he was not there when I was there.

BWS: Okay, that was—

PS: That was earlier before I was—

BWS: That was actually 1967, actually, I think.

PS: Something like that, yeah.

BWS: Something like that.

PS: So I’ve never had any personal—I was never at anything like that—but I had been following all these things closely and involved in this student organization that I mentioned. So I was back in school then in late 1968 and 1969 and then out again for a while. It was—well, it was a—I was not very self-directed then, partly because all these other things were pulling at me and I just—sort of treading the standard path just wasn’t feeling like it was working for me so I had to grapple with choices or decisions.

So back then to early 1970, the Cambodia invasion had happened, or happened that spring, but before that, locally, there were a couple of other big things that happened. You know, more upheaval. There was an occupation of some buildings in Dinkytown on the East Bank campus, having to do with a development project that was going to tear down some old, small shops of one kind and another on University Avenue, or on Fourth Street, parallel to University Avenue in Dinkytown. There was a small restaurant chain that was going to build a place there called The Red Barn and that became a big point of activity and gathering there in Dinkytown.

00:40:00 So that was in 1970 and additionally, in—at the—during the last weekend of February of 1970,

there was a big Selective Service attack, attack on Selective Service that happened here in the Twin Cities. Now this is the sort of thing that had happened elsewhere in the country before and I was aware of raids on draft boards that had happened sort of overtly. I can’t remember when and where I learned about these but there were people in the east, priests mostly, and Christian Brothers, and seminarians, who had taken part in draft board raids in Maryland in particular; in Baltimore [Baltimore, MD] and in Catonsville [Catonsville, MD], which is close to Baltimore. Those things had happened about a year and a half beforehand or a couple years beforehand and it was just striking that attacking the Selective Service System that way, which, in its way, was attacking all of us, was inspired and inspired a lot of us to think, Well, hey, how about that?

And so to leap forward to early 1970, there was a draft board raid, a series of draft board raids that took place over the last weekend in February. It was something like the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh [Beaver 55 draft board raid, February 28 to March 1, 1970], and draft board records in Minneapolis and St. Paul were all destroyed all in one weekend. It was like all night, all day and all night a big project. We learned about it in the newspaper. What had happened was the St. Paul or Ramsey County draft board, which was all in one building in downtown St. Paul, and the State of Minnesota Selective Service headquarters, which was in the same building in downtown St. Paul, the post office building [former St. Paul Post Office, now Custom House Apartments, 180 East Kellogg, St. Paul, MN], I think.

Those had been raided and all the records, or at least a lot, 1A records and maybe others, were destroyed there and at the same time, in Minneapolis, the same parallel office had been raided and with different success it turned out later. I learned it hadn’t been quite the same kind of complete destruction, but a lot. So thousands of records were destroyed here and at that time, in early 1970, it was the biggest draft board raid that had happened anywhere in the country.

Now, a year and a half before, in the fall of 1968, there had been a big draft board raid in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and we all knew about that and knew some of those people because some of them were from here, from the Twin Cities. It was called the Milwaukee 14 and so the people involved in that had contact with the people at the Draft Information Center and otherwise. So the context for all this that had happened in late February of 1970 was there. These raids had been happening. And the Milwaukee raid was almost all Catholic lay people or priests or seminarians, with a couple exceptions, and they had stood by. It’s called a stand by action; they took the files out into a public square across the street from the office that they raided and burned them in front of the press. And that’s what had happened in Catonsville, Maryland, earlier, too. It was with homemade napalm in Catonsville.

Anyway, this had become sort of the style of operating. Take these files and destroy them and wait to get arrested as an active witness, Christian witness in those cases. So that’s how some of that had been going but the raids in Minneapolis and St. Paul, by the way, the people called, styled themselves the Beaver 55 who did those raids. And that was kind of a joke because there had been a raid of a different kind—well, there had been a draft board raid in Indianapolis

00:45:00 [Indianapolis, IN] the year before I think and the people there called themselves Beaver 55 and

I think that that name came from a group that had been involved in a raid in Michigan on a—I think it was Dow Chemical [Dow Chemical Company, Midland, MI] records and office.

So it was, Hey, this will make us look like a national organization, roaming around the country, and raiding draft board offices. Well, it wasn’t anything quite like that. It was not a little army of fifty-five people, but it was close enough in some ways.

Anyway, that had happened and I was around the TCDIC often enough and had been doing things with people who were involved with the draft resistance enough that I, in some way or other, and I forget just how I did it—well, I had said right after the Beaver 55 raid in the Twin Cities, “I’m really upset that I didn’t get to go on that because it was such a great success.” I mean, it really was a sort of a ‘wave the flag’ moment so I said to people, “If anything like this is going to happen again, I want in.”

And so I did wind up getting—being made aware of the next layer of conspiracy for doing this sort of thing in Minnesota. And some of the people who were involved in that Beaver 55 raid were involved with me or I wound up being involved with them because they figured, Let’s do it again. But it wasn’t nearly all the people who were involved in the Beaver 55 raid. Turned out a lot of those people came from elsewhere and they never—no one was ever charged, caught, arrested. They succeeded and escaped. At that point the idea was, Let’s do this and try to impede the operation of Selective Service and not stand around and get arrested. Let’s go and do it again somewhere else. And that actually did happen from time to time. It wasn’t just independent local efforts; there was some continuity from one place and time to another.

So anyway, I volunteered and was involved in the planning sessions a little bit for the raids that we tried to do in July of that year, 1970, but I wasn’t very much involved. Others were doing things like scouting the locations to see if they looked like they were vulnerable to entry after dark or were there alarm systems or what—just to see what places would be feasible. But part of the idea was to go to outstate locations rather than well, the Twin Cities were kind of—they’d been dealt with at that point—but we actually knew that there was a disproportionate burden of conscription on young men who were in outstate areas, partly because they were less likely to be going to school after high school and getting those student deferments. So it was—in the wake of conscription and the draft where the war was falling a little more heavily on rural areas.

So part of the idea of doing this in these outlying towns was to bring the reality of this—or it wasn’t so much an education effort, as trying to do something for the sake of these young men in other places outside of the Twin Cities. So that’s why we were going to Little Falls [Little Falls, MN] and Winona and Wabasha and—I always forget—

BWS: Alexandria [Alexandria, MN].

PS: Alexandria. And the fifth place where it was called off—I always forget where that was because nothing came of it. Anyway, so that was the theory behind scattering these raids around the state.

BWS: Right, and you chose those particular just because?

PS: Because they seemed feasible to do. But again, I was not the one who chose them. I was just a foot soldier. Plus, I mean, everyone was older than me and a lot of people had been

00:50:00 involved in some of these raids before. In 1970, I was nineteen years old.

BWS: So you were a young kid.

PS: Yeah, but no younger than lots of people who were already getting drafted. So it’s not like it was—and a lot of young men were volunteering, too. I mean there were still volunteer enlistments as well as conscription so it’s not like I was exempt, feeling in some way.

BWS: You were ready to take action. It sounds as if you were— made that decision.

PS: Yeah, that’s true. I was ready and since I was not going to get drafted and have a chance to refuse induction that way, this seemed like, in a way, the next best thing.

BWS: So that actually figured into your decision or did it not?

PS: It’s hard for me to recall at this point. But I knew that I was safe from being drafted; I was not going to be able to stand up and refuse the way other people I knew had done. And so I was ready to go down a path that also was designed to put sand in the gears, which was the idea. It wasn’t—and we were not planning to stick around and get arrested either during any of these raids. It didn’t work out quite like that, but that was—our idea was to be sort of like the Beaver 55. You know, we would get in and get out and succeed in our mission and then see what came next after that.

BWS: How were you prepared or told or what preparation were you given specifically since you hadn’t been part of the planning?

PS: Yeah, that’s true. There was some—a little bit of show and tell about how to successfully get into or get through the heavy frosted glass windows that were typically in these office doors into the Selective Service offices. There were techniques having to do with glass cutters and little hand-held butane torches. And once you were in the office, you needed to be able to get into these files which typically were locked and so we learned how to punch in the push button locks that you can still see on file cabinets, with a hammer and a screwdriver. You just bang that in there and we learned some other things that didn’t wind up coming into play so we had brief cursory burglary skills seminars.

BWS: Basically giving you some techniques needed to do this.

PS: Right, some how-to—

BWS: Yeah.

PS: Done by, as I recall, mainly and maybe only by a couple people who were involved in the previous Beaver 55 raid in February. So we—I felt like—and I guess we all felt like—we knew kind of what we were doing or knew enough. And so among these raids that we were doing, that—these couple people who were definitely part of the Beaver 55, and another who was not so overtly part of that—anyway, were spread around among the five groups that went out. Three of those groups, including mine, had one of the Beaver 55 veterans there to help us figure out what we were doing and do it the right way because they’d had practice.

BWS: Who was in your group? Who was your Beaver 55?

PS: Brad Beneke was the one who was along with me who—and he was the one who cut the glass and got through the door and Frank Kroncke [Francis Xavier Kroncke (1944-)] was at Little Falls and Chuck Turchick [Chuck Turchick (1946-)], the third Beaver, was at Alexandria. I might be turning those around with who was at Alexandria and who was at Little Falls. But anyway, those three were—had been involved in the Beaver 55 action and were each of them at a separate location with us in July.

00:55:00 But before that there had been a lot of exploring for these county, typically county draft boards

in these smaller towns around the state to find places that we could probably successfully get into. So, and we got into all of them except for the one that was called off so we succeeded that far but, except for Wabasha, they were waiting for us.

BWS: They?

PS: The FBI. So we were arrested by the FBI shortly after we went into the offices. They were there. They knew, because they’d had informants flooding the Twin Cities after the Beaver 55 raid. They sent a host of agents, trying to find out who did that and who was behind it and again, they never charged or arrested anybody for that but they definitely were getting their fingers into, or trying to infiltrate the people who’d been active in that and more generally because they wanted us. I mean, they really did want to make sure this didn’t happen again because they’d been bedeviled by these raids all over the country. I mean, they’d been happening hither and yon all over the place, not just around here; not just in Baltimore.

So it was a big deal for them and the subtext for all that was one of the reasons it was a big deal for them, and others have talked about this, is that we learned, or it was learned in 1967, after the very first draft board raid, which was in Baltimore—the people who did that were called the Baltimore 4, and they were all Catholic leftists, part of the Catholic Left, mostly older; they were not draft age themselves—had poured blood on files in Baltimore and it turned out in their trial that the Selective Service people who were being witnesses and describing what had happened and how bad it was, said that these files were ruined and they couldn’t replace them. And this was a revelation. They did not have copies. This was all a paper based system then, back in 1967, ’68,’69, so if they had copies it was sort of by accident or not in an organized way. They didn’t have something to fall back on.

So others got the bright idea that, Hey, we can actually do something to slow down the conveyor belt of young men who were going into the military to prosecute the war and so that’s why draft board raids became strategic. It wasn’t just romantic or a way of standing around and doing something besides waving a sign in a demonstration. It was actually—the idea was that it would have an effect on keeping people out of the military who didn’t want to go.

BWS: So you could actually—I mean, you were stopping, or at least really slowing down [the draft]?

PS: Yeah, it wasn’t just a gesture. It was really something that was meant to be effective and that’s why later on I came to think of it as sort of a commando raid with a different kind of idea behind it than finding—well, it was sort of like finding the enemy’s weaponry and destroying it. I mean, this was how they—a big part of prosecuting the war. So it was something that went well beyond refusing induction.

BWS: Did you know that at the time when you were doing the raid that you were, you know, the raid in Winona, where you were caught, you were aware of that?

PS: Yeah, yeah, it was—

BWS: And you knew that if you took an action, it could be something that couldn’t be—?

PS: I’m not sure if it was clear, entirely clear to me, that replacing the files was virtually

01:00:00 impossible for them. I probably knew that from the discussions that went on beforehand but

part of the idea of doing all this was people would know, local people would know, that their draft files were probably gone from the local draft board and they then could decide whether they wanted to make contact again and get themselves back in the system or not. So it was to make it more voluntary instead of the compulsory registration and sort of erased the compulsory registration so people could decide if they wanted to go or not so it would be in their hands instead of government hands. So that was the theory behind all that.

BWS: So you figured you’d be in and out and on your way, huh?

PS: Yeah, it was—

BWS: [unclear]

PS: Yes, yeah, it was going to be an overnight effort. We drove down to Winona that morning and did a little scouting again in the office. I was the one who went into the office, although I’d never been there before, to see if it looked like there was anything suspicious, alarm systems, or anything, you know, decals on the door saying, Silent Knight, you know, those sort of things which people don’t see any more but that was—so I was supposed to go in and look because I was elected to pretend that I wanted to get registration information or something like that because I was young enough to make that plausible. I looked it. So didn’t find anything; didn’t see anything like that.

BWS: Nothing suspicious there?

PS: No, nothing that I recognized as suspicious anyway and also got a quick look at what the inside of the office was like.

End of Recording 1

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 2

00:00:00

and after that we were just hanging around until nightfall which took a while before we parked the car that we drove down in and snuck into the back alley and climbed up the guy wire that was holding up, stabilizing a telephone pole and then—which got us onto the roof of the adjoining first floor office building or whatever, a garage or something, that took us to the back window where we got into the building. So that was all after dark on the night of July tenth.

BWS: How many were with you in Winona, specifically, not all eight, right?

PS: Oh, no, no, just three of us there.

BWS: Okay, you—?

PS: There was a total of three who were arrested at the three different locations.

BWS: So you and Brad Beneke—?

PS: And Don Olson.

BWS: and Don Olson, Okay, those were the three that were there. Okay, all right.

PS: So that’s who was there.

BWS: We’ve been going for about an hour. Are you doing okay?

PS: Yeah.

BWS: Okay, all right. So it was just a little over an hour actually, I think, yeah [refers to length of interview at that point]. So it was the three of you who spent the day thinking about it, talking about it, checking it out on your part, just getting ready to make—do the raid?

PS: Yeah, and a fair amount of that was just wait until it got late enough that we could get in the back under cover of darkness.

BWS: So at night, yeah, that would be late.

PS: It turned out, interestingly—we had not anticipated this—that that night, and I forget if this was a Friday night, Saturday night—it must have been a Friday because the office was open for me to go in. That night was the first night of a weekend town festival that happened in Winona every year at that time. I don’t think they do it any more, called Steamboat Days and there were people all over the streets, or as all over the streets as you can get in a town of that size. People strolling up and down at an hour of the night when you wouldn’t normally expect it to be happening. So that made things a little bit interesting. It felt a little bit more—well, we had to be a little bit more cautious with going in the back and sort of filtering our way in and hope that no one would come through looking for their car while we were climbing up the guy wire. It would be hard to explain that. [laughter]

BWS: May I ask? Did your family know you were doing this?

PS: No.

BWS: I don’t know if I’m jumping ahead of the story?

PS: No, that’s okay. I had told my mother that I was going to be spending the night with a friend.

BWS: Okay.

PS: And that wound up being a too transparent tissue come the next morning when I didn’t show up and there was no contact from me for a while, but that’s what I had done. I had taken myself out of the picture for the overnight anyway, figuring that that would be it.

So, anyway, we went into the office and started—I don’t have a real clear recollection of just what we were doing, what each of us was doing precisely, trying to figure out which file cabinets had the 1A files, things like that. We had streetlight from outside because the front office, the front windows of this office, fronted on sort of a main street there in Winona so we could sort of see what was going on but it’s not like we turned the lights on. I think we must have had flashlights, but probably nothing farther than that.

And then suddenly, through—I can’t remember if it was from—through the door that we had come in; that we had broken the glass on; or if it was from somewhere inside a back room of that office but three or four guys came in, or maybe there was half a dozen, but several came in and said something like, Don’t move. FBI. You’re under arrest. Others say that they remember them having guns drawn and I don’t remember that. It was just so startling that I—everything

00:05:00 kind of—I wasn’t absorbing or retaining very well after that. But in any case, it was definitely,

 Hands Up!

BWS: How long had you been in the office, do you remember?

PS: Not long, just a few, you know, it’s not like we were there for half an hour. It was a matter of not many minutes; maybe ten minutes something like that, briefly.

BWS: So you’d barely gotten in and were going to—?

PS: Yeah, we hadn’t really accomplished or begun to accomplish any of what we were there for.

BWS: Which is probably the reason they stopped you.

PS: Well, who knows what they thought? But they didn’t want to let us go too far. That sort of became an issue later on with one of the other trials because—it wasn’t the issue for us—but I think it was Chuck and Bill [Bill Tilton (1947-)] hadn’t had a chance—they hadn’t done anything. They got in but they hadn’t done anything and so, Well, what do you mean you’re charging us with interfering with Selective Service? You know, we’re—the implication was—we’re just simple burglars, you know, maybe we were going to take typewriters or something. But in any case, we didn’t manage to do anything that would interfere either.

BWS: But you had gotten far enough that it was clear that—?

PS: It was clear enough, I mean, who are you trying to fool here? So anyhow, they arrested us; handcuffed us; and were standing around talking on their walkie-talkies and arranging whatever they were going to arrange to get us out of town. Which they did; they didn’t take us to some sort of lock-up in Winona; they took us back to Minneapolis in—the three of us, each of us in a separate car with a couple of agents so they were quizzing us, you can imagine, during this long drive from Winona back to Minneapolis, you know, close to one hundred miles.

BWS: Through the night.

PS: Through the night, yes. And it was sort of entertaining or intriguing in a way, sort of jousting with these FBI guys, who, at least the ones that I was with, were youngish; they were probably thirty-ish, something like that, and you could tell that they were trying to sort of worm their way into your confidence or trying to get you to say something; spill something—let something slip. But, you know, a lot of the time it was just, you know, No, I’m not going to say anything to you, and otherwise talking about things that were harmless. You know, I can’t remember much of what they asked me about but it must have included things like, Who are those other people? and, Is there something—?

They knew; they must have known there were these other things going on or possibly going on around the state. But they didn’t know everything because the people in Wabasha got away. No one thought that there was going to be a raid there and later on, we learned, I think, that there had been agents in other draft boards where we weren’t planning to go because they thought that maybe we were; or maybe they had been cased or explored previously as possible targets. The spottiness of their information was interesting. It said something about how they learned, what they learned, but we never found out—they definitely had someone who had infiltrated our planning sessions enough to know where we were going, at least some of these places, and sent people there to apprehend us. And they were hot to do that because it was what? Just four months plus beforehand that the big raids, the Beaver 55 raids had happened, so they were out to get us. They wanted to score a victory of their own which they sort of did.

BWS: You didn’t know how they knew you would be there?

PS: We still don’t know.

BWS: You still don’t know.

PS: No, we just know that they had been doing surveillance on us. We learned during our trial that they—at least one of the planning meetings, more than one, had happened at the home of one of us and they must have been—they must have known about at least some of these

00:10:00 meetings because by mistake, we saw, briefly, a document during our trial—my trial—a list of

 automobile descriptions, license plates, and owners that they thought were of interest. And one

of those automobiles was my mother’s, which I had driven to a couple of these meetings where some of the planning was happening so it was pretty clear that they were just making note of everything that was parked within a block or so of where this meeting had happened, because there were other people. We didn’t know who the heck they were. But my mother’s car was not the only one on that list that belonged to someone who had some sort of connection with us one way or another.

BWS: And you were not aware of that at all during the meetings?

PS: At the time, no, no, I mean, we should have been [laughs]; we should have anticipated that they would be after us, I guess, but we were pretty—we were real sloppy about that—or the people who were engaged in all this planning, they were—they probably figured, We did so well in February, let’s do it again and time to blaze away. So yeah, they were definitely hunting us down or trying to, and did a reasonably good job of it.

BWS: They did, didn’t they, that night?

PS: Yeah, yeah, so—

BWS: So that ended up that of the what? Of the three unsuccessful raids, those were the eight? Those were the eight people who were arrested and became the Minnesota 8.

PS: Right.

BWS: [unclear] on each one, from those, wherever they were caught and taken back, but not—taken back to the Twin Cities, separately the way you were?

PS: Yes, yeah, so—

BWS: Everyone was taken separately?

PS: There was a fleet of automobiles—FBI plain-wrapper cars that were coming back to Minneapolis to, as it turned out, what was then the new Federal Building [110 South Fourth Street, Minneapolis, MN, now the Hennepin County Family Justice Center] where there were FBI headquarters and U.S. Marshals offices and holding cells and things and they brought us all there. And I remember sitting in a—they did these elaborate fingerprinting things at the time with us and then we were sort of sitting around waiting for something to happen, or maybe waiting for our turn to get fingerprinted. And then others of us started to arrive. I mean, I don’t remember if I, Don and Brad and I were the first ones to get there because maybe we were closest; but I was sitting there in this sort of little lobby, waiting area in the U.S. Marshal’s office and in comes Bill Tilton and I didn’t have the presence of mind to say nothing. I said something like, Hey, Bill. He may not have told his name at that point. I mean, I don’t know. But it started to get kind of comical because people, you know, started filtering in like, Gee, now what?

BWS: How many of us are going to actually come in tonight? Yeah, how many did they find? But it was all men; there were women in other raids but this was not a raid with women.

PS: Yes, and there was a woman involved in the Wabasha raid who didn’t get caught and I can’t remember if the one that had—where the people there called it off—I don’t think there was a woman involved in that. But anyway, all of us who became the public face of all this, all guys. And all local people, too. So we were pretty homegrown, although it turned out, I learned much later, that remember at least three of us had been involved in the Beaver 55 raid. People who were involved in that raid, a good many of them, and it was more than a handful because it was a big effort, three different places, two days’ worth, had come from elsewhere. So this was kind of like a flying squad of draft board raiders who came for that and that was true in

00:15:00 some of the other raids, too. People just sort of were recruited or dispatched to go and do this

after locals had done the legwork beforehand to find out what seemed to be a vulnerable location and so on.

BWS: Well, I noticed it. Is it Fred’s—Fred was with the Milwaukee 14?

PS: Fred Ojile [Fred Ojile (1945-)]?

BWS: Fred Ojile and he—did he say in his interview something like, Well, Philip Berrigan [Philip Francis Berrigan (1923-2002)], said why don’t you go over and help—it was almost like it were an assignment. Go over and help out, or something like that.

PS: Well, there was—

BWS: And I don’t know if that were the—if that would be the case here or not because you were homegrown.

PS: Yeah, but the idea was not homegrown. It came to us from—really all this grew out of those initial actions in late 1967 and 1968 in Maryland and Milwaukee and other places. It all came out of the Catholic Left.

BWS: Yeah, that is an unusual or, I mean, that strain runs right through it doesn’t it?

PS: It really does.

BWS: Social justice or something going on there.

PS: And it’s something that I didn’t have much understanding of at the time. I mean, I knew who had been publically connected with these things because they had, you know, the Berrigan brothers and others had waited around to be arrested. I mean, they were the names that were most prominent but they weren’t the only ones by any means. But I didn’t know at all at the time that they, and others, like George Mische [George Mische (1937-)], in particular, who is a Minnesotan and who I interviewed a few months ago, were actively trying to figure out where to do this next because it was thought to be an effective way of slowing down the war machine.

And so it wasn’t like these activities were locally inspired or even locally conducted so to speak. You know, some local people, but a lot of others, too. There was a raid that was attempted and wound up not happening for reasons that are actually pretty comical that Bill Tilton talks about in the interview I did with him a few weeks ago. That Bill came from here in the Twin Cities to Detroit [Detroit, MI], along with a bunch of other people—he didn’t know who they were—didn’t know them. He was just someone who was there and he can’t remember now how he came to be there in particular like who sort of assigned him to that but there were—there was recruiting of some kind or other that was definitely happening, especially for these ones later on where people didn’t intend to stick around and get arrested, which was increasingly common after the Milwaukee 14. There may have been others who waited to get arrested but it was increasingly, almost entirely, not like that. People wanted to get in and get out and then go on to the next one if there was going to be a next one for them.

So it was sort of like a nationwide loosely tied together set of commando raids at these different draft boards in Chicago and New York and out on the West Coast I’m sure, lots of them all over the place. And sometimes they were lone wolf people. There was a fellow named Brian Wells, who raided his own—I think it was his own—local draft board in St. Peter, Minnesota, all by himself. And I never had any contact with him, but so locally inspired by these other big national things. So, but the big ones—the big ones tended to be part of this network of people that were sort of figuring out, Where can we do this again? Which all came out of these seminarians and Brothers and priests who tended to be from the East Coast.

BWS: And why that? Did you ever figure out why, or understand why, it was that particular, that religion, or that particular group of people in that religion? Is that where [unclear] developed?

PS: Well, I wasn’t trying to understand that then. It was just—

BWS: Okay, I mean, it was just—

PS: I mean, it was noteworthy and remarkable, but—

BWS: Did it surprise you?

00:20:00 PS: Not—it was just striking; it wasn’t surprising to me so much because I was sort of

aware of things like the Catholic Worker movement, even though I grew up pretty secular and, you know, my family background was Swedish Methodists, not like this other bunch of people at all. But when I’d gone to these open housing demonstrations in Milwaukee in 1968, they centered from a church that was—the priest there was James Groppi [James Groppi (1930-)] and he was well-known at the time and, as I said, I went there a few times for demonstrations and one of the things that I saw for the first time in my life there was the one-cent per copy newspaper called the *Catholic Worker* [*Catholic Worker*, New York, NY,1933-present] and they always had those there. And I’d never seen anything like that before, Catholic or otherwise and the fact that there was—so I started to learn that this had—was a group that had been going on for a long time all over the country and that was a real eye opener for me. I just had no idea. I had little experience of organized religion really at all. I mean, I was baptized, but that was about it.

BWS: Or organized religion or organized social justice movements like that, if that’s what you would call them.

PS: Well, the thing that I’ve sort of noticed is a thread through a lot of these things and I didn’t understand why—was the underlying Roman Catholicism of the farm workers movement was always there. And then, you know, in Milwaukee, it was the Catholic Church, rather than someone else, who was ministering to and being a home for the open housing demonstrations. And I don’t know if was very true there then, but, you know, in general, it had not ever been true in the United States that the Catholic Church was a particularly non-white church. Certainly ethnic enclaves had their particular Catholic Church, you know, various people of various European backgrounds, but the open housing demonstrations in Milwaukee were about African-Americans and access to equal or fair or unrestrained housing. It wasn’t about Polish-Americans or German-Americans or Irish-Americans having problems finding places to live. It was about black Americans.

But the Catholic Church was, in its way, some of it was attached to all this so this was the Catholic Left—I’ve used that expression before—that had existed here in this country for a long time. Catholic Workers, people like Aamon Hennessey, who I mentioned who, in addition to being part of the Catholic Worker movement, I mean, he was also a union activist, sort of an anarchist union activist. You know, the Wobblies, the IWW, they were kind of anarchistic.

BWS: Kind of, huh? [laughter]

PS: Yes.

BWS: Or maybe more than that.

PS: Yeah, I suppose so but they were also, I mean, they were not anarchistic in the sense that they did not want to have a union organization. They were not Nihilists, but they did not aspire to be part of the larger more conventional labor movement. So the thread of radical or leftist Catholicism that ran through all this is something I definitely noticed but I didn’t really understand it at all.

BWS: What about Quakerism or some of the other pacifist churches that may have had an activist side to them?

PS: Well, I was aware of them as—because I had been close to—

BWS: Or maybe not activist—go ahead. I don’t know if that’s the right term.

PS: Being involved in the draft resistance locally, and I knew Quakers who were draft resisters—

BWS: And that would be a pacifist.

00:25:00 PS: Yes, traditional pacifist draft resisters who, for whatever reason, weren’t allowed CO

status and refused induction and that was true of Seventh Day Adventists and maybe Mennonites to a degree. I mean, there are these traditional peace churches in the, under the sort of Protestant umbrella, that were well, refusing conscription was traditional in a lot of these sects or denominations. But these churches did not step out in quite the same way that the Catholic Left did. And I’m not sure—I mean, I don’t know enough to have a theory about why one and not the other.

BWS: But that was your observation?

PS: Yeah, and still is, that, for whatever reason, concern and compassion for the poor and the sort of social justice having to do with the disadvantaged and the downtrodden, the Catholic Worker perspective, is something that has, as far as I know, from early twentieth century, been a steady theme in the Catholic Church in a way that it hasn’t been in other religious organizations, at least in this country, and I suppose in Europe, too. I mean, there is something that had been going on in Europe, primarily, I think, in France for a while, for some long time from early twentieth century, called worker priests. And worker priests were a lot like Catholic Workers. They didn’t have churches or congregations; They went to places where, you know, the industrial settings and things like that and did their ministry there in factories or other sorts of settings like that without having congregants who would come to a church-like institution. And I don’t think I know much about that but here in the United States with Catholic Workers, that was not the only place that this sort of theme of going to people where they are instead of having them come to you, was kind of routine in its way.

BWS: Would you say that that was a thread that kind of ran through some of the activities that were the work, activism that you did, that you were part of, not that you were Catholic yourself but you were part of ?

PS: Well, probably not.

BWS: Okay.

PS: Because interestingly, although there was—it was an interesting hodge podge of people who were around the Draft Information Center here in Minneapolis, there was not a particular, or noticeable by me, presence of people like this, involved in that. I mean, there were Quakers and there were people like Frank Kroncke and Fred Ojile, who, you know, had some sort of connection with all that, who had that sort of background, but it was definitely, I think, a minority presence. The others who were prominent and central people in TCDIC here were Midwesterners and sort of that Midwestern profile; they were—

BWS: The Gutknechts [David Gutknecht (1947-) and Douglas Gutknecht] and?

PS: Right, and whatever, if many of them may have had a sort of secular background, or became non-religious, but it was not—there was nothing defining coming from the Catholic Left or any denominational sort of place like that that I remember from the local draft resistance. It was the war and the illegality of the war and, you know, killing people for us immorally. It was about morality but it wasn’t about religion.

BWS: Okay.

PS: This is how I felt and saw it at the time. And there was a lot of hippie yippie stuff involved, too. I mean, it was a carnival, too, in a lot of ways, the way the demonstrations

00:30:00 happened and what TCDIC was doing down at the induction center in the old Federal Building

[Old Federal Building, 212 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN] then. There were people in costume and we had these parades and stuff and it was not a bunch of priests and nuns; it was a bunch of people in wild dress and—

BWS: A lot of tie-dye?

PS: Yeah, a lot of tie-dye and other things like that. I mean, this was, what would you expect of a 1968, ’69, ’70—it was wild in the streets, you know. So that’s sort of the atmospheric and thematic background for all this stuff as I recall and experienced it then.

BWS: Fascinating, isn’t it?

PS: It really is and it’s the sort of thing that is clearly these things that I wound up being part of in my smallish way, were major things that were happening around the country. And they certainly seemed like major things. It was the other thing besides the war going on, it was resistance to the war going on. And where that came from and how it spread is something that’s pretty much—there are probably people of my vintage who find this interesting but it’s not like it’s well understood if it ever was or much thought of or studied or, you know, it’s not part of the story really of those years as manifested in the short shrift that we got in the year and a half ago Vietnam series on public television done by Ken Burns [*The Vietnam War*, written by Geoffrey C. Ward and directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, PBS Television, 2017]. We almost disappeared in all that. It was interesting and a lot of it was good but you wouldn’t know that there was so much opposition as in fact there was and where it came from and what it was like from something like that.

BWS: And the effect it had on all of you, on everyone as well.

PS: Right.

BWS: It was a—

PS: It was nationwide and, you know, like it or not, and a lot of people didn’t like it, it was—well, it was something that was pretty organic and also free floating. There was a lot of spur of the moment, inspired or silly things that people did or thought about doing because of their—well, countercultural affiliations and also, usually hand in glove with that, resistance to militarism and the war, which was a theme that was not unusual or not—it was in the air then in a way that it certainly isn’t now.

BWS: And it was a big change from World War II with the whole, we are fighting, you know, this was a very different time and a different war and a different approach.

PS: Well, it was also a different geopolitical situation in the world. I mean, I can’t speak for what it was like in World War II because I wasn’t there.

BWS: No, I wasn’t either, but, you know, but—

PS: But twenty years later, I mean, we who were the children of what they keep on wanting to call ‘The Greatest Generation,’ I have doubts about that. We were so unlike our forebears that way that it was—that was startling to everybody, I’m sure, and so I think that was a manifestation both of cultural things that are pretty hard to define and still get argued about and like, Was this about surf and beach movies? Is that what started this all happening in 1962? Or what? Where did this come from? And I don’t know, but I know that people were ready to not be roped into being servants of the state.

00:35:00 BWS: Yeah, oh yeah, that’s [unclear]

PS: I think that’s a fair way to put it And service to the state for the sake of what? You know, after the Korean War, there was, you know, that left a bad taste in the mouths of a lot of people because this was the first no resolution—we still don’t have a resolution to that. It’s still just a truce; there’s not a peace pact there. And so the idea that there was something like an American imperial practice that we had bases all over the place, part of which was the outgrowth of World War II, and that, Why are we still sending people to Germany and why do we have bases in all these, all over Asia? And why do we have missiles in Turkey, right across the border from the Soviet Union? I mean, this was all—seemed kind of screwy. And what is that supposed to be getting us and why are we doing that and how could this make any sense?

So it was part of the, I think the general discord that had some effect on the idea of resistance or at least skepticism about why is this so important that we’d be sending people over there to afflict people who we’ve—I mean, what could the connection possibly be except this idea of the Red Menace?

BWS: Yeah, yeah.

PS: Which later on came to be pretty clearly a ruse.

BWS: Yeah, that—yes, there were all kinds—there were a lot of factors going into that.

PS: Yeah, it a very complicated time.

BWS: It was—it is a complicated history.

PS: Right, it is.

BWS: You can’t make it a simple history as was done with that television series so it’s a very, very complicated—

PS: Yeah, you can’t—

BWS: part of the world and part of what was going on here and all this on the continuum of how do we look at war?

PS: And the same sorts of things were happening in other parts of the world, too. It’s not like we were the only ones. I mean, think of what 1968 was like in Europe and France. I mean, the government almost fell because of student and union demonstrations and strikes then. It wasn’t just us taking up a fuss at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. It was happening all over the place.

BWS: So all of that was going into what was happening with you. We haven’t gotten to your—we’ve gotten through your arrest and that’s about as far as we’ve gotten on your story.

PS: Yeah, and—

[discussion about interview time]

BWS: Okay, good, that’s fine, that’s great. So you were arrested. You were brought back to the Federal Building. People are coming in. You realize that it’s not just you three, that there are others.

PS: Yeah, that’s right. It was a stream and we knew that something was not going as planned. [laughs]

BWS: Yeah.

PS: And so, I mean, we were held for a while in the Federal Building and then at some point during the day—this was now the eleventh of July, they took us over to the Hennepin County Jail [350 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, MN], which was then entirely in the old Courthouse building at Third Avenue and Fourth Street and we were held there for five or six days, something like that. And that was real interesting. That was the first time I’d ever been in jail so that was a new life experience.

And some of us were in the same cellblock areas but they had to spread us around just because of where there was space and we were having—my recollection of that was mostly that we had

00:40:00 some contact with people like attorneys and family. I got my phone call and was able to tell my

mom about, Gee, Mom, I know this is not what I told you is what I was going to be doing but here’s what it is now. But it was—it was real interesting. It was the first time I’d had everyday, or had really any contact with people from that side of life whose basic orientation to life was—lawbreaking activity was sort of routine for them and they were giving us advice about who good lawyers were and stuff like that because of their criminal cases and burglaries—burglars like us except a different tier of burglars.

They were making—one of the fellows would make fun of me once in a while because we had high bail set. They set our bail initially—there must have been a hearing but I don’t remember it in particular—they set our bail at fifty thousand dollars apiece, which was a pretty big stack of money then.

BWS: In 1970?

PS: In 1970, yeah. You could buy any two houses you could think of for that. And so this one fellow would, you know, and everyone knew there was no way that you could make a fifty thousand dollar bond so he would come down the hall and look in the cell and say, “Are you still here?” [laughter] So yeah, we were getting some legal advice.

BWS: What were the charges?

PS: Well, our initial charge, and it took a while for us to get arraigned, like until the following Monday, something like that it must have been. Anyway, we were initially charged with sabotage which I didn’t realize then, but learned later, was a charge that had never been laid against people who had done, or seemingly attempted to do draft board raids. They were really hot for us and so it was sabotage of the national defense. That’s what we were first charged with.

BWS: That does not sound good.

PS: Potential life sentence. [Simmons is mistaken here; the maximum sentence would have been for ten years]

BWS: That does not sound good.

PS: No, it was—I think that that’s correct; it was a potential life sentence. Anyway, sabotage was a big hairy deal, something that you know I didn’t want to get involved with. And that was our charge for a while. We did ultimately get bonded out so yes, sabotage was our charge initially.

And there were big demonstrations outside by the way. The next day, it must have been the twelfth, we were sort of aware of this and found out more about it afterwards, but there were hundreds of people outside the courthouse because we were inside and people had mobilized pretty rapidly because a lot of us were pretty well-known. I was not personally, but several of us were well-known locally and there was this big organization that had been going on for a long time. The Draft Information Center and SASS and others trying to resist the war and so there were a lot of people outside the courthouse and it kind of scared them inside the courthouse.

Someone actually—remember I mentioned Dave Pence earlier, his sister Ellen, his younger sister, was part of the many people who were at that demonstration and she had a flag and others have said it was a red flag, but I—and I can’t remember—well, I wasn’t there to see it. I had the idea that maybe it was a local production of a NLF flag—NLF, National Liberation Front of the—what was popularly called here, the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. So she had this flag, whatever exactly the flag was, and on a fairly sturdy flagstaff and actually broke the glass on a window at the main floor door on I think Fourth Street and they were getting—the report

00:45:00 was the people inside, the jailers and the police, feared that this crowd was going to come in

and get us out; we were going to get busted out. And, you know, that was mostly the result of Ellen’s impulses, not because there was any scheme to do anything like that.

But, anyway, it was a great big event out there and I sort of wish that I’d been there. It would have been pretty exciting. But, yeah, so we were arraigned and charged with sabotage of the national defense so we had to learn about that. And because our charge was so serious and was so novel, we started having to look around for attorneys who were not just good local Selective Service related attorneys, and there were a lot of them here who had lots of experience with defending non-registrants and induction refusers, but with sabotage, that’s—

BWS: That’s sort of a frightening.

PS: Yeah, and it was meant to be and it was meant to put the fear of the government into other people who might be trying to do something like this. It turned out that one of—they wound up changing our charge after—I can’t remember how long it was. It wasn’t a very long while, but they wound up changing that from sabotage of the national defense to a more conventional Selective Service Act charge, which was interfering with the operation of the Selective Service System by force, violence and otherwise. That’s the way that title read.

And I was told later—I don’t remember this myself—that the reason that they did that is that they couldn’t really legally charge someone with sabotage if there was not a declared war going on, a declared war. And, of course, there had never been a declared war in Vietnam; nothing since World War II, even Korea was a police action, whatever that was supposed to mean. So they couldn’t charge us with sabotage because there was not a state of war in effect. So it got to be much more garden variety and we weren’t talking with national reputation attorneys after that.

BWS: Did they find you or did—was it a mutual you’re finding them or they found you?

PS: Well, we knew about all these people because they’d been in the news already with these high profile cases. The fellow—the two people I know that we talked with were Michael Tyger, T-y-g-e-r—I think that’s the right spelling and Leonard Weinglass [Leonard Irving Weinglass (1933-2011)] , who was well known from the Chicago 8 trial, where he’d been co-counsel with Bill Kunstler [William Moses Kunstler (1919-1995)]. And he was sort of interested and he came and visited with us and I remember that pretty well. But once our charges got changed to Selective Service title, then everyone figured that, Well, experienced local people can do this, whatever the chances are, we don’t need to have national named people involved and they wouldn’t be that interested anyway. People were doing Selective Service cases all over the country.

So we wound up with—our attorney for each of the three groups of us—and we were tried separately because of these—being—we were interested in doing it all together in one big trial, but the government, as I remember, wanted to have three separate trials; they didn’t want to have a show trial and like Chicago or something like that, or Catonsville 9, or they didn’t—or Milwaukee 14—those were like show trials that they did not have good control over. So they wanted to have three smaller trials and that’s what happened.

So the attorney that we had for all of those trials was Ken Tilsen [Kenneth Earl Tilsen (1927-2013)] and he’d been doing Selective Service cases and other things, too, part of a remarkable family by the way. His forebears were progressives in North Dakota and it’s a long story, the

00:50:00 family connections with Ken and his kids and his wife and his in-laws, but so Ken was our

 attorney. And our trials went, sort of went along. Brad, or Bill and Chuck were tried together

first. Before all this happened, the trials, the eighth one of us, had separated himself from the group of us I think because of family pressure and maybe what—he didn’t plan on getting caught either but he was not someone who was exactly a veteran or deeply involved or committed political activist. So he wound up separating himself and in the end, pleaded guilty and got probation of some kind.

BWS: That was Chuck Ulen?

PS: No, Cliff Ulen.

BWS: Cliff Ulen, okay.

PS: Right. So it was sort of like in Chicago. What had been the Chicago 8 became the Chicago 7 because of Bobby Seale [Robert George Seale (1936-)] being peeled off by the feds with their conduct at that trial and we wound up—they still called us the Minnesota 8, but it was only seven of us who were in the dock for our different trials.

So Brad and Bill went first. They were tried by, in St. Paul, by Edward Devitt [Edward James Devitt (1911-1992)]. He was the federal judge who was assigned that case, and they were convicted in fairly short order.

BWS: The trials came up fast, didn’t they? I mean, relatively speaking or wouldn’t you say that?

PS: Well, I can’t put calendar dates on but they were closely—they were—the first trial and the second trial, the second trial being mine and Brad and Don’s were pretty close to each other and they were separated in time somewhat because we had the same counsel and had to be able to prepare for these—can’t do all that simultaneously. So Bill and Chuck were convicted in spite of—and theirs was the case where, Hey we didn’t really do anything. We just came in. We’re just simple burglars. But they convicted them anyway.

And then Brad and Don and I came up and one interesting thing about that was we had a mistrial at first. We had two trials or one and a half trials. They went through the jury selection process and I can’t remember if testimony had started—it must have started but I can’t remember how far it got but there was this cafeteria in the Federal Building and the jury members would go there typically and others, too, the press and family members and friends, hangers on, all like that. And at least one of the jury members was overheard talking to another one and overheard by, as I remember it, by Brad’s mother, Millie Beneke, talking about us and in particular, talking about Don Olson who had long blond curly hair then, disparagingly, mostly on the order of, you know, long-haired hippie kind of commentary, something like that. And [Millie Beneke] reported this back to the marshal or somebody, said, Hey, these people are not supposed to be talking and they’re not supposed to have a prior opinion about all this, right? They’re supposed to be having a neutral jury waiting to hear the evidence and they clearly, at least one of these people, didn’t feel like that.

So the upshot of that was that the judge quizzed whoever it was and determined in the end that yeah, this was prejudicial and this was someone who had not, you know, whatever they might have said beforehand, during jury selection, they were not able to be impartial and so they dismissed the jury and picked another one.

So we had a second trial, or a second start of a trial, and I was not very involved in that in the sense that I did not wind up speaking for myself. Ken was my attorney but of the three of us,

00:55:00 Brad was acting for himself, attorney pro se and I think that Don did the same thing, or

something similar, maybe with a different title so to speak. I think both Brad, well, anyway, they both spoke for themselves at some length more than once and were able to question witnesses and things. I didn’t do any of that.

But none of us took the stand and that was true in the other trials, or in Bill and Chuck’s trial, too, because if a defendant takes the stand, then guess what happens? The prosecution gets to question them. You don’t just get to sort of emote and talk about any old thing you want to. It becomes rules of evidence and, you know, if you answered that question then you’ve got to answer this question and we didn’t want to risk having to tell about other people because they could compel us to testify about others who had not been caught or had been involved in this conspiracy, you know, get evidence to charge others with something that hadn’t happened, but they had conspired to do, you know, the raid that was called off or the one that was successful, all those things.

So none of us took the stand and you’re not required to take the stand. So Brad and Don spoke for themselves and tried to explain justifications, things like that that, you know, not saying we didn’t do it but what we—why we did what they’re charging us with. And that didn’t go over very well. I think that didn’t succeed. So our trial was fairly perfunctory in that way, too.

And then the last trial was some weeks later because of court calendars and a different jurisdictional assignment, went—happened in Minneapolis before Philip Neville [Philip Neville (1909-1974)], whose named by initials, not by name, in a second poem that John Berryman [John Allyn McAlpin Berryman (born John Allyn Smith, Jr.; ( 1914-1972)] wrote about us and our trials in 1971, that I just came upon again the other day.

BWS: And he’d written one in 1970 as well.

PS: Yes, yeah.

BWS: Okay, go ahead.

PS: So this was [poem] number two, which was less known anyways[[1]](#footnote-1). He identified Neville by his initials, just said “PN” in the text of this verse and was pretty condemning, too. Berryman, by the way, is another sort of radical Catholic. This thread keeps on popping up so for whatever reason, he felt really strongly about us and others and what we were doing.

BWS: And so you’re before these judges whom I take it were not disposed to—

PS: Well, Neville was an interesting case.

BWS: to, you know, or had a lot of questions about what was going on. Go ahead.

PS: Yeah, so Devitt, who—the way I think of it and others of us—Devitt convicted the first two, us in the first two trials and then Neville allowed all kinds of things. He must have had some sort of underlying sympathy or openness to this notion that there was a reason for what we did. It wasn’t just, Were you there? Did that happen? So he allowed all kinds of testimony from people who were sort of—these were like expert witnesses about civil disobedience and what was happening in Vietnam with spraying of Agent Orange and things like that, all these ideas that had influenced all of us and was part of this bigger picture of why this war is so horrible and immoral, besides being illegal because it was never declared.

So he allowed a whole raft of people to testify that Devitt never would have allowed to testify, Staughton Lynd [Staughton Craig Lynd (1919-)], was a witness in that trial. This was Frank

01:00:00 and Mike’s [Mike Therriault] trial, by the way. And Al Janicke [Alfred Janicke] was on the

stand. He was one of the Milwaukee 14; he’d already gotten out of jail from a couple of years beforehand so he was on the stand. And it—I don’t remember a lot of who the witnesses were but besides those two, the one I particularly remember, and that everyone sort of took note of, retrospectively, was Daniel Berrigan, pardon me, not Daniel Berrigan—

BWS: Ellsberg [Daniel Ellsberg (1931-)].

PS: Daniel Ellsberg, who was not known particularly at the time. We had met him and it was sort of an intriguing, mysterious kind of a meeting we had with him. He came over to our lawyer’s house and we all were there and he was talking and he had worked—I think that we learned from him that he had worked for the defense department and had this sort of special knowledge background, but we didn’t know a whole lot except that he was impressive and charismatic and dynamic and mysterious. Frankly, later on said, “You could tell he was a spook.” Well, I don’t know about that, but a very attractive presence.

So anyway, he wound up—and he had conferred with Ken, our attorney, certainly beforehand and part of what he wanted to do there, besides being a witness on our behalf in a general kind of way, because he had been involved with resistance people as sort of his awakening to his new view of the world on the East Coast. He had lived in and around Boston [Boston, MA] and knew draft resisters out there and was inspired by them. He also knew and hung around with Howard Zinn [Howard Zinn (1922-2010)] and Noam Chomsky [Avram Noam Chomsky (1928-)]. But before that he had worked for RAND Corporation [RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA] and for the Department of

End of Recording 2

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 3

00:00:00

Defense for—I can picture him. Who was that? Secretary of Defense, guy who came from Ford [Ford Motor Company, Detroit, MI]—McNamara, Robert McNamara [Robert Strange McNamara (1916-2009).

BWS: Yeah, played a role.

PS: So Ellsberg was connected with all of that and had done this big study on the history of our involvement in the War in Vietnam—that was one of his big projects when he was at the Department of Defense. So part of what he was doing there was to talk about why the United States was prosecuting this war because he had expert knowledge because he’d done this big research project about it. And he could testify to, you know, no, it wasn’t because we wanted to make sure they had an election. It was because we wanted to make sure they didn’t have an election, things like that.

So the underlying situation with him coming to do this with us was that he had for some time been trying—he had already taken and copied what were later known as The Pentagon Papers, this huge study, this Department of Defense effort that he had been at the head of, or deeply involved in. And he had been trying to put this study, because of all the things that are revealed that were contrary to the official story about what was going on in the war and why we were there, and all the official falsehoods from Johnson [U.S. President Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973)] and McNamara and Dean Rusk [David Dean Rusk (1909-1994)] and all the others. He’d been trying to put this in the hands of Senate committees. He’d offered this to William Fulbright [James William Fulbright (1905-1995)] and I think to Wayne Morse [Wayne Lyman Morse (1900-1974)], you know, senators from the Foreign Relations Committee and maybe others I forget, but they turned him down. They were scared of putting their hands on this stuff.

They were not going to take this from him and introduce it into the congressional record and testify and have hearings about it. And he had gotten sort of dismayed or dispirited about, How can I get this into the hands of the American people? And he was sort of re-inspired by his contact with the draft and other resisters that he’d started to be around on the East Coast in the Boston area. And the report I got was that someone there on the East Coast, you know, the timing was such that our arrest and trials were coming up and I think, if I remember this right, he was told about us or our situation was—he was alerted to our situation and the potential there by David Dellinger [David T. Dellinger (1915-2004)], who was a World War II Conscientious Objector who had been in prison and well-known nonviolence advocate, publisher of *Liberation* magazine [*Liberation,* founded, published, and edited by David Dellinger, Bayard Rustin, Sidney Lens, Roy Finch, and A. J. Muste, New York, and Glen Gardner, New Jersey, 1956-1977 ]at the time, things like that.

However he came to make contact with us, when he was on the stand, he, again, I was told later, I didn’t see this myself, but he had his briefcase with him with documents and things and part of what he had with him, as he was going to testify about what’s really happening over there and what the government really has in mind, not what they’re saying they have in mind, he had some of The Pentagon Papers, as they were later known, with him. And Chuck said to me that this came up when he was in chambers with Ken, our attorney and Philip Neville, but I remember it being something that happened on the stand, that he was thwarted from introducing these things by the judge because someone asked him, Ellsberg, about something that Nixon had claimed or offered as a justification or a statement of fact about what was happening with the war, some aspect, something like that. And I don’t know if this was a question that was expected or not—well, it must have been the prosecuting attorney who did this because the judge wouldn’t bring this up—but anyway, he asked some question, wanted

00:05:00 him—or maybe it was Ken, maybe it was our attorney who said, Well, what about this? What

about this reason that the government tells us this is going on?

And at that point, Ellsberg said, “Well, that’s a lie.” He didn’t say—and this was a statement that it must have been Nixon had made because he was in office then—it wasn’t Lyndon Johnson. He said, Well, that’s a lie and that is what caused the problem as I remember it. He didn’t say, “I don’t believe that’s true,” or “That’s not correct,” or something like that. He said, “That’s a lie,” and at that point Judge Neville sort of brought everything to a halt and said, “No one is going to call the President of the United States a liar in my courtroom and you can stand down. Your testimony is over with.” And so we were—

BWS: They didn’t correct—?

PS: Who knows what might have actually played out if the flavor had been a little different? But we might have been real close to, or actually succeeded in having Dan Ellsberg get to be a celebrity in our courtroom in Minneapolis with The Pentagon Papers. It took a lot longer than that and it was a very exciting story for him and everybody afterward.

BWS: Eventually, but the judge would not let him explain why he had made such a firm statement? No just a—?

PS: I guess not. Again, I don’t remember—

BWS: Yeah, that’s what it appears to be that the judge didn’t—

PS: Yeah, it was a matter of the proprieties of a federal court and the judge has a lot of control. It’s not like you can say, you know, I object. At a certain point you have to—they run the courtroom so that was the end of that. But we had lots of testimony about other, you know, what justification defense is, you know, that it’s doing something that’s illegal for the sake of preventing a greater harm is justifiable. You know, the old portrayal of that is it’s not a crime to steal a boat to save a drowning man so we were always going for something like that and that’s what the testimony in Frank and Mike’s trial was aiming toward. And Frank introduced—he spoke for himself. Mike didn’t. Frank was his own attorney. He spoke at some length about Vatican II and, you know, which had influenced him and other people of the more or less Catholic Left.

So a lot of things of that kind were introduced but at the end—and made a pretty convincing case, too, but at the end, after several days of this kind of testimony, the judge said, Well, you’ve heard all this testimony, members of the jury, but I’m not going to allow you to consider it in reaching your verdict. So it was kind of interesting. He was treading a line in some way that he was letting this testimony happen but then instructed the jury that they could not consider it. They only had to consider the facts of the case, which is pretty typical. You know, in the end they’ll say that. It’s rare to have a justification defense admitted for actual consideration. It does happen and there were parts of—a lot of that came up in the Milwaukee 14 trial and the Camden 28 trial in New Jersey later on. But in general, they don’t want you to try to give the jury the idea that something besides the material facts are things that they can work with.

BWS: Interesting that he allowed it, however. He was walking a fine line with that.

PS: Yeah, and I don’t know what the dynamics were within the federal court here in Minnesota then, but Judge Devitt, who tried those of us beforehand, he was the chief judge of the district, of the state, federal district and Neville was not. And so he was doing something

00:10:00 that was within his purview clearly but probably really rankled as far as Devitt was concerned.

That was not what—I’m sure not what the district attorney’s office was sort of planning on or planning for or expecting.

By the way, the person who was the actual in the courtroom prosecutor for the first two trials in Devitt’s court was Robert Renner [Robert George Renner (1923-2005)], who was the actual district attorney for the state. He was the top guy so he was the one who was in the spotlight for the prosecution for both of those trials. But a deputy attorney general was the one who did the prosecution for Mike and Frank in Minneapolis. His name was Thor Anderson [Thor Anderson (1937-)], and I think that’s he’s still—and I think that he’s a judge now in Minneapolis but I’m not sure—I think a district court judge.

We had a lot of trouble with Thor. We thought that he behaved badly in some cases. I remember he said in court, trying to impeach or, at least, cast doubt upon the value of Al Janicke’s testimony, the Milwaukee 14 priest, he had left the priesthood after he got out of jail, or maybe before, I forget. But he was a priest when he was arrested. Anyway, he had left the priesthood like so many others ultimately did and married and Thor said, when he was talking about Al, who was on the stand, or had maybe just left the stand, or maybe it was in his summation, anyway, said something about Al having—How can you trust this person or give much credit to his testimony who left the priesthood to partake of the eighth sacrament, meaning marriage? Everyone thought that that was pretty snotty and nasty of him.

BWS: Yeah.

PS: And uncalled for. I mean, it was just sort of like almost meanness. But anyway, so Mike and Frank were convicted then with a lot of—there was a lot of sympathy for them on that jury because they’d gotten a chance to hear this whole story. And they had gotten contacted by some of the jurors afterward and I don’t remember some of these things but Don talked about it when I interviewed him. You know, that there was weeping and a fellow who was on the jury came out, apologizing about being in the Korean War and no one had talked about the Korean War but this had—it moved people on that jury to hear this whole story the way it was portrayed. So it was done well; it’s just that the judge told them they couldn’t think about that.

BWS: That was reported, too, wasn’t it? What was—the information publically reported?

PS: Oh, there were reporters there for sure. I mean, I can’t remember what was in the newspaper then but—because I was concentrating on being there so what things—the things that might have seemed big or significant or special to us might not have made it into the newspaper. But that’s how I remember that and that I remember being so upset when that—when the jury came back. It was kind of late at night. I was just—it had seemed so good, you know, everything—the story was being told and we didn’t make it or Frank and Mike didn’t make it. Yeah, it was deeply upsetting for me.

BWS: You thought maybe they would even if you hadn’t?

PS: Well, they were able to tell the story and we’d been prevented from doing that so it was—I don’t know if other—

BWS: By the power of the story or the power of—? Is that it? What you’d been thinking of?

PS: Just the idea that what was behind what we were being charged with, instead of the simple material facts was getting a hearing, was—I don’t know if it was unprecedented but it was certainly rare if it had ever happened and, you know, then the hammer came down so to

00:15:00 speak and, you know, Well, you can’t consider any of this and I’m going to tell you what the

 law is and you have to use that as your basis for judgment about the verdict. Then it was

 crushing. Felt like that to me anyway. Yeah, it was very disturbing.

BWS: So your voices weren’t being heard in a way.

PS: Well, they were being heard but they weren’t being counted. I think that that—

BWS: Yeah, that’s a better way of saying it, not being counted.

PS: Or not only our voices, but all these people around the whole country who saw this in a way that was different than geopolitics and reasons of state and things like that. The idea that there was something besides who was in command that should be important or be considered and, you know, the fact that no one had been given a chance to really make a judgment about, or much less vote about any of these things and here we were, dragged into all this—well, things that were tearing the country apart and more so all the time.

So then we were all convicted anyway.

BWS: And sentenced?

PS: But the last conviction was at least in its way a satisfying big splash of, you know, we’re not just grubby criminals. We had a reason for doing this and it’s not like we were trying to burglarize our own draft boards for our sake or anything like that. It was, these were other people’s draft boards and we weren’t there to get any gain out of it personally. People I met in prison later when I told them about what I had done, they said, Oh, so was that your draft board? Oh, no. That’s dumb [laughs]. Why would you do that if it wasn’t your draft board? Even if you failed, they didn’t understand that very well.

BWS: Interesting, isn’t it? That perspective.

PS: So yeah, so we were convicted and each of our—we were sentenced not in a group all at once but after each of our trials so most of us got five years, which was the maximum for a Selective Service violation of that kind at the time, except for Brad and me. We were young enough so that we fell under a different federal sentencing guideline so we got a sort of an indeterminate sentence under what was called the Youth Corrections Act, which actually exposed us to up to six years of supervision and imprisonment instead of five. But it had—there were provisions that would allow you to get discharged early if you convinced the powers that you were good or you were going to be good now, because we were under twenty-one when we were arrested and so we qualified for this provision that allowed a certain kind of lenience if they thought that we were retrievable, that we could be brought back into the fold of good citizenship.

BWS: Did it have an impact on where you were sent?

PS: Yes, to a degree. I mean, these age categories have something to do with it. Brad and I were each sent to one of the two federal youth centers, rather than a medium or close security penitentiaries or correctional institutions of different kinds. So he went to one in Ashland, Kentucky, and I went to one in Englewood, Colorado, the outskirts of Denver. And that didn’t happen until the fall of 1971 because we were out on appeal. All of us appealed our charges and that took months for that to happen. And in the meantime, we were going out and doing

00:20:00 speaking to high schools and other things like that so we were in the public eye in a way that

 we never would have been if we hadn’t been arrested.

The Beaver 55 raid that was such a big deal to us, it sort of sank without a trace because there was no person who was identified, interviewable, charged, on trial, anything like that. It was just this event and then not that many months later, we showed up and so we were prominent. We were—or notorious or whatever locally and so there were things that kept us in—like these trials that kept us in the news once in a while. And we would go out because we were local personalities, and I talked to the high school classes fairly much, for instance.

BWS: Invited in.

PS: Yeah, yeah, in fact, I was invited to talk to a class in a Catholic school in [Winstead, MN]—I’m not sure of the town anymore; it’s about an hour, an hour and a half west of Minneapolis, but I remember the fellow who was teaching there who invited me was named Dennis Wadleigh, W-a-d-l-e-i-g-h, I think is the correct spelling, who at the time or beforehand, had been the Minnesota president or whatever the office was, of the state chapter of Americans for Democratic Action, which was a sort of a lefty liberal group that was present, doesn’t exist anymore so far as I know. Anyway, he had invited me to come and talk to his class, or a class, maybe a couple classes in a row in this little town. I want to say Windom [Windom, MN] but I’m sure that’s not right. It was out in the direction of but beyond Waconia [Waconia, MN]; somewhere out there. And I forget the name of the school but it was a Catholic school and he got fired not long after for –

BWS: Bringing you in, maybe? Or for that type of—?

PS: Yeah, so the Catholic Left did not have deep roots in that place wherever it was. And I also talked to people at--to classes at public schools around the Twin Cities somewhat. And otherwise, we were just trying to sort of get our affairs in order so, anticipating, well, not sure just what was going to happen, but trying to make the most of our time between conviction and the ultimate rejection of our appeals.

BWS: Which you expected I would assume?

PS: Yeah, we didn’t have any high hopes for that particularly, but there were principles of law that were worth exploring but we didn’t expect that anything was going to—that we were going to get—that any magic was going to happen and that we would, that any of us, would get our convictions overturned for procedural or reasons, or anything like that. It’s not like the facts were in serious dispute; it was all, you know, you should have allowed this kind of testimony; shouldn’t have done that, you know, sort of on the judge’s procedural things.

BWS: Yeah.

PS: So we were preparing ourselves to go in and that was something. That was—it was a difficult period because we had a long period of anticipating something that we and our families figured was going to be really unpleasant.

BWS: It was going to be difficult, wasn’t it? I—want—keep going, discontinue if you want or you can stop.

PS: I’m going to turn this off for a minute here.

BWS: Yeah, I’m just going to check—

End of Recording 3

00:24:13

Beginning of Recording 4

00:00:00

PS: Are we going again here? Are we recording? Is this making it through? Yeah, it looks like it is. Okay, so back again.

BWS: Just a brief—it was on pause for a minute. The recorder wasn’t.

So you said you were getting ready to have to report in. What are you—how do you feel about all that now? What was going on? And what kind of support or preparation were you getting for having to go off to federal prison?

PS: Well, a lot of it was on a very personal level at that point. I mean, our convictions had happened and it’s not like we had faded into the background, but at least for me what was going on was just trying to get a grip on myself as a, now a twenty and a half year old and what all this—what I was going to make of this and how could I cope with it. I know that—I mean, it felt like I was going to be stepping off into a void. Didn’t know really what to expect. I mean five days in a county jail is not the same thing and, you know, remember who was president and who was in charge of the Department of Justice, which is where the Bureau of Prisons is housed. John Mitchell [John Newton Mitchell (1913-1988)] was the Attorney General. That’s a scary thought right there.

So I remember—well, one thing that we did—several of us, not all of us, but a few of us, a friend of ours who was part of our defense committee knew a couple people who’d been in federal prison and arranged for us to have a sort of a seminar with these two guys who told us some of their stories. And which were not exactly reassuring but they were sort of helpful and it turned out later on, that they were right on the mark about what it was like. But so we—we felt like we had a little bit of coaching that way, or I felt like that. But it was still—I mean, I remember lying awake, feeling like I was going to be going into a dark passageway and no telling how long it would last or just how dark it was going to be. And actually thinking to myself, Well, if I’m imagining myself being inside and who knows in what kind of confinement, in the dark I can look at the colorful patterns, splashes, things like that that are on the inside of your eyelids when it’s dark. So I got that.

And another thing that I did was, because I didn’t know whether I’d be able to count time, how isolated they would have us, I made a little mark with a razor blade or something on my thumbnail right where the pale moon is at the base of your fingernail to see how long it took to grow out to the end of the quick to see if that was a way to measure time. And it took ninety days. I mean, this was sort of imagining myself to be in a Robinson Crusoe situation where you make marks somehow or other to just gauge what is going on.

BWS: Not knowing.

PS: Yeah, not knowing at all. So it distressed me enough that I was doing and thinking about things like that. So in a way, it was sort of a relief when the realities actually came to roost.

But getting to turning ourselves in, the orders that we got were that we had—I forget the date precisely, but we were to turn ourselves in to federal custody on Wednesday, November something, the day before Thanksgiving. They were going to make us—the vindictiveness is

00:05:00 just striking to me, how petty and nasty these people would elect to be. And I still don’t

understand it. I mean, it’s not like they had almost lost or something like that. They had us so they were going to take us from our families the day before this—the national holiday, along with Independence Day, so we decided we weren’t going to do it. We weren’t going to turn ourselves in. We decided that we would be fugitives for a few days and we did.

We sort of went briefly underground, which had become a little bit of a tradition among the other more notorious resisters, or draft board raiders—some of them were underground for years, months though, certainly. You know, everyone knew about Daniel Berrigan [Daniel Joseph Berrigan (1921-2016)]—he was on the run for several months anyhow. So we decided that we were not going to knuckle under to this day before Thanksgiving stuff. So we made arrangements and we went here and there, you know, stayed with friends or I don’t know what others did much.

But what we ultimately did then was we turned ourselves in—it was either late on Thanksgiving weekend or the Monday right after. I think it must have been—probably was that Monday, but it might have been Sunday. Because what we did beforehand, and there were just five of us were going into custody then because Frank and Mike’s trial was so much later that their appeal cycle was a lot slower so they were going to still be out. But Brad and Don and I and Chuck and Bill were all supposed to turn ourselves in together.

Well, what we did was, or what that arranged was this: we had a sort of a ceremony, a tribute event out at Fort Snelling Cemetery [Fort Snelling National Cemetery, 7601 34th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN].because here are the war dead, you know, which is what we were about was, you know, our war dead; their war dead; everybody’s. And there were conscripts out there in that graveyard. And so there was a—people made speeches. There were some people from Vets for Peace there and others and so there was this event, which the press was invited to. We weren’t secretive about it. And I can’t remember a whole lot about what went on there but there was a reasonable crowd there. And then we went down to the what was again, the new Federal Building in downtown Minneapolis where we’d first been brought when we were arrested and put in custody initially.

And so we went there and there were a bunch of people there. So there was—it was a little bit party-like and, you know, well, we had a theme song when we had events like this toward the end. Our song was—it was the old Roy Rogers [Roy Rogers (born Leonard Franklin Slye, (1911-1998)] and Dale Evans [Dale Evans Rogers (born Lucille Wood Smith; (1912-2001)] theme song, what is that now? Why can’t I remember it? [*Happy Trails*, by Dale Evans, 1940]

End of Recording 4

00:08:48

Beginning of Recording 5

00:00:00

BWS: So you were—at that point all of you were separated or you were—?

PS: I don’t know if the others were all separated from each other but we certainly weren’t all together.

BWS: Yeah, okay.

PS: So I was in Ramsey County Jail [the old Ramsey County Jail; at that time attached to St. Paul City Hall, now at 425 Grove Street, St Paul, MN] and if others were there, they were on different floors. And anyway, we were all awaiting transport to the various prisons where we were going to go.

BWS: Did you know at that time where you were going to go? Did you have any idea?

PS: I think so but I’m not entirely clear. Yeah, I think I did, but I didn’t know anything about it. So I don’t know how it worked with the others but three of us, Don Olson and Chuck Turchick and I were all transported initially in the same car from the Twin Cities down to Kansas City [Kansas City, MO]. That’s the first stopping off place we went on a long one-day drive there to the huge county jail [Jackson County Corrections, 1300 Cherry Street, Kansas City, MO]. there—Jackson County I think it is, which was horrible. It was horrible. It was kind of what you imagine as a nasty jail situation. Lots of people there and noisy and kind of scary and, you know, I didn’t suffer anything particularly there except anxiety but was there for several days.

And continued to meet interesting people. I met an interesting guy from Kansas City, who was in the Ramsey County Jail before they started to drive us across the country. He was a bank robber from Kansas City, who had come up to the Twin Cities and gotten arrested for robbing a bank. Because the banks were—all the banks had been robbed in Kansas City and it was too dangerous. So they had too many guards or something so people from Kansas City were coming up here sort of like Jesse James [Jesse Woodson James (1847-1882)] coming up to Northfield [Northfield, MN] from wherever he had been. Yeah, the same kind of thing.

But anyway, I met a fellow in Kansas City in the jail there who was an airplane hijacker. He was one of the first airplane hijackers and he talked to me for—interesting guy—lot of smart, clever people in jail by the way. But he said, “You know, Pete, what we need is a school so we can really learn these skills that we need to be able to be better criminals.” And, of course, that’s what prison actually is, a crash course if you want to enroll.

But then I was taken by myself to Omaha [Omaha, NE], to a jail there where I spent a few days, two, three days—I forget. It was the nicest jail I’ve ever been in, cleanest, best food—I mean, these things count and I had a cell to myself. I didn’t have to be in a bullpen with others so it felt kind of relaxed. And from there, with one other fellow who was—picked him up along the way—somehow, somewhere or other, taken to the Federal Youth Center in Englewood, Colorado [now. Federal Correctional Institution, Englewood (FCI Englewood), Englewood, CO]. And that’s what it was called then, Federal Youth Center—that was the status of this institution and, of course, those of us who were there, we called it the Teen Center because the average age of the inmates there was about eighteen or nineteen.

So everyone pretty much from the western half of the United States, who was in that sort of youth kind of status or that age range—and they figured they weren’t dangerous especially—went there. There were Eskimos from Alaska there; there were Indians from reservations all over the western United States; and there were car thieves from all over the place; and there were more bank robbers there; and lots of drug smugglers. It was a real interesting collection of people, individuals that I never would have been around in my whole life otherwise, if it hadn’t been for my being there. Sort of like being in the Army. You wind up being thrown in with people sort of at random from anywhere. And in a way, it was a great American society,

00:05:00 cultural, education experience because I was around people who—from everywhere—

from all kinds of backgrounds not like mine. And some of them were like mine. I mean, knew middle class drug smugglers form Chicago there.

Anyway, and there were lots of veterans there, too, lots of guys who’d been either—been there, conscripted, you know draftee hitch and been discharged or maybe general discharged out because they had problems with authority or something, but were in often for being interstate car thieves. That was a real common charge and all it took was driving a stolen car on a joy ride from St. Louis [St. Louis, MO] to East St. Louis [East St. Louis, IL] or Kansas City, Kansas to Kansas City, Missouri—that’s an interstate crime and you wind up in a federal institution instead of state which is actually a better deal because it’s a better prison usually.

So I met car thieves and drug smugglers and bank robbers and the kids who were there from reservations. Any crime that typically happens on a federal reservation, including a Job Corps Center, but more typically, the Indian reservations—that’s a federal offense, too. So there were kids there from reservations in Montana and Arizona, for bootlegging and assault, manslaughter, a variety of things that would otherwise normally be state district court type charges. So it was a real education. I knew Hopi kids and I knew Blackfeet kids; and people who had very interesting—had made a real study of what borders were like and crossing borders for drug smuggling. Like I said, there are some very smart, clever people in prison. They just didn’t have the advantages to take their talents in a more standard kind of a direction.

BWS: What was a day like for you? What was a typical day?

PS: Well, it started out that I was assigned to work in the kitchen cleaning pots and pans. I was on the pots and pans line with a very nice young guy from Nebraska, who was in for a drug charge of some kind. And we liked each other and we liked what we were doing because no one messed with us because no one wanted to be doing—it was a hot, steamy, wet—and so they offered to, you know, transfer us now to some other duty after they’d first gotten us in there and made sure that we weren’t going to be causing big trouble or—they assess you at first when you get to a place like that. And we said, No, we want to stay here. And we did that for a while until I think they sort of made us start going to a school program or something like that. But we started calling ourselves, General Pots and Private Pans because of working the pots and pans line. [laughter]

But after that I wound up, because of my education, I suppose partly—I had a split assignment. Half the day I worked in the assistant warden’s office, which is up in front in the administration building. So I had to go through security and get frisked going out and going back in but they didn’t do strip searches. And that was in a way lots of fun. I learned a whole lot of things from this fellow who was from Washington, D.C. We got along real well together and his named was Jack Brent, B-r-e-n-t. And I’m not sure where he is now, if he’s still alive. But that was—he sort of took me under his wing in a way. But that was a real lucky thing for me. And I got to be around people who were not prisoners but who were prison staff, but kind of like the normal world.

And the other half of my day I was in the library, not because I was working in the library, but because it was a place where I could, at least theoretically, work on schoolwork because I had

00:10:00 an arrangement where I could do independent study through—it wasn’t continuing—it might

have been continuing education—something like that at the university. So there was a staff person there who was sort of assigned to me, but my advisor, who legitimatized all this stuff was David Noble [David Watson Noble (1925-2018)]. So I sort of, in a way, what I did was turn in reading lists. So—and it was very independent. I mean, no one was exactly checking up on me and I didn’t have to send in papers and things like that. But I never did the typical assignments like being on the yard crew or being in school to learn auto mechanics or—I had a chance to work with a guy who was the institution plumber there and learn plumbing and I regret that I didn’t choose that because that would have been a great thing to be able to take out with you.

BWS: Yeah, that’s a career there, right in its—

PS: Or just a great life skill to have.

BWS: Yeah.

PS: But I didn’t do that. I was too short sighted. So it was—and the rest of the time, socialized with a whole bunch of other criminals in my—in the unit where I lived. It was cut up into four different sort of big dormitory type areas so got to know people from all over the country.

BWS: Were you in a cell or a dormitory or—? Describe that.

PS: First a dormitory, a great big open area kind of like a barracks. And after a while, if you’re good, they put you on a waiting list and if you’re good, then you can get a room and—which is in the other wing of this unit. And I can’t remember how long it took me but I wound up getting a room and the neat thing about it was that not only was it a—I mean it was a cell but it wasn’t bars and things and wide open, but there was a door which you had a key for that you could lock although the staff always could get in. But you had a key for your room and during certain hours of the day you could unlock the door if you wanted to and prop the door open and have other people sort of bring chairs from their rooms in that hall and sort of sit in the doorway and you could socialize or play music if you were a musician or play records. That was pretty common. Or you could read or write letters. And I did—I wrote lots and lots of letters and I kept a list that might still exist somewhere of all the books that I read. And I was reading all the time. There was a bookmobile as well as the library, which had an interesting variety of things that were pretty much cast-offs from other libraries.

I remember one of the odd things that was on the bookshelf there was—there was a copy of *Finnegan’s Wake* [*Finnegan’s Wake*, by James Joyce, published by Faber & Faber, 1939] there which is pretty impenetrable. But they also had this other companion volume called *A Skeleton’s Key* or *A Skeleton Key to Finnegan’s Wake* [*A Skeleton Key to Finnegan’s Wake*, published by Harcourt Brace, 1944] which tried to explain a lot of the weird language or constructions and things. But I never took advantage of that very much. I just read and read and read and mostly concentrated on fiction.

BWS: Passed the time?

PS: Yeah, yeah.

BWS: Passed the time.

PS: And it worked out all right. I mean, there were people there who I felt like I was good friends with because our backgrounds were sort of similar and it was a great learning experience and it was, in the end, it was not scary, it was just kind of tedious at a certain point.

I started to notice after a while, there’s a constant stream of new people coming in and people who’d been there for a while before you got there, getting out on parole or probation. I started noticing after a while that some of those people were coming back; people getting violated and

00:15:00 coming back in was a pattern. I got to see recidivism live and in action and that was sort of

intriguing. Why did that happen to you and what was behind that phenomenon?

My parole officer, so called there, the people who were sort of ultimate supervisors at recommending what should happen with you next when your chance for parole comes around, which it does every once in a while, like months and months apart but—he told me at one point that a lot of the kids from the reservation who were there, they would—this was sort of the reverse or a flip side of recidivism of the normal kind. They wouldn’t come back so much but there was a phenomenon where, if it was wintertime or close to wintertime, and they were scheduled for release, they would make a sort of a half-hearted attempt to escape. And this is a minimum security youth institution, so there were guard towers but they would not shoot so it wasn’t that dangerous to try to escape. So these kids would try to escape sort of so they wouldn’t have to go home to the dire poverty of the reservation in the wintertime. Says something about, you know, I’d rather be in prison that on the res, especially kids from the northern reservations like Cheyenne and Blackfeet and like that. I never would have imagined anything like that, that that is something that people would pick federal prison over the reservation or anywhere.

BWS: Isn’t there an impact, too, about the regimentation of the schools and especially during those years and the impact on your life and how to react to control? I don’t know.

PS: I suppose but—

BWS: There may be and that’s not a direction that I’ll go with this interview but—oh, okay, but I, you know, no it’s not a place we’re going to go with this interview but there’d be all sorts of factors going on with kids, with people, with young people I would expect.

PS: Yeah, yeah, it was—

BWS: It’s all just a—yeah, they’re in and you would see that inside the prison.

PS: Something though that—I was there long enough, twenty months almost to the day of total custody and a little bit short of that for being at Englewood—something that surprised me sort of afterward I saw in myself. I came to think of myself as being part of these people that I was around, the whole criminal subculture, which is sort of what it was, started to feel like normal to me. And by the time I came out, I was—I had these notions, these sort of schemes, that, Okay, I know all these people who are unsuccessful, but in fact, drug smugglers. And I learned some things about all this stuff while I was in there and maybe I can come up with a way to connect these things that I learned about with some of the people that I knew from outside before and get something going for myself there. It seemed somehow like it was a plausible near future.

It’s hard to imagine this now, but I pictured myself, sort of as a exploring like, Okay, let’s work out something between people in Vancouver [Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada] who are supposedly bringing in hashish on salmon boats, go across the country on the, you know, the major east/west Canadian highway, and then bring it across through the Boundary Waters [The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Superior National Forest, MN] because I’d been there. I knew how that worked. [laughter] Who was going to be checking there?

BWS: So this whole culture of the prison system was—it was—you were kind of becoming part of it in a way.

PS: I was drawn into it and there was little if anything that the prison as an institution tried

00:20:00 to do to bring you around to the idea that normal law-abiding citizenship was going to be a

good thing for you. I was shocked at first to find out just how the everyday staff that you had contact with, who were really custodial staff [someone comes in—side conversation].

End of Recording 5

00:20:28

Beginning of Recording 6

00:00:00

PS: Now it is; we’re going now finally.

BWS: After a pause?

PS: Yeah. So the thing that really shocked me and, you know, in a way that I mean, I felt that this was something that a citizen should be distressed about is the guard staff. A lot of them were military lifers, guys who’d done their twenty and out, okay? And wherever they had come from, they were—their job was not to take part in programs of rehabilitation. They were fascinated by us a lot of the time. They wanted to hear us talk about our stories of what we had done. You could hear, see them, hobnobbing with these kids, finding out about how they got caught and what they did, you know, what their whole—it was sort of like, Tell me more about that, like it was intriguing and interesting and exciting instead of in any way not a good thing that you’ve done. It was like this was more exciting than my life so I want to hear about your life, you young felon.

BWS: And these kids are at a vulnerable age as well. They’re going—so that’s not good—that’s an interesting influence but not—

PS: Yeah, so, I mean, there were programs to try to bring some of us along, group counseling sessions and these occupational training things, stuff like that. But the general atmosphere, it seemed to me, was one of, Well, we’re not here to be a better example for you than what you started out doing. It was—discipline and control was understandably the thing there, but there wasn’t any sort of underlying, We’re going to help you figure out how to be a better person and not get into this situation again. And maybe there’s a good way to do that but they certainly weren’t doing that where I was and this was a youth institution where there’s supposed to be some chance of redemption, you know, or bringing these young guys who’d gotten in trouble back to something that was not so prone to trouble or bad behavior. I don’t know what the counseling programs or things were like because I never did that. I guess I never thought that I needed that but it was sort of shocking to me that, you know, rehabilitation was not the prime directive there.

So I guess that might have something to do—and later on, like I said, I got drawn into the whole—I mean, I did not aspire to be an interstate car thief but I thought smuggling was kind of exciting sounding. And I also learned something there about how, you know, the war on drugs hadn’t really nominally happened then or was just sort of starting to happen, but I learned firsthand about how people who would do one illegal thing would do another illegal thing. Meaning, okay, so you’re starting out smuggling marijuana across the border in El Paso [El Paso, TX], okay? Well, the next time you’re down there in Mexico, the same people who supplied these bales or bricks of marijuana to you, they might have something else different than that for you. And, you know, so you might have started out just supplying pot to your neighborhood, but suddenly you have a chance to be a mule carrying opium or cocaine or other things like that across. And these things all mix together with each other because the one thing is illegal, all these things are similarly illegal and why not and the money is better?

So there’s, you know, the idea of a gateway drug, it really is true in the sense that these things will ride along together in the same chain of commerce if you make them all equally not

00:05:00 allowed or equally illegal. So an unintended or maybe we’re indifferent to it consequence

 because of political decisions that are made.

BWS: But an unintended consequence for you as well.

PS: Well, yeah.

BWS: The impact this was having on your life indirectly.

PS: Right, I mean, not a lot right then, but the fact that I was absorbing the sort of state of mind. It fell away after a while after I got out. But it was—it took a little while to be back out in the normal world and start to feel like I was getting back to realizing, recognizing myself as I once had been instead of what I had become or what I felt like I was tending toward. I mean, prison was interesting; it was like a travelogue without going anywhere because of all the people I was around, but it was not an improving experience. It was just confinement. And I think they knew full well, you know, that’s what they had to offer really and were just sort of going through the motions otherwise. That was my sense of it anyway.

BWS: Were you planning—were you actually thinking, Okay, what will be my next step when I get out of here? You know, am I going to go back to school? Am I going to take some training? Am I going to whatever? Were you thinking about that at all, besides your David Noble reading list?

PS: I had a general intention of going back to school and finishing my degree, which I ultimately did, but it took a while. There was a big interruption, being inside, plus the year or so before that. You couldn’t really do anything like that because you couldn’t count on anything—being out even to finish the quarter, because it was a quarter system then, not semesters.

Anyway, I didn’t have any particular plan. It’s a situation that doesn’t really allow for much in the way of particular planning if you’re in between things. It’s not like I had a trade or occupation or something like that beforehand. So I was still on my way some place but I didn’t think that I really knew where.

BWS: So it wasn’t that drive, I can hardly wait to get—I want to get out tomorrow or anything or was that—?

PS: Well, everyone wants to get out—

BWS: Right, but what am I going to do?

PS: but it wasn’t because I had a particular pathway figured out for myself. And the other thing is, we had no idea how long it was going to be before we got out. I mean, I had my first parole hearing and was denied parole then and this was after I’d been in there for three or four months or something like that. And then they tell you when you can come back again and try it again. It’s what is called a set-off; you’re set off until another future date before your next hearing is and it was usually twelve months or eighteen months or something like that before you could come around and try again.

Well, we wound up getting out before I had my next hearing to our surprise because Frank and Mike had gone inside like three or four months after we did. And all of a sudden they got a release date. And we were still inside. Well, they hadn’t been released yet but Chuck, I think, found out and Don told the story about this better and Chuck, too, when I interviewed the two of them, but it led to all of us getting out on the same day in July of 1973, the twenty-third of July. And because two of us who’d been convicted of the same thing, identical charges, were getting out sooner than the rest of us, well, they couldn’t exactly justify that and they didn’t want to have to justify it in a hearing someplace so they decided to let us all out on the same day.

BWS: Why did that happen? Do you know?

PS: You mean with Frank and Mike?

BWS: Yeah, why were they allowed out earlier?

PS: It’s not entirely clear. It could be that their judge, this was Philip Neville was their judge, might have had something to do with that because judges have their hand on the tiller to

00:10:00 a degree after you’re convicted, too. It’s their sentence that they impose and there might have

been something there but it was never—if it was never clear to anyone; it was never clear to me. But in fact that happened for the two of them. And it wasn’t just like one of them; it was both of them. It wasn’t like one of them had been behaving well and the other not, they both had the same result. And because of that, and they learned about that in May or something like that of that year, which corresponds to the letter that you saw that Molly Ivins [Molly Ivins (1945-2007)] and my mother had as correspondence about, so the fact that this was known a month or two before we all got out but it was a big surprise to everybody. And then you went through these steps so we all were going to get out on the same day.

BWS: So two—a little less than two years?

PS: Well, twenty months—

BWS: Twenty months.

PS: almost to the day, which coincidentally, ironically, is almost the same length of time as a typical hitch in the military if you were a draftee then. So we were inside with a lot of—me, at least, with a lot of young veterans and the whole place was kind of like military surplus. We wore old uniforms, navy shoes and khakis and the guys who were working there were all military retirees, almost all of them, except it was all kind of sloppy, compared to real Army. I described it as kind of like Camp Swampy in *Beetle Bailey* [*Beetle Bailey* comic strip by Mort Walker, 1950-present] Well, no one—they forgot about us at the Pentagon; we haven’t heard anything about them in years. And it was kind of like that. It was just sort of a little bit slipshod and shabby where I was at least, with this sort of quasi-military overlay.

BWS: Interesting.

PS: Anyway, when I got out, being on parole was not too taxing for me because I went, you know, after a short interlude, went back to school and was doing pretty well with that and being steady with it, too.

BWS: What was your major? Excuse me, I don’t—what was your major?

PS: Well, when I was a freshman, way back in 1967, my major was biology. But as I got more and more involved in public affairs kinds of things and the peace movement, that started to seem less compelling to me and in the end when I got out, I changed my major to history. The thing I said to myself and other people, Well, I’ve been involved in making some history; now I’m interested in studying it. And that’s what I wound up graduating in.

But it took me a while to—I was not able to leave the prison experience behind me very well for a long time. I felt like kind of an outcast and I didn’t talk to people much about what I had done. I was not very well-known, compared to some of us and so I didn’t want to tell people these things about myself because I—however they would react to it, I wanted them to—I wanted to be myself instead of a label because I didn’t have the experience of being sort of, Oh wow! You know, good for you, or Yeah, I don’t know what I think about that, and you know, so I got reactions in different kinds of directions and so I just kind of didn’t talk about that much until I knew somebody well enough that I thought I could reveal this about myself to them.

BWS: So your name—when people hearing the name Peter Simmons, or Pete Simmons, it wasn’t an automatic, Ah, he’s one of—?

PS: No, only in a small circle, but people I came to know, like school acquaintances, things like that, I was—I controlled dispersing that knowledge about myself just because it didn’t always feel so great.

00:15:00 But I also, I mean, I was—

BWS: What was the impact of the prison experience beyond that, just the fact that you’d gone through it, the fact that you had that in your background?

PS: Well—

BWS: That your life had changed obviously?

PS: Well, the main thing was that, I mean, in retrospect, it didn’t do me a lot of harm or good one way or the other I don’t think, but it stayed with me. I mean, it was with me every day for a long time. I noticed real clearly one time I said to someone and to myself when I realized this, I haven’t thought about my prison time for more than a day today. Because it was there every day and I thought about it. I mean, it intruded itself every day and this happened seven years later when I had that day of, I didn’t think about it today. So that was kind of remarkable, I mean, it was remarkable to me both that it happened and that it took that long. I still have dreams once in a rare while. It’s rare now but I used to have dreams more, well, it was like every week or something, but it’s the kind of thing that, well, it stayed with me more than I would have imagined.

BWS: And dreams that you’re in, personally in?

PS: Yeah.

BWS: Or that you’re still there or—?

PS: Something like that. I mean, the dream status is an odd one and I mean, last year sometime I had a dream, at least fragment, that involved being in prison, but it wasn’t the prison where I was, it was just a prison situation and it wasn’t like a nightmare, but it was—I don’t think I would have had a dream like that if it hadn’t actually happened to me years and years and years ago.

BWS: Loss of control over your life or did you feel you still had enough control?

PS: I guess I didn’t feel like that was the issue. It was a different kind of emotion or state of mind that was the live thing for me, the isolation of, self-imposed partly isolation, after I got out of, Well, I don’t want to share that with anyone quite yet, or with you quite yet, because it was just too loaded.

Now, long before I got to the point where I felt a lot more relaxed about that, although I mean, there’s still people I’m around now who regularly at my part-time work, who don’t know this about me. But, I lost my train of thought here.

BWS: That don’t know about the prison system or your prison background or that you don’t want to talk about it yet.

PS: Well, yeah, that’s—I’m still very cautious about sharing that with others but—and I still feel sort of like—on a certain level and I really doubt that it’s actually true, but I feel like an outcast. It’s—people like you have been real accepting of me and it’s, you know, it happens a lot more often than it probably would have decades ago, but somehow it’s not quite reassuring enough to have those—that jitteriness go away about, well, you know, who is it safe to talk to about that experience of mine? So it’s a—

BWS: That is a kind of a loaded thought, isn’t it or an experience or a difficult [unclear]?

00:20:00 PS: Yeah, yeah, so that’s something I’ve made for myself maybe out of next to nothing. I

mean, here we are, forty-five years later but it’s a habit of thought that stayed with me for a long time.

BWS: And not because you were a Vietnam raider, but because you were in prison.

PS: Well—

BWS: Or are they both—?

PS: It’s all one thing.

BWS: Okay.

PS: But it’s—

BWS: But you had, I mean, obviously you’ll never know because the raider experience was a, you know, a civil disobedience, but that was of a particular time and then the prison becomes a consequence that’s lifelong. I’m just thinking out loud.

PS: Well, you’re speculating here and I—

BWS: I’m speculating, yeah, whether it’s correct or not.

PS: But you’re about right. It’s one of those things that—I suppose it’s kind of like PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], you know, you get immersed in a situation that you can’t control much and it’s traumatic on some level or other and you can’t just wake up the next day and have it be it didn’t matter. It’s not like, Oh, I got a parking ticket. It’s something a lot bigger than that.

BWS: So how long did it take you to get through school?

PS: I graduated finally in 1978 with my bachelor’s degree and then I went back to school after a while and got a degree in, bachelor of science in agriculture business and economics, after I’d been working in the co-op movement for a long time. And that was in 1985, ’84—no I take it back. I think my first degree was in 1975—would it have been ‘75—well, anyway, it was not right away and I, you know, I had been out for a long time so I had a lot of catching up to do and I didn’t go through steadily, you know, one quarter after another after that. My self-motivation was not real well organized then.

I guess the other thing that I’d like to talk about is that, in spite of those things that I was just saying now about, you know, was maybe the aftermath was maybe sort of dubious for me personally for me that way, that was all about my relationship to other people and society at large and like that.

By the way, I was discharged from supervision early. It was a year or so after we got let out, not a long time. It wasn’t years after. This Youth Corrections Act that I was sentenced under—it allows for early discharge from any kind of supervision and my parole officer here in Minneapolis went to bat for me and recommended that and so my conviction was set aside after a year or so. So I didn’t have—it meant that among other things, an application of any kind, when they ask the question, Have you ever been arrested or convicted or anything, I can say no and it would be legal to do that instead of a false statement. So that was very helpful. I just had to make things up about, Well, what were you doing during that two year period of time? on a resume. But that didn’t come into play too often and as time went by it was simpler. So I was real lucky that way. And that’s not something that happened to any of the rest of us.

BWS: What about voting? Did that make it—?

PS: And then I was able to vote, too, which made a big difference to me. The first time I was able to legally vote was in—in a national election—was in 1976 so I had a chance—I took the opportunity to not vote for Jimmy Carter [U.S. President James Earl Carter Jr. (1924-)] or Gerald Ford [U.S. President Gerald Rudolph Ford Jr. (born Leslie Lynch King Jr.; (1913-2006)] was it Ford then?

BWS: It might have been.

PS: Yeah, that’s right—it was Ford and Carter after Nixon resigned in ’73 or ’74.

00:25:00 BWS: Yeah, Gerald Ford stepped in and then ran.

PS: Yeah, I voted for a Socialist Worker candidate of some kind. I didn’t vote for Walter Mondale [Walter Frederick "Fritz" Mondale (1928-)], one of the Minnesotans on the ticket in ’76, and I didn’t vote for—a sign of age; these names are escaping me. The perennial Communist Party U.S.A. candidate was on the ticket from up in the Iron Range [Gus Hall (born Arvo Kustaa Halberg; (1910- 2000)].

BWS: Yeah, I’ll fill in the name later. It started with “D,” I know that name.

PS: He was on the ticket, too and I didn’t vote for anyone from Minnesota. I can’t remember who it was I did vote for but that was a very big thing to me, the first time I was able to legally vote because I was inside in 1972 when McGovern [George Stanley McGovern (1922-2012) was running; couldn’t vote then. Followed that real closely and watched the Watergate hearings on TV in prison some.

BWS: I bet you did.

PS: So that was all pretty intense then, but—

BWS: Yeah, so you were still following. Who was the—I don’t what else you have to say. I’d just like to know a little bit more about what you’ve done since.

PS: Oh, I remember what I was going to bring up before. So I got discharged from supervision, my good fortune, but in spite of having said the things that I did about having it being sort of a haunting thing, not exactly causing me lots of distress but always there in the close by background for me for a long time, I never felt bad about it. I mean, lots of things happened that I didn’t imagine happening the way they did and, you know, like I didn’t set out to get arrested but a lot of us thought later that it was actually, you know, it turned out well that way.

And personally, I feel like I was really lucky that it turned out that way because it helped me grow into someone who had—I felt like I had—this is maybe self-serving or grandiose, but I felt like I had stepped into a situation where I had a kind of a reputation or a stature that I would never have imagined myself having as a public figure because of all this, at least with some people. And it had a big influence on the way I conducted myself, even though I felt oddly about all this sometimes in some ways, I came away with it. And I may have felt like this anyway, but I came away feeling that I had, because of what I’d done before and who I’d been with, and the things that we had been standing for in our way, that I had something to live up to.

And it was almost like I was making it up for myself but it was sort of like having a code of honor that, well, there are just some sorts of things, you know, these are—there are ways that I’m just not going to behave. I shouldn’t do that because of feeling like I needed to live up to the—however virtuous you might think it is—I thought that it was honorable, what I had done or tried to do and that I conducted myself well afterward and I felt like I should keep on doing that. And I might have turned into someone sort of different than I did if I hadn’t had that tail on my kite to balance me in that sort of way. I think I made choices afterward because of my past that tilted some aspects of my future in ways that it might not have gone otherwise.

And I can’t speculate more than that, but there were many times when I had the sort of sensation that, Well, better do this because then you’re living up to yourself and I don’t know if

00:30:00 something like that would have come from somewhere else. So that’s one of the ways in which

 I feel like I had real good fortune out of all this.

Not only do I, as a personal moral question feel like I don’t have anything to be ashamed of, and there are so many who must feel like that out of the warriors, so I feel lucky that way. And I just feel that I had—not because of anything I especially chose to do, but I came out of it lucky to not have moral ambiguities surrounding me. Like if I had just gotten out of the draft, because of my good lottery number, but nothing else had happened or I hadn’t done anything else particularly, I might well have felt differently about myself than I did later otherwise.

So, yeah, so it turned into something different and better for me than I ever would have imagined otherwise and plus I felt like—I feel like this is one of the things that makes me a little dubious still about spilling my personal beans to people who are strangers. I feel like I served my country, even though others might disagree, but that’s something that I hold onto.

BWS: You stood up for what you felt was right.

PS: Yeah, even though it was because of poor planning. I mean, I—if I don’t know how I’d feel myself if we’d—feel about myself if we’d gotten away with it. So it has become a real personal, a valuable to me personally experience that might have not have had that—I might have felt very differently about myself in some ways if I hadn’t had that in my early life.

BWS: It’s an interesting—you’re standing by your beliefs is what you’re saying. You acted on your beliefs or you took the beliefs that you had as a teenager and didn’t walk away.

PS: Yeah, well, you know, a lot of—

BWS: You talked about Gandhi; you talked about the influences you had and you didn’t walk away.

PS: Well, that’s true and, like I said, before, I volunteered for something that didn’t turn out the way I sort of expected it to. But lots of people volunteered for the military and just had real tedious hitches and they served their time and got out. You know, sometimes some of those guys, just because of—whether it was luck or valor or something else—they got a bronze star or maybe they got dead. And I felt sort of like I got my equivalent of a—without ever having a medal or a special license plate on my car or something like that, I feel like I got something that counts in a different kind of way that has been real important to me.

BWS: When did you start talking about it more? You did that, the History Theatre [*Peace Crimes: The Minnesota Eight vs. the War*, by Doris Baizley, produced by The History Theatre, 30 Tenth Street East, St Paul, MN, 2008] and stuff.

PS: Well, that had an effect. That was sort of a pivotal thing in a way and that was—that play ended its run just a little more than eleven years ago in early March, I remember, I think, of, 2008. And we were sort of, after a long spell of, you know, each of us doing things we were doing, personal life; private life; public life and the various things, all of a sudden, we were

00:35:00 celebrated and it was rejuvenating because we had lots of fun with each other. And finding out

that there were all these people who thought that our story was kind of a neat thing and worth telling in a way that was not condemning, but offering a certain kind of recognition and approval was really unexpected but very satisfying. And it’s—and people showed up who we hadn’t seen in years and years and it was—in a way, in a weird way, it was kind of like a thirty-year class reunion and everyone got along and had a good time instead of re-living old animosities or something like that.

And here was the general public showing up at these performances which were great, and very satisfying and validating for me and for all of us to the extent that we might have felt that we needed something like that. I mean, I was glad of it. People where I work found out about it without my saying anything and started coming to me and, Boy, we want to go and see the play, and like that and it was really sort of shocking to me that people were just sort of anyone and everyone else out there thought that this was a great thing instead of what I’d been carrying around for me for a long time, but it was something that I’d just as soon not talk about.

So we had more speaking tours again or, you know, a little bit, and we stood up on stage and talked with the audience afterward and things like that. And it was a great experience.

BWS: So did the—did your thinking guide what you did after you got out of prison and after you got your degrees and everything? That holding up to the values and the standards—did that guide your work, you know, your, anything that you did at all or did the experience have an impact on what you did?

PS: You mean in everyday life?

BWS: In everyday life and work and a career and anything that you are, you know, probably more at work or in a public—I don’t know. Any of that? I’ll leave that real open.

PS: It’s hard for me to say. A lot of my focus after a few years was family. I have two sons who are now in their thirties, and so, let’s see, it—I was—I’d been out of prison for about twelve years before the first of them was born and so I was—well, I was doing this work in the co-op movement. That’s what I did for a long time afterward and that was very valuable to me because I was accepted there and sort of known there. I wasn’t just a somebody but well, I was sort of a somebody and it was real important for me to have an occupational situation like that that I felt was something that I could do that was ethical and that was going somewhere that was good for the world. So that was a good thing for me and that lasted for about fifteen years probably. And at that point, I had two small kids and that was the focus of things, whatever else I did.

Until a few years ago, I’d never worked for a for profit business. I always worked for a co-op or for a nonprofit health organization, something like that. And so, but I probably would have done those sorts of things anyhow. I don’t think that that was decisive that way, but it felt like I was having some personal ethical continuity there.

00:40:00 Yeah, as time goes by and those events recede into the past, I don’t feel like it exactly

governed or influenced what I did later much, but some. I mean, I took part in community things, neighborhood organizations, some peace activities over the years but it wasn’t the center of my life anymore.

BWS: So that—it was balanced, but you didn’t lose it, or you didn’t walk away from everything.

PS: No, but I didn’t let it be the dominant thing for me.

BWS: Or the commitment was still there but I should say in a positive way, but without dominating, yeah, okay.

PS: Yeah, I think that that’s fair to say but there are certainly others among us who’ve done way more than I ever did after release and over the years. And others who sort of faded into the background as far as public existence until our play and then all of a sudden, you know, the spotlights were on again and it was a great thing to happen at that stage of life. You know, we were all about sixty or closing in on being sixty and what a neat thing to happen when you might otherwise feel like you were on the long downhill slide. You know, we became celebrities again and, you know, better parties than we’d been to for decades. [laughter]

BWS: In demand, huh?

PS: Yeah, things like that, and we got to hang around with each other.

BWS: What about doing this project? You wanted to get this going, too.

PS: Well, yeah, and it’s something that seemed to me like a more important, more alive thing to me in the immediate aftermath of that play because we shared things with each other, meaning those of us who were arrested and convicted together. We shared things with each other more than we had in a long time and we had a chance to sort of catch up with what—some of us had been in contact with each other pretty steadily forever, but not necessarily and I was impressed with what great stories we had to tell, which we shared with each other.

And we shared with other people who knew next to nothing about us, like these twenty-year-old actors who were portraying us when we were twenty something. And they thought that it was great like, Wow! Why didn’t I ever hear about that? And other things of that kind and the fact that institutions like the university and the History Theatre, thought that this was kind of a neat thing to tell a story about. It encouraged me to think that it was—that the stories that we had to tell were worth listening to. I mean, maybe they’re not really important, really important to anyone except us and those close to us, but I didn’t want them to disappear and just be stories that maybe we told to our kids if we did.

BWS: There’s more significance to them than that.

PS: And I also wanted these stories to be available to people close to us that we maybe had never shared them with very much. It was always difficult for me to talk with my kids about this, not because I was embarrassed, but because it felt like I was—I didn’t want to feel like I was trying to inculcate them with how great your dad is or something like that. So collecting these stories of these big things that happened to us years later, while we’re still here to tell them, came to feel like an important thing to me and finally, I found a way to try to do that.

It’s the answer to that big question, What did you do in the war, Daddy? Well, read this and

00:45:00 you can find out something about that because I don’t have a conventional story to tell that

 way.

BWS: But the story is part of that era.

PS: Oh, yes.

BWS: And it’s an important—I mean, it’s a significant part of that era. It’s part of what happened and why.

PS: Well, true.

BWS: And you don’t want to lose it in the rush as part of that story, as part of that whole Vietnam War era story.

PS: Well, true and there have been real active attempts to erase us. I referred before to the Ken Burns series of a year and a half ago, but it’s not just that. I mean, the official stories minimize or sidestep or sort of eliminate the fact of resistance to militarism in this country, which has been going on for a long time. And I don’t want to make it easier for them to do that by letting these things sort of drift away. I mean, today, these days, American militarism is so rampant that it’s more striking in a way than it was forty-five, fifty years ago because there was lots of disagreement and opposition then and now it’s like a unified voice. You don’t have someone like Wayne Morse or William Fulbright in the Senate holding hearings or Estes Kefauver [Carey Estes Kefauver (1903-1963)], during World War II about war profiteering. I mean, these things just don’t happen anymore and there’s a certain continuity or fabric that I want to make sure gets preserved.

And the other thing that I’ve—I had this thought when I started this whole project and it’s been confirmed in me that it matters—people like me came out of someplace. You know, we didn’t come out of nowhere. We got to where we got by various routes but it’s a—the exposures that people have when they’re young or when, you know, they’re developing, leads somewhere and I think that it’s of historical interest, even if it’s not of personal interest to other people, but it should be of historical interest that people who did thing like me came from other people who did things like that or thought a certain way.

And I mean, that’s why I detailed these people that I knew in my adolescence. I think that there’s a sort of a lineage that’s not a blood thing that helps us come out to unusual places like this. And so—and there’s no telling where those connections might be. And, you know, it encourages me that in addition to the fact that I believe we come from somewhere; we don’t come out of no place, however we can come from any place. And I think that my group that I’ve been interviewing demonstrates that real well. I mean, almost all of us are Midwesterners and we have these different backgrounds, really different backgrounds, that led us all to something that we were willing to do and still feel pretty good about.

BWS: Excellent.

PS: Maybe that’s all I have to say anymore in my own voice anyway.

BWS: It’s a good place to end. Thank you.

PS: Well, you’re welcome.

End of Recording 6

00:49:50

1. “Interstitial Office,” from a longer poem, “Opus Dei,” published in *Delusions, Etc*. 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)