**Interview with Brad Beneke**

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

**Oral History Project**

**March 28, 2019**

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**Peter Simmons, Interviewer**

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Name of interviewee: Brad Beneke - BB

Names of interviewer: Peter Simmons - PS

Recording 1

00:00:00 PS: This is an interview that’s being done as part of Minnesota Cultural Heritage Fund

grant project currently named, We Won’t Go! (And We Don’t Want You To Go, Either). I’m interviewing Brad Beneke at his home in Shakopee, Minnesota, on the morning of March 28, 2019. Brad, if you would please start out by talking briefly about the event that led to my interviewing you here and what and where and when that was? And then we’ll proceed in more detail about that and other things later.

BB: All right, Peter. Thank you for putting this project together. I think it’s real important.

In July of 1970, with a couple friends, I was involved in breaking into a Selective Service

office in Winona [Winona, MN]. It was already known by the police that we were going to do that, or by the feds, and we were busted as we entered the Selective Service office.

PS: And that was in the dark night in Winona?

BB: It was in the dark night. We were thieves.

PS: Who else was there?

BB: Peter [Peter Simmons] and Don [Don Olson (1943-)], right? Don Olson, Peter Simmons.

PS: Yes, Don Olson and me, Peter Simmons, who—I didn’t introduce myself at the beginning, by the way. I’m conducting this interview and Brad and I had this big experience together in Winona and a lot of unplanned for things came from that.

So, I’ll want you to talk more about some of those details and what led up to or came after our arrest together. But, in addition to that, which is pretty well-known and talked about by others in this interview series, you were involved in something a few months before that was well-known briefly, but not so well-known afterward, that also happened in Minnesota that was similar. Tell something briefly about that and then we’ll go into that some more.

BB: Sure. I was involved with the Beaver 55, which is the same kind of raid on a Selective Service office. This was in Minneapolis and St. Paul. I was in the St. Paul tribe and we did some pretty serious damage and got away with that one.

PS: So, because this is not very widely known—it was reported a lot at the time because, if I remember right, it was the biggest draft board raid of its kind in the country up to that point. Does that sound right to you?

BB: Yeah, it was. In fact—

PS: And it was when, if you remember?

BB: No, I don’t.

PS: Well, it was before July of 1970 so I think it was in late winter, like the very end of February. Does that sound about right?

BB: Sure.

PS: So that was a raid of more than one location. Describe that a little bit and then we’ll talk about how it came to be.

BB: Well, we—it was kind of fun and thrilling. It was in—the Selective Service office was in the post office and at the time—

PS: This was in downtown St. Paul.

BB: Downtown St. Paul [St. Paul Post Office, 180 East Kellogg, St. Paul, MN; now Custom House Apartments]. And the times were very different than they are now so there really wasn’t much security or many precautions taken. So a group of—oh, we must have been—we were more than ten in the St. Paul office. We actually walked in the garage door where the postal trucks go in and out. And we did it, not as a group obviously, but in ones and twos and then we ended up walking up—oh, it was eight stories or so so we took the steps up to the floor that the Selective Service was on and began our rampage there.

00:05:00 PS: Wasn’t there more than one office in that building that, I mean, there was a Ramsey

County office and then there was the state headquarters, too. Am I remembering right?

BB: Yeah, I think you’re right. Yeah, you are right. I think some of the folks broke off and did Ramsey County. I was in the state office.

PS: Okay, the state headquarters there. So those two offices were in the same building but separate from each other.

BB: Yes.

PS: Okay. So we’ll talk some more about that but now I’d like to back up a little bit to when you, your origins. For the recording here, can you say what your birthdate is and where you were born and briefly something about your growing up in your family?

BB: Sure, February 17, 1949. I’m seventy now. I was born in Glencoe, Minnesota, about fifty miles west of the Twin Cities. I grew up in a middle-class family. My father, who interestingly enough, had a lot to do with the direction I went, was a major in World War II, and saw quite a bit of action. He was a tank commander. I had a pretty typical upbringing. Poor grades, fairly good athlete and there’s a few items that led to my being untypical at the end of my senior year.

PS: You have one brother than I know of. Any other siblings?

BB: I have one brother and two sisters, all alive, spread all over the country, not a very tight family.

PS: So—and your brother Bruce, who I know, but I don’t know if I’ve ever met your sisters—he was in the military, too, years ago when I first knew him. So, in a way, you have some military background spread through your immediate family?

BB: Yeah, absolutely. Bruce was in the JAG [Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG Corps)]; he was an attorney. I think he had completed law school and then he was in ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] in college.

PS: Was that here in Minnesota?

BB: That was in, yes, the University of Minnesota; undergraduate at UND [University of North Dakota, Fargo, ND], but law school at the university so maybe ROTC was in North Dakota; I’m not sure. But that’s, to those folks who don’t know, that was officers training.

PS: Reserve Officers Training.

BB: Yeah, which meant that they had to go into the service and actually he went over to Vietnam as an attorney and dealt with legal things over there. I don’t have much insight into that.

PS: So he was—but his assignment there where the Judge Advocate General’s department was in Vietnam. I didn’t realize he’d been stationed there.

BB: Yes.

PS: And your father, when he was a tank commander, he was in Europe?

BB: He was.

PS: Okay, say something about your mother Millie, who I remember and met and was around a good deal during our trial. She had—she wasn’t just a quiet housewife at home in Glencoe, she had a variety of interests as well, outside home, right?

BB: Yeah, you’re absolutely right, Pete. Millie was an energetic gal ahead of her time. She was involved in politics, Republican; the family was actually a Republican family at that time, you know, fifties, sixties, early seventies. She was in city council or on the city council but over time kind of moved into other areas which were more personal to her. She was a playwright; ended up actually writing a play about the Minnesota 8, but she had written other ones. She was an actress in community theater and also tried to do what she could for those who had less than we. She organized a housing development for underserved—I’m not sure what the proper word is—but—which is still going today.

00:10:00 PS: And that’s in Glencoe as well?

BB: That’s all in Glencoe, yeah.

PS: Okay, and her name is—went by Millie. Mildred I suppose?

BB: Yeah, went by Millie; liked Millie.

PS: And your father’s name was Arnold.

BB: Arnold, yeah.

PS: Okay, and besides his military background, he was an attorney, too. Tell a little bit about that—what his position was in the community when you were a youngster.

BB: Yeah. Dad was attorney—excuse me, was county attorney for most of the time I was in high school.

PS: What county?

BB: In McLeod County, Minnesota. He was actually, when he came back from the war, and for these reasons: it’s a small town. He came back from the war with a, you know, pretty good position, meaning a major. He was an attorney and so he was looked at as a congressional candidate early on by some people. Then he decided not to do that because, he told me once I asked him, and he said, “Because it would intrude on my privacy.”

PS: You mean United States Congress, not state legislature?

BB: Yeah, for the U.S. Congress, or that district—I have no idea what it is.

PS: Okay, so he had been an attorney or at least, finished law school, before he was in the service in World War II or did that all happen after he came home?

BB: A little of both. So he was in law school when World War II was taking place and went to Europe during that time. And that, interestingly, not well-known, so I suppose it’s good these things come out, is that those people who were in process were just granted their license. And he, in a sense, didn’t even have to finish law school, even though he had completed most of it.

PS: Ah, so he was close, but then got kind of a shortcut after that to being admitted to the bar?

BB: Yes.

PS: Ah, so anyway, so he was county attorney, starting I suppose not long after he was mustered out?

BB: Yeah, not too long. He did some—what, now it might have even been his first job, but he was county attorney most of the time. He did go on a little later and did some private practice and then ran for county attorney again late in life and didn’t win that time, lost just by a few votes. But I was down there watching votes being counted and it was—I was always on my dad’s back because he did absolutely zero campaigning and thought that his name was going to carry him and said, Yeah, well, you‘ve got a great name in the area but that was a long time ago, and unfortunately he did lose and practiced as a private attorney.

PS: All right. Well, you said that your father had a lot to do in the end with the sort of tilt that you wound up taking by the time you were finishing high school. By the way, you said that you came from what was then a Republican family. If I remember right, sort of liberal Republicans as we might think of them now, sort of an animal that doesn’t really exist much anymore. But I remember, I think, your father had come out of the Ripon Society [Ripon Society, Washington, DC, 1962-present] kind of? That sort of background, right?

BB: That’s a good point is that I’m not sure they do exist anymore so it’s kind of a combination of a progressive social attitude with a conservative attitude about, You were responsible for your own life, fidelity to the country and those type of things. So, yeah, I don’t even know if the Ripon Society exists anymore.

PS: But that was part of his background, too?

BB: Yes.

PS: Okay, that helps to clarify it’s sort of one of those forgotten facets of mid-twentieth century. So you said that your father had a lot to do with how things wound up developing for you. I think before you talk about that, when you finished high school, did you come to the Twin Cities and go to the university something like that? Or include that in what you talk

00:15:00 about for what happened as you were getting close to finishing high school and then finished.

BB: You’re talking about that now or what?

PS: Yeah.

BB: When I graduated I went to Concordia [Concordia College, 901 Eighth Street South, Moorhead, MN] up in Fargo/Moorhead [Fargo, ND; Moorhead, MN], and actually there was a fellow there, Brian Coyle [Brian John Coyle (1944-1991)]—I don’t know if anybody—you should read about Brian Coyle. He was a tremendous fellow, who was up in that area. I went there for one year and then I couldn’t afford it so then I went down to the university after that.

PS: Okay, but you met—Brian was faculty up there?

BB: Brian was faculty at Moorhead State [Minnesota State University Moorhead, 1104 Seventh Avenue South, Moorhead, MN].

PS: Okay. Later on, he was a Minneapolis City Council member.

BB: Yes.

PS: So that’s where he became better known, more widely known.

BB: Yes.

PS: So, backing up a little bit, talk some more about how your family and maybe your father in particular had a lot to do with the directions that you took after you finished high school or when you were getting close to finishing.

BB: Yeah, I thought a little bit about this, as you prepped me for this, I think there were three elements—and I’ll keep the discussion short—but family, friends and music really is what contributed to how I was as a senior and what I began doing thereafter. I think family was the—every night the TV was on and we’d eat our meals, you know, surrounded by what was going on in Vietnam. So that certainly spawned a number of discussions and therefore we were very topical and a very political family.

I had few conversations with my dad—as you may have heard, and it’s very true, not a lot of World War II veterans talk about their times in war. And whether that’s a good or bad thing, I don’t know. But the few times that I did with dad, there were two things. One is that he bought a *Life* [*Life* magazine 1883-2000] book that had—of World War II—that had the most graphic and horrific pictures in it that anyone could believe.

PS: When you say *Life* book, you mean, published by the *Life* magazine?

BB: *Life/Time* Book, when it was *Life/Time* Books [Time Life Books].

PS: Okay.

BB: One of those actually intended to be what do they call it? A coffee table book or something like that?

PS: Big format kind of thing.

BB: Big format and yet you’d have all of these bodies stacked up on one another and, you know, just incredible graphic pictures. And once in a while—so Dad bought that and put that out there and once in a while, we would look at it and talk about it. Not often. But there were two things that he said that I thought were real interesting. One is that, and it gave me permission—I think that’s important—gave me permission to step outside the lines. After World War II, and he had served several years, they came back and told him he was going to Korea. And he said, “I’m not going to Korea.”

PS: Because he was still in the Reserves then.

BB: Yes. And they tried to activate him and he refused. So I thought that was real interesting.

PS: That must have been an interesting experience for someone who’s already what? He must have been county attorney by then, right?

BB: Yep.

PS: Because this was in like 1952 roughly.

BB: Yep. So that—it didn’t—it wasn’t like an epiphany at the moment but I always kind of go back to that. We’re—and then the other conversations were—he had mentioned sometimes—he would talk about a few incidents in the war. The one time that he was called back to headquarters in the tank group that he was in—was led into a German 88 training camp. The 88’s were—he would go on about how good the German equipment was. The 88’s were a far superior cannon to the Americans.

PS: So it was an artillery piece?

BB: It was an artillery piece and his tank, as well as a number of other tanks, were knocked out and people in them were killed. Point being is had he not been called back, he would have been dead.

PS: Oh, so his group was going into this battle when he was called back to headquarters so he was spared by accident.

BB: Spared by accident. Bad intelligence drove him close to this training camp; it wasn’t even intended to be. It was just one of those ‘fog of war’ type of things, I guess. And then I

think the third thing was he would mention periodically about war not being necessary and even maybe World War II not being necessary. So, you know, you could feel in him a basic humanity and a questioning of authority.

PS: That kind of question I’m sure wasn’t commonplace among World War II veterans, at least not that ever became apparent to people in the wider civilian society.

BB: I think you’re absolutely right. You know, it would be interesting to know, and I have no insight, but it would be interesting to know how many others felt similar but just knew that they couldn’t say it because it’s really hard, especially in that era, to be anti-American.

PS: Yeah, because this was the height of the Cold War and—

BB: McCarthy [Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1908-1957)].

PS: McCarthyism and all that. It’s not the sort of thing you wind up bringing up when you’re at the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] or the Legion [American Legion] hanging around with your friends. But he talked about this at home at least sometimes.

BB: Sometimes; very short conversations and very infrequent.

PS: But you could tell what he thought and felt about that from those things even though it wasn’t all the time?

BB: Yeah, absolutely. Change in demeanor; your father when he changes into a different person, you know, we’ve all experienced that. You know it was heartfelt and real.

PS: So you knew about his thoughts about this, his thoughts born of hard experience before you were say, twenty years old. This was something that was part of your, like at least adolescent growing up?

BB: Yep.

PS: So did you have other influences when you were young like church or people that you were close to who maybe had an influence in this sort of way on you? I don’t know if you came from a sort of a secular home background or not?

BB: That’s a good question, Pete, because it made me think of something about that that I didn’t put in there. Yeah, let’s talk about friends and music. On the—directly to your question on the church thing—Dad was part of the conservative—we were almost a totally secular family except that in a small town, the county attorney goes to church.

PS: Sure.

BB: So, we went to church begrudgingly, as probably 90 percent of the people—I should not editorialize here, but as many who grudgingly go to church, we did. And then there was a time when—and we were in a conservative Missouri Synod church, and there was an internal squabble about what the church stood for, etcetera. And my dad actually, and my mom, they were both in it together, broke off and became part of another Lutheran path. I don’t know—

PS: Was it an active congregation there in town or—?

BB: They started—they, as well as many others—were the founders of it. Mom and Dad, because they were not terribly religious, weren’t the gung ho drivers of it, but they participated in this break off of this conservative Lutheran church into this—I think it’s now the ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church of America] or something like that.

PS: Ah, yeah.

BB: There was a little bit of church influence but it was more—once again, Dad showed a pattern of breaking from the norm. That’s kind of the tie-in there.

PS: And being at the center and not just going along with the easy flow of things.

BB: Yep.

PS: And your mom was fully involved in that, too, all that then.

BB: Yes.

PS: So even though these sorts of events were around you, it’s—you still weren’t part of what you call a religious family, right? So religiosity in itself was not really part of your growing up?

BB: No.

PS: Okay, and you talked about music, too, as the other -

BB: Music and one—

PS: Yeah.

00:25:00 BB: And I’ll throw in a friend piece there, too. Music was—I was musical and, in fact, later

on in life, made a living as a musician after prison. And during the times, it was—I was listening to Bob Dylan [Bob Dylan (born Robert Allen Zimmerman (1941-)] and some other, you know, Rolling Stones [The Rolling Stones, 1962-present] and Beatles [The Beatles, 1960-1970], and those type of things—and there were a lot of words and thoughts and ideas in that music. In fact, I remember I would actually, before I played Friday night football, I would listen to this music which probably kept me from being as good as I could be, but there—so I was hearing stories from dad, seeing actions from him, as well as hearing these words so the music was not an insignificant piece of the puzzle of moving me off the center line.

PS: And when you said playing Friday night football, you were on the football team—

BB: Oh, sure.

PS: at home and that’s what—you’re not talking about turning on the TV for football but being in the game.

BB: I was a very big fish in a really small pond when it came to athletics, very small pond, puddle as a matter of fact. But, yeah, so I was, you know, from eighth grade on I was in varsity sports.

PS: And later on, got more musical and—

BB: I [unclear] high school band, was in a high school band.

PS: You said something about—I think you were going to mention a particular person or, if not family, people close to you.

BB: Yeah, it’s a good tie-in, nice tie-in; it came through sports. So at the time Catholic schools only went up—their education was up to ninth grade, so tenth grade the Catholics would come over to public school.

PS: And you were always in public school?

BB: I was always in public school and this fellow came over, Dennis Richter, who last year, ran for mayor of Los Angeles [Los Angeles, CA] with the Socialist Workers Party, so he’s been a Trot [Trotskyism theory of Marxism as advocated by Leon Trotsky, born Lev Davidovich Bronstein (1879-1940)] his whole life.

PS: But he was from Glencoe like you were?

BB: He was from Glencoe. And he radicalized me kind of in a different angle. He was quasi-religious. Well, I’m not going to editorialize and Dennis got involved in the Dorothy Day [Dorothy Day (1897-1980)] movement.

PS: Catholic Workers [Catholic Worker Movement, 1933-present].

BB: Catholic Workers. So in high school, we would, on an irregular basis, but more than once, we would drive into Minneapolis and work at these Catholic Worker houses where, you know, indigents, people without resources, people with diseases and that would come to stay for a night or two.

PS: Sort of a shelter kind of a situation.

BB: Right. And then Dennis and I would talk about the war—see he was an athlete—I’m sorry, that’s the nice piece. So he came over—he was a very good athlete, six five, two-hundred-twenty pounds—had an anger issues that we always would kid about. He was the only person I ever knew who got kicked out of a basketball game in less than three minutes because he just went nuts on some guy and the referee threw him out. Anyway, so—

PS: So that was his sport, was basketball or more than one?

BB: All, all. Football and basketball and baseball, very good baseball player. And he and I kind of did this Fargo/Moorhead. He went—he had a scholarship to NDSU [North Dakota State University, 1340 Administration Avenue, Fargo, ND] North Dakota State University in football, and I kind of decided on Concordia, just because we were buddies and I didn’t have any other preference—

PS: So Concordia across the river from Fargo in Moorhead.

BB: Exactly. And then he and I would both spend time with Brian Coyle, who kind of took us to the next step.

PS: Back up a little bit more. So you and—you were introduced by Dennis to however much of a Catholic Worker movement there was in the Twin Cities then when you were still in high school?

BB: Yes.

PS: Okay, and he must have talked with you or you talked with other people at these Catholic Worker locations you went to about their bigger philosophy and what they were doing and why and what do you remember about that? Because this is all stuff that’s new to

00:30:00 you then; it was not part of your upbringing, this sort of radical Catholicism, but it must have

 been kind of a novelty to you.

BB: Well, it was, and not being a very deep—there’s a gal, Janet, who ran these houses and pretty well-known gal in the Twin Cities, you know, as a leading feminist, Socialist, Catholic Worker, that type of thing. And we would talk—and she was a good-looking gal so I spent time talking to here because that’s what I did. And it was foreign because, one, I mean, as I mentioned, I wasn’t terribly religious to begin with so having conversations about all of that was a yawner for me. But I did like Janet and I was impressed by the sacrifices that she would make because she was a good-looking, intelligent, great personality and just a tremendous gal, and yet she was doing this kind of things. So that made an impression on me and I’m not sure what that impression was, but it was impressive to see somebody sacrificing when they didn’t have to.

PS: So this exposure that you had before you wound up being—before graduation from high school—made some kind of a mark on you and it’s something that you carried along to a degree?

BB: Very much and actually acted on it at the time. So I was a Conscientious Objector in high school.

PS: Ah, you knew that early on, before you were eighteen?

BB: Yep, so the draft was coming up and we had to register and do all that stuff and I took a CO path, a Conscientious Objector, you know, had to meet the county Selective Service board and explain why.

PS: Okay, and this was—you would have had to register in 1967, right? When you were eighteen?

BB: Yeah.

PS: So yeah, talk about that a little bit. I didn’t know that about your early contact with Selective Service which all young men had to have at that time because it was required. Yeah, what was that experience like for you?

BB: Well, it was—people have said, and I’m sure it’s true, that I got the CO—I was the only CO out of Glencoe; probably still the only CO out of Glencoe.

PS: So you actually got that status?

BB: I got that status and people said I got it because my dad was county attorney. But, I mean, I felt and believed it and made a cogent argument in front of these World War II veterans, because that’s all the Selective Service guys. I remember Doc Stockdale, the local eye doctor, and a few other people who were on it and they would push and shove because they just couldn’t believe that anyone didn’t want to sign up and go to war.

PS: Especially a football player who’s dad was a tank commander.

BB: Exactly. It wasn’t—it didn’t play in their minds. How could this be happening? So yeah, you know, I was taking all of these things, Dad’s conversations, music, the experience of Dennis and the Catholic Workers and, you know, rolling it into something. And it really became—and maybe even TV. I mean, it was—you, Peter, remember the times and hopefully people listening to this do, but it was every night, you know, you just watched people killed and bombs and unbelievable lies taking place. It really created an atmosphere that may be similar today. You either said, I’m all about this and I’m on board and I’m going to go join the Marines tomorrow, or you said, This is a lot of crap and I got to do something about it.

PS: So you had—you were ready to come down on that side of things before this sort of life dividing line of, for young American men, of Selective Service contact happened. You were already well on the way to that and you had the good fortune to actually getting your CO

00:35:00 status. Did they lean on you to volunteer for some kind of service, non-combat service, when

 you got that status? Do you remember?

BB: Well, I didn’t do anything so they must not have leaned on me.

PS: Okay, because that was a common thing. Well, we’ll give you the CO status, but you’ve got to sign up in fairly short order to work in a hospital or something like that, or be some kind of a military non-combatant status or something like that, so none of that happened to you?

BB: None of that happened. No. The—it brings up a good point, though. A high school friend and a friend that—one of the few high school friends that I maintain today, Mark Schramm, went to Vietnam. He would call me, you know, as the Selective Service was happening and he was drafted, all the time, saying, “You know, I don’t know what to do, Brad. I don’t want to go. I don’t believe in this. I don’t want to go to Canada,” so he did end up going in as medic in a non-combative role. Mark and I stay in touch, you know, the stories that he has and the changes that I have seen in him, you know, I—makes me feel really—it’s distressing to see how much damage was done to these young kids in war and the effects are lifelong and they do not get better.

PS: You saw that, you see that, in your lifelong friend from Glencoe?

BB: Yes.

PS: Well, yeah, it’s a shame. You wound up, by comparison with your friend and with so many others, do you feel like you were really lucky to have been able to avoid that?

BB: Yeah, you know, maybe lucky isn’t the word. It was a bit of—doing CO status was a challenge because the threads were—even though we describe the threads where I had permission to break off the center line, you still were a small town kid brought up in a conservative family, you know, with a military background, and you still played war when you were a young kid and wanting to be a soldier was the thing that you wanted to do. You know, so there was a bit of a conflict there and then—but I think the difference is is that, those things that I just mentioned are kind of theory and they’re the propaganda that’s told to us whereas the other things—my dad’s story; the Catholic Worker; those kind of things were visceral. They were real.

PS: Live and in person.

BB: Live and in person and we end up being moved by those things.

PS: So, well, so talk a little bit now about how you, whatever your path was that got you involved with the people who wound up doing the Beaver 55 raid in the Twin Cities in 1970. We’re going to pause here for a minute.

Okay, so resuming after a short break here, and I just asked Brad to talk about how he got to the point of being involved with these people who were ready to do an actual draft board raid, well beyond something that is sort of routine as getting a special Conscientious Objector status from Selective Service. That’s where a lot of people would stop. So how did you get involved with these people and a little bit about who they were and just what you remember about that whole process.

BB: One story—so, as I mentioned, I couldn’t afford Concordia anymore, came back to Minneapolis and signed up for—I was one of these, you know, night type of progressive education things where you didn’t have to pay a lot of money and that kind of stuff. And tried to stay around the progressive movement, but was not tied into anything specific, any group, any person, anything like that. So I would attend rallies and events and a lot of those were actually around the Catholic center on the University of Minnesota.

PS: Newman Center [formerly St. Lawrence Newman Center, 1228 Fourth Street SE, Minneapolis, MN, 1926-1998].

00:40:00 BB: Newman Center, yeah. And at the Newman Center one time—

PS: But you weren’t an enrolled student at the university then or not all the time, some of the time?

BB: Some of the time, like a night student because I had to work during the day.

PS: All right, okay, rather than a full-time day student.

BB: Right.

PS: Okay, I get you.

BB: And I went to one of these rallies—can’t remember what the rally was but it was antiwar something and there was a guy who was quite articulate who was asking questions of the panel and kind of putting them on their heels and that turned out to be Frank Kroncke [Francis Xavier Kroncke (1944-)], who was part of our Minnesota 8 group. And afterwards, I went up and introduced myself to Frank because he seemed to be a bright, articulate, impassioned and of the same ilk that I was. And I was down in Minneapolis without friends, you know, unattached, so it was just kind of a normal thing to do. And then Frank and I became friends. As it developed—

PS: Can you put an approximate date on this, at least what year? It must have been before 1970.

BB: Yeah, I would say probably within a year of the Beaver 55 because this is the path—

PS: So maybe early or sometime in ’69?

BB: Yeah.

PS: Okay.

BB: So then Frank and I saw this sign for, you know, “The Real Way to Protest the Vietnam War is to Evade Taxes”. But I was working so I was paying taxes and Frank was too. He was working for the Newman Center.

PS: At that time when you first met him?

BB: Yes.

PS: Yeah, he had had some kind of—he was attached there in some sort of formal way as a—doing some sort of pastoral sort of work there, right?

BB: Yes.

PS: Okay.

BB: And Frank and I attended this and it turned out we were the only two who showed up.

PS: That attended?

BB: This—

PS: Oh, tax resistance event or workshop or something.

BB: Right.

PS: Okay.

BB: So we were the only two that showed up. And it was clever because what it really was it was the recruiting mechanism for the Beaver 55, as opposed to what we did for the Minnesota 8 which we’ll probably get into later.

PS: So this billed as being about tax resistance but in fact was something different and in a way, bigger and more so.

BB: In fact, what it really was, it was an interview of people to see if they could be on the team. That’s really what it was.

PS: Do you remember who was doing that or where that happened, whatever the details were?

BB: I do. I hesitate to mention his name. He did go on to be a very stereotypical Irish whiskey-drinking poet, university professor, womanizer, after these raids has passed.

PS: In the Twin Cities?

BB: He went back out east. He was from the east.

PS: Ah, okay.

BB: And he had been in a couple of these raids out east.

PS: Ah, so he was a veteran of these things?

BB: He was a veteran and he was, literally, the organizer in the—it’s all underground ways. You know, a lot of these were taking place around the country and I think they started in the east I suspect. And while I don’t think it was a formal, You go here and you go there, type of meeting. It was kind of an informal—you did one in this town, this city and somebody whose passions were pretty high would move onto the next city.

PS: Ah ha, so there were, whatever the detailed planning was, there was definitely planning that was already going on at the point when you and Frank went to this, as it turned out, screening and recruiting event?

BB: Very much so. In fact, that’s why screening and recruiting as he had kind of done all of the reconnaissance and laid out the plan and he was looking for the bodies to fill the plan. Because he’s an out-of-towner so he doesn’t know anybody.

PS: Right, but this fellow knew enough about the Twin Cities. He’d been scouting and

00:45:00 doing all that beforehand, was putting together a team at this point, right?

BB: Yes.

PS: That’s interesting. So he was kind of just casting his net wide by means of this open attendance, Come to this gathering about tax resistance, without trying to be secretive about it in that kind of way.

BB: Yeah and, you know, when you think about, it’s clever because it—anybody who shows up is kind of saying, Well, I’ll break the law, right? You know, now this—Frank and I didn’t think about this at the time, but so you’ve got that going for you. And then he’s relying on his experience in the other acts that he had been in, which were two of them.

PS: Do you remember what those were without naming him because there were multiple people in all these other things?

BB: No, I don’t, I’m sorry.

PS: Or what cities?

BB: I want to say New Haven. Was there one in New Haven?

PS: They were getting to be sort of all over the place so I’m not sure about that. I don’t have a memory of the long list of places where raids had happened.

BB: It was quite out east.

PS: Okay, and another one is well, at least two that this fellow was involved in, maybe I’ll ask you this. I’m going to turn off the recording for a moment here. So we’re back again after a brief interruption. So, you were—you and Frank were recruited and clearly other people were recruited either before or after this event with the Beaver 55 organizer, who, again, was from elsewhere and either decided himself or maybe had been sort of assigned to come and evaluate the Twin Cities as a draft board raid possibility?

BB: Yes.

PS: Do you know if—well, you said that there were at least ten people that were involved in the Beaver 55 raid in St. Paul that you were on. There were also people in Minneapolis so he must have been seeking out people for some time to add up to the teams that went out and did that. Do you have any sense about any of that?

BB: Well, you’re right. I don’t have a great sense, but I do know from how a couple of other people got in that he was doing more than just tax evasion type of things. He was coming up with reasons, very clever, you know, reasons for people who were on the fringe to come forward and have a conversation, reevaluate. Because you’re right. There must have been in all twenty people.

PS: For the Beaver 55 raid in the Twin Cities here?

BB: Right.

PS: And just for the record, to distinguish, there were a couple of other things that had happened previously in other parts of the country that had used the name Beaver 55 and it became kind of a, almost a joke conspiracy, that we’re making it look like there’s this great big team of people going to—well, there’s a draft board raid in Indianapolis [Indianapolis, IN]. I think that was the first one that—where the people styled themselves Beaver 55 wherever that came from. And then later on, there was a Dow Chemical Company [Dow Chemical Company, Midland, MI] raid of their records in Michigan and people involved in that also took on the name Beaver 55, whether they were the same people partly or not, I don’t know, but in fact, there was not a whole lot of connection. It’s not like there was this team of shock troops that was going from one place to another doing the same thing so it was still kind of impromptu and local.

BB: Yeah, absolutely right on everything you said. It was—the intent was to be somewhat humorous and comic, and yet at the same time, suggest that there’s a big movement going on. Now that you mention it, Detroit [Detroit, MI]—I think that’s where Jim’s second one or one of his other or previous acts were at. It was tied into Detroit, Michigan, somehow. So, yes, he recruited—it was a loose affiliation of people. He came to town, recruited a bunch of people using different methods. He did most of the reconnaissance and figured out the plan. We did

00:50:00 go through a couple trial runs so we actually trialed it out and we would try to refine—I went

in twice before the actual act and it was really to check, Is this the best schedule? The best time of day? It was during a shift change. You know, are there things to watch out for? So, you know, it was quite well-organized as kind of a, you know, I guess you call it either military or criminal act or however you want to reflect on it, it was—

PS: It was a conspiracy.

BB: It was a conspiracy, yeah.

PS: Now there was also at least one thing that, part of this precursor to the actual raid that happened in Chicago [Chicago, IL]? Does that sound right to you, that—?

BB: Chicago 7 you mean?

PS: No, no, I mean, going to Chicago having to do with setting this up beforehand like learning how to break in, do some of these sorts of—I mean, not everyone knows how to do the thing with the little torch and the glass cutter and stuff. Because Chuck [Chuck Turchick (1946-)] said that he remembered meeting you and Frank, or one of you, at least, on a train going to Chicago before all of the Beaver 55 stuff. Does this fall into place at all?

BB: May have been Frank—it doesn’t come to mind. I remember going to Chicago for the ’68 Democratic Convention—

PS: And that would have been well before this so, okay, well, maybe it will come to you later, but in any case, the Beaver 55 raid here was set up by someone who’s not local, but recruited local people, or at least partly local people, maybe others who were from elsewhere? People you didn’t know, right? You didn’t know already all or maybe even many of the people who were doing this raid with you. Is that right?

BB: No, I didn’t know anyone.

PS: Except Frank?

BB: Except Frank.

PS: And the fellow who was doing the initial organizing, recruiting about all this.

BB: But I believe everybody was local. I don’t remember anyone else being from out of town.

PS: Okay, but hard to tell since you didn’t know them particularly otherwise?

BB: Yes, you knew them only through the practice of the action itself.

PS: Okay. How did you go about—who taught you the things that you needed to know to be able to do the actual burglary or break-in? Or did you do that much yourself?

BB: Well, it ended up the teachings that they did were not very good and not very useful. In fact, in St. Paul I had to climb, because I was the only one who ties back to, I guess, the athletic thing. We couldn’t get the door open so they boosted me up into the transom—it was an old building that has at the top of the door one of these windows—

PS: The folding glass

BB: so that’s how we got in. So much for the torch and the glass cutter type of thing. [laugher] So, while it was sophisticated in the sense of planning, there was nothing sophisticated about the actual raid itself. It was all making it up as we went.

PS: Well, you made it up well enough that you got in and got out and this took place over a whole weekend.

BB: Yeah, it was really a very good raid, right. We went in Friday night I think it was and, you know, so nobody’s around, and had lots of time, did a lot of damage. We heard later on—I had people who came up to me and thanked me for doing that because they never had—they weren’t drafted and they were in line to be drafted but there were so many—there were like six thousand files destroyed. And remember, this was before computers, so everything’s paper and we ripped everything up and that’s principally what it was is we went in and we bent the 1A key on the typewriter, stupid things like that, but we just literally took the files, every file we could find, and just ripped the living daylights out of it. And at that point in time, there was no way for them to recover, the Selective Service. So Minnesota, if I remember right, under produced its designated quantity—

PS: Its quota?

BB: Its quota, under produced for that year or whatever.

PS: So the people that you knew then, because you knew Frank was involved in that raid, so you knew Frank. And you knew Chuck by that time?

BB: I knew Chuck.

PS: And everyone else was more or less a stranger to you except for the fellow who recruited you. Is that—?

00:55:00 BB: Well, yeah, Chuck was even a stranger until I met him through the—

PS: Through that?

BB: Yeah, so I didn’t know Chuck before. I knew only Frank and then this guy Jim, who recruited us.

PS: Okay. To back up a little bit to your friend Dennis Richter, was he ever sort of on the fringes of any of this? Did—was he still up in Fargo or—?

BB: No, he came—

PS: I was just curious if you had contact with him.

BB: No, good question and interesting because he and I would really have debates. He got picked up by—if you ever read much about Trotsky, it makes a lot of sense, but he got picked up by one of the leaders, who was a gal with the Socialist Worker Party, who were, who are followers of Trotsky. And he really got involved with them and we would debate about action and I, you know, I was still enough of a small town guy with an American background that I was not at that point entirely a Communist or a Communist was still not a good thing in my mind. The War in Vietnam was not a good thing in my mind either.

But Dennis and I would talk about it, you know, what kind of actions, how far you should go. He had a story on why I shouldn’t do it, which was that actions result in repression, police repression, and makes the situation worse. With the Socialist Worker Party at the time, they had a printing press operation so they, you know, I think it was clever. They would do legitimate printing for any businesses and that was their revenue for their funding flow and then they would be printing, you know, progressive radical publications and that’s really what they did. So they really saw, you know, they stayed true, and even over the years to date and stayed true to kind of this—I want to say seriously mythological, since it’s certainly not scientific, with this, you know, the uprising of the oppressed masses through the leadership of the Communist Party; the Socialist Worker Party being the correct derivation of the Communist movement. And so he stuck with that and always admonished me for doing these wild and crazy things.

PS: These other deviant practices, huh?

BB: These deviant practices.

PS: Okay. So, the Beaver 55 raid—my recollection is that it happened over the last weekend in February 1970, whatever exactly the dates were. That was widely reported because it was discovered right away the beginning of the following week on Monday after you guys had done all this. And, as I said before, it was I think at that point, was the biggest raid of its kind that had happened in the United States to date then. So you and Frank and Chuck were part of that and talk a little bit about how that took you all, or whatever combination of you all, into thinking about doing something additional locally that was a local operation, rather than someone coming in from out of town.

BB: Frank was done and Chuck was done.

PS: They weren’t thinking about doing more at that time.

BB: They were not motivated to do anymore of this stuff and I think for two reasons. One is because they’re both a little saner than I am and, you know, two of the factors that it was successful, I thought was great and I thought we should just continue on. Maybe sane is the wrong word. Maybe a more realistic because, of course, once that happened, you know, they moved FBI people into town and Frank and I were living together at that time and we used to see FBI agents watching the apartment and that stuff all the time or hallucinated it. I don’t know.

PS: You believed at the time that you were being—you were under some kind of surveillance.

BB: Well, we did find out that they did bring a whole lot of people into town.

PS: Yeah, agents assigned here after the Beaver 55 raid.

01:00:00 BB: Yeah. So that was—so I kept instigating and I remember, Tilton [Bill Tilton (1947-)]

 and I drove out to the West Coast after that.

PS: Bill Tilton?

BB: Bill Tilton.

PS: So he hadn’t been involved in the Beaver 55 raids. You must have come upon him somehow or other in the meantime.

BB: Yeah, in fact, we were—Chuck was driving; we were in some car that Chuck was driving and we were down in the Dinkytown area and this guy in a, like a leopard jacket, came up to Chuck and knew Chuck and said, You know, if you do this again, I’d like to be part of it, kind of in a frantic way. And I kind of looked at Chuck and I said, “Who’s this nut job?” [laughs] So that’s—

PS: And that was Bill?

BB: That was Bill.

PS: So, yeah, Bill told me that he had—he didn’t remember exactly how but he had solicited someone to be included if this happened again.

BB: Yep.

PS: Because he was disappointed that he’d missed out.

BB: Yeah.

PS: So people were self-recruiting at that point?

BB: Yeah, absolutely. You know, we went on to try to recruit. We can talk about how badly that was mangled. But then, you know, the numbers grew slowly so Bill was one of the first ones on and I got to know Bill. And then we started doing things, although if I remember right, this may be self-serving so but I think I remember it this way. I did not want to do this open house that we did at Bill’s, which brought in—I bet that night—I don’t know if you were there, Peter, what? Were you?

PS: Yeah, I remember at least one sort of wide open, yeah, open house is about right, where

End of Recording 1

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 2

00:00:00

it seems in retrospect like there were maybe a couple dozen people there, something like that, you know, more than a handful.

BB: Do you remember why people came there?

PS: I don’t remember what was the cause of this gathering or how the word got out. I don’t recall that but it was in the place where Bill was staying on West River Road [West River Road, Minneapolis, MN] and he had space down the lower level of that house and I remember this big gathering and discussing, Well, what were we going to do and how were we going to do it? That kind of thing and that wasn’t the only thing, but—and I don’t remember if it was the beginning of our particular conspiracy in July of that year, but it was one of the main events.

BB: It was, yep, it was. And I was not in favor of it, probably because of the way I was recruited and this one was pretty-- but I don’t remember—I’m saying that’s why it might be self-serving. Maybe I did it, who knows? But I do remember not being an active participant in it and thinking it was fraught with risk

PS: Well, you were right about that.

BB: Yeah. [laughs]

PS: So there was that and there must have been other sort of word of mouth things that led to our group being who and what it was.

BB: Yes, a lot of them were like I remember Mike [Mike Therriault] coming in through I’m not sure who it was, but through a friend, because Mike wasn’t—he may have been at one of those meetings but I remember—

PS: Talking about Mike Therriault who was arrested on that same July evening in 1970 when the rest of us were.

BB: Yes. So you’re right. There was a lot of personal recruiting that was going on.

PS: Sort of friends of the family and—

BB: How did you get in? Through that Riverside meeting?

PS: I’m sure it had to do with people I already knew at or through the Draft Information Center because I, in the year before, had tried unsuccessfully to get CO status and I had been counseled at the Draft Information Center before that. So this was, I mean, I was eighteen in the fall of 1968 so I knew people who were in the draft resistance before that and, for instance, I knew Don Olson before that and I can’t remember who I talked to but I know that there was someone who I approached, just like Bill talked to Chuck and said, “I want to be part of this if you do it again.” So I volunteered in a very similar kind of way.

BB: Yeah, interesting. Yeah, something I didn’t mention and I don’t want to get into it but you’re right. That—when I came down to Minneapolis I talked about that Newman Center, it was also—I was going to TCDIC, Twin Cities [Draft Information Center], and I met Don there and—

PS: Dave Gutknecht [David Gutknecht (1947-)] and other people who were central to that, the counselors and I mean, that was sort of a hub.

BB: That was the hub, absolutely, you know. *Hundred Flowers* and Eddy Felien did the publishing of that, and the great organizer, Honeywell organizer.

PS: Oh, Marv Davidov [Marv Davidov (1932-2012)]?

BB: Marv Davidov and all those people. That really was the hot spot of—

PS: Yeah, that was all in that building at 529 Cedar Avenue [529 Cedar Avenue, Minneapolis, MN].

BB: Yeah.

PS: And other things, too. Later on, our defense committee office was in the basement of that building. I remember us having meetings there. Anyway, so we were sort of assembling ourselves under, in a way, I guess, do you feel like it was you or ultimately you and Frank maybe who were sort of maybe not calling the shots, but kind of coordinating all the things prior to the raid that we did or tried to do in July of that year?

BB: Yeah, so we were trying to keep it going. And I had to keep Frank going and did you interview him or not?

PS: Before that? I mean—

BB: For this. Have you interviewed him?

PS: Not yet.

BB: Okay, he’ll tell you how he didn’t want to do it.

PS: Okay, I’ll make sure to ask him about that. So he was sort of reluctant?

BB: Yeah, but we were friends and I was gung ho so he was a friend and I think the only difference was that, you know, we kind of wanted to do in a distributed manner, instead of

00:05:00 centralizing manner. I’m sure you remember I think everybody went out and cased their own

 places, right?

PS: Well, I never was involved in any casing because that might have been happening before I volunteered myself to whoever it was. So I didn’t go to Winona or any place else before the day of the raid. But I know that people had been there before and to the bunch of other places that we didn’t even try to break into that night. People had been searching around. But the way I remember it being portrayed was, you know, having done these two big local metropolitan draft boards plus the state headquarters, time to go into the county seats in the outlying parts of the state, partly because the information we had then was that a disproportionate number of conscriptees, draftees, then were coming from these rural parts of Minnesota. If you went by strict numbers, they were sending more—they were being—young guys from the rural areas were being drafted more frequently than in the Twin Cities.

BB: Yep.

PS: So that was a reason to do that plus they were probably more vulnerable in these small offices outstate.

BB: Yeah, and it was kind of—the idea was to, you know, keep the Beaver thing going, the conspiracy is still afoot sort of thing, you know, and it’s spreading.

PS: Right, and at that point, I mean, the Beaver 55 moniker was there but it was also sort of linked then, or maybe later, to the Conspiracy to Save Lives idea, which had come out of the East Coast. Does that—that’s what we were going to call ourselves after the event in 1970 in July. That’s what I remember.

BB: Your memory’s better than mine.

PS: Anyway, so you and Frank and really in a way, were the motive force. It was more you than Frank, but the two of you were, because you’d taken part in one of these things before, you were pushing things along.

BB: Pushing things along in kind of a different manner. You know, recruiting people to do their own stuff. So like, Joe, and I won’t mention last names, like I didn’t Jim, but some of the places that were raided, people were not caught. And those people, you know, went out and did their own casing and set everything up kind of on their own. So it was, you know, a distributed model. You do your own work. I happened to do Winona because like I don’t know why I did Winona.

PS: You went down there to case that office at one point previously, right?

BB: I did.

PS: Yeah, so in a way, people who were involved in our July 10, 1970 raid network, there was a certain amount of freelancing involved in that, right?

BB: Absolutely.

PS: Okay, although people might have cased more than one place to decide where to go.

BB: Yeah, I mean, I looked at a lot of places and then we kind of selected the ones based on the number of people we had and then I think there was—we were trying to make by selecting the cities because it made some kind of sign if you looked at it on a map, some kind of—

PS: Symbolic shape or something like that?

BB: Yeah, but there really were a lot more and probably better ones but maybe they didn’t fit into the symbol; I’m not sure what that process was. But, yeah, there was freelancing going on. People took responsibilities for their own site.

PS: But the coordination was with the time, the date.

BB: Yes, and some of the training; some of the thoughts.

PS: Yeah, I remember going to Frank’s office. At that point he was working at St. Catherine’s [St. Catherine University, 2004 Randolph Avenue, St Paul, MN], rather than, and maybe in addition to the Newman Center. I don’t recall that part—to see how to punch out the lock on a file cabinet with a big screwdriver and hammer and I can’t remember if I saw the

00:10:00 “how to” with the glass cutters and little pocket butane torch or not, but there was at least a little

bit of show and tell beforehand. So, all right, so kind of loosely organized; in a way almost like a cell system, with each team being kind of on its own and with some coordination but not a lot. And so we went out to these several places and you and I and Don, to Winona on—well, we left on the morning or middle of the day of July 10, 1970, down to Winona and sort of checked again one more time to make sure that things looked like a go for our raid. What do you remember about that?

BB: Well, I remember the raid, not so much the check before. I think we probably did a walk through to see if any new offices had opened or if there were more people there or something. I remember, let me put it this way. I remember going to one place that I thought was absolutely a great place and I went back and cased it a second time and they had put a motion monitor in. So that’s kind of what we were looking for was, Has anything changed here?

PS: Anything new that would be like an alarm system or something of that kind?

BB: Correct.

PS: Yeah, I went into that office. I was the one who went in to just sort of scan things and see what it looked like and, of course, I’d never been there before so I didn’t know what might be different but I didn’t see any evidence of anything. No stickers on the door about the alarm system we’ve got or things like that. So, anyway, we’ve had other people in other interviews talk about the details of these raids. What do you remember about our attempt itself and what happened in the few days after that?

BB: Well, yeah, well, you know, we climbed up a fire escape ladder onto a roof and then climbed up again through a window and got to the place. I forget how we broke in if we did the butane thing or not, we did. We got in there and within seconds of—so I think we did hear before they came in—we heard something that was odd. I remember that. But lo and behold in the office next to us were FBI agents so they knew all about it. I think we learned later that they didn’t know the exact date, which is somewhat telling, because it means maybe their information wasn’t [from] any one of the eight or so, because there information would have been better. Because I remember them saying, and maybe you know this, too, that they had been there a couple of Fridays or Saturdays. They weren’t sure which one it was.

PS: I don’t remember that part, but—

BB: So they came in and they, you know, tried to roughhouse us a bit. It wasn’t too bad, you know, we weren’t aggressively resisting. There was a bunch of them; guns were pulled so there wasn’t—we were all rational enough to know that we weren’t going to get out of this situation so, you know, we kind of complied and I remember a lot of people gathering outside. I suppose they had the local cops then with their lights on and then we were ushered out and got a lot of support if I remember right. That may be self-serving, but I think I kind of remember people being supportive of the action by yelling antiwar type of slogans. Do you remember that or not?

PS: Well, what I remember is that, to our surprise, that weekend, that Saturday, and maybe Sunday, too, or no, this was on a Friday—we went in on Friday night—and Saturday morning. Anyway, that weekend was a big festival there in Winona. It was something that they—I don’t know if they do it anymore, but they—it was a big summertime thing called Steamboat Days.

BB: Yes.

PS: And there were crowds of people on the street and it was a little bit nervous climbing up and going into the back of this building because people were sort of drifting round through parking lots and things like that. It wasn’t vacant like it normally would be at that sort of time

00:15:00 of night there. And local people there—and that’s who was there outside going up and down

and seeing the flashing lights and so on. They knew, many of them, what was in that office upstairs there and sort of figured out what was going on, I guess. And Don said that he kind of slowly or anyway, he backed himself up, after we were handcuffed, backed himself up to the window that faced the street there where there were crowds of people sort of, Hey, what’s going on here? And flashed a peace sign through the window and that sort of conveyed more about who was there, what was going on. And he said that—I was pretty shook up and nervous and not absorbing a lot of this, but Don said that people cheered or, you know, there was some kind of a rousing response to him doing that. So we were taken out of there and transported back to the Twin Cities and left whose car behind?

BB: Frank’s, I imagine. No, in Winona. Frank wasn’t there. Yeah, but it was his car.

PS: Was it his car? I thought it was your dad’s car.

BB: Maybe it was, yeah. Probably was because Frank was elsewhere, right?

PS: Yeah, yeah.

BB: Yeah, I probably took the family car because I didn’t have one.

PS: So we left some things behind. That was not part of our plan. What was the near aftermath like us going to jail and well, whatever stands out for you after that? I mean, we were in jail for a while and then we were out and planning for our trial, trials.

BB: You know, maybe not a lot Pete, I remember I ended up in the county jail with Bill Tilton.

PS: So you were in the same area there.

BB: Yeah, and I remember saying, Wow! I guess we better, you know, I was full of all these radical plans that people had.

PS: And this was at the county jail, downtown Minneapolis [Hennepin County Adult Detention Center, Minneapolis City Hall, 350 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, MN].

BB: Downtown Minneapolis. And also I was all hep on setting up on education sessions, you know, I mean, these inmates could give a shit about who we were or what we did, right? But I was going to save the world, including them. Bill wasn’t so eager on that; he didn’t think that was such a good idea, which was probably the correct response. But it was, you know, it was my first time in jail so it was a bit shocking.

PS: People you wouldn’t have been around otherwise.

BB: Yeah, you know, and the confinement and it was just the lack of facilities. And jails are not good places to be in. They’re not meant to be. But not a lot of other things come to mind, maybe just that one story about Bill and you know, setting up things to do with the prisoners, you know, the prisoners themselves to—

PS: Trying to relate to those other guys that we were around.

BB: Yeah.

PS: So we were held for several days. Do you have much recollection about how we wound up getting—we had a really high bail set at first.

BB: Yeah, they were charging us with treason and made a big deal out of it and we had a high bail. I think basically it was that—and then friends—and I think it was—I forget the gal’s name that sort of—but then there was, of course, the big demonstration. That was the big event that came out of that which I though was really cool.

PS: That was like the next day so that happened really rapidly after our arrests were made known.

BB: Yes, and I—if I remember right, what I thought was really cool about it is that the people who organized it, Ellen Pence, I thought was kind of the person behind it. Do you remember that?

PS: I know that she was there and was prominent because she broke that flagstaff through the door.

BB: Right.

PS: But I don’t know who was sort of—I don’t remember or maybe never knew, who had

00:20:00 really set that up or tried to get the word out and organize that and I wouldn’t be surprised if

 Ellen had a big part of it, but I bet it wasn’t just her.

BB: Yeah. But it was nice, I mean, it was good for a couple of reasons. One is that, you know, it gave us an adrenalin boost, made us feel like we were right. It also kind of set us up within the cellblock itself as somebodies and, as you learned, and as many people learn when you go into jail, it’s very much a hierarchical system. And if you’re somebody, nobody messes with you and so I didn’t know that at the time but it was, you know, it had that side of it, too.

PS: Because we had, whatever else we didn’t have when we were in there on the old jail cellblocks, there was television on and people could tell—there were news reports about what was going on outside about us and so people kind of got the idea that this big event outside it had to do with these new guys who were inside with them who had fifty thousand dollars bail, which was almost unheard of then and all these guys were saying, golly, you’ll never get out of here.

BB: Yeah, yeah. And the demonstration itself drew a lot of people.

PS: Yeah, it was big.

BB: So it was kind of like you’re the leaders of a big gang, right? Your gang’s bigger than my gang. [laughter]

PS: Yeah, it was—well, it impressed me.

BB: Yeah, it was one of my—yeah, and good for all those people for doing it.

PS: So not many days after they reduced our bail after we had—there was an arraignment and a bail hearing. We were first charged with—it wasn’t with treason; it was with sabotage.

BB: Sabotage, yeah.

PS: And they wound up reducing our bail and I can’t remember if that happened—well, that happened in fairly short order because we were out after five or six days and then we were preparing for trial and shopping for attorneys and things like that. Do you remember much about that?

BB: Not a lot. I mean, I remember setting up the Minnesota 8 and those events in the basement of the Center of Progressive Politics in Dinkytown.

PS: It was on the West Bank.

BB: Or the West Bank, yeah. I’m thinking of two different places; on the West Bank. And we talked about fundraising; we talked about lawyers. That’s when Tilsen [Kenneth Earl Tilsen (1927-2013)] entered and you know, everyone knew about Ken and I’m not sure how he entered in, if he entered in himself or somebody sought him out. I’m not sure how that happened. Maybe you remember. But the, you know, I remember us having a lot of attention that eroded rapidly and all of a sudden we were kind of on our own to keep this thing going which is a very difficult task. And, you know, I think part of that is just America, how rapidly we move from what’s on the news today to what’s on the news tomorrow. But I do remember us sitting in the basement trying to come up with fundraising as well as education as well as, you know, what we’re going to do in the trial and was it going to be like the Chicago 7, wild and crazy or those type of things. Not sure how Ken was introduced or selected. Maybe you remember that.

PS: I remember some but a lot of what I think I remember has been reinforced by others I’ve been talking to over the last few months about this. Ken was well-known locally. He defended other draft resisters but so had a lot of other people. But what I’ve been reminded of—well, I remember that for some time after we got bailed out, our charge was still sabotage and after a while, that got changed to, instead of sabotage of the national defense, it became—they changed the charge to interfering with the operations of the Selective Service System, a more conventional kind of thing because that’s really what we’d been doing. And after that

00:25:00 happened, we concluded that it would be just fine to have Ken or maybe someone else local,

who was experienced with Selective Service cases, be our attorney. But sabotage was something that was a new idea. No one had ever been charged with that for one of these raids before.

BB: Yes.

PS: That’s what I’ve been reminded of and so, we pretty willingly, happily, went with Ken because he was available and knowledgeable about Selective Service law and that really wound up being what our situation was, Selective Service, not sabotage anymore.

BB: Yes, it’s good that you bring that back because I remember we tried to get the Chicago 7 attorney—

PS: One of them, yeah, Leonard Weinglass [Leonard Irving Weinglass (1933-2011)]. Yeah, we interviewed him or he interviewed us, however that worked because this was maybe going to be a great big deal. Plus we thought or imagined at the time early on, that we’d have one big trial with all of us in court at one time, sort of like in Chicago. And it didn’t wind up being like that but we were thinking this could turn into a big national event.

BB: Yeah, we wanted it to.

PS: Yeah, yeah. We were—this was a way to keep the educational aspect of this going beyond speaking engagements and things like that. So, anyway, it came around to—Ken was our attorney except some of us defended ourselves in each of our trials. We had three different trials. Ours was the second trial. Does that sound right to you?

BB: Right.

PS: And your father helped with all this because he was an experienced attorney although that wasn’t his field exactly, but he worked with Ken a great deal in doing background and prep work for all of this. What do you remember about that?

BB: Well—

PS: It’s not like your father stepped back from things because you’d gotten involved in something like this. He was right there.

BB: Yeah, good point. I’m glad you bring it up. He was—he was at the trial itself and did a lot of work for Ken, even though Ken was kind of the lead attorney and then my brother was also involved.

PS: Yes, that’s right.

BB: He went out and got—you have to have a federal license and—

PS: To be admitted to practice for the federal bar.

BB: Right, right. And my dad had been and Bruce went out and got this and they were both involved in preparation but the point most importantly is that, you know, Dad stepped up and it wasn’t—he wasn’t running from it.

PS: And your mom, too.

BB: Yes. She, okay, I remember when we first got out of jail, I met Mom and Dad at a restaurant and that was a difficult meeting, more so with Mom than with Dad. Dad was kind of a take it as it goes and Mom was concerned about reputation and the law practice and things like that. But Mom still came over, you know, and then got pretty passionate about it once they started thinking about the situation differently. And I think that’ s a lot of, you know, a life—I mean, that’s what the educational side of this progressive movements are is that if you have a situation and you’re viewing it from a certain perspective, if you can crack open a door and allow somebody else to see from another perspective whether it’s, you know, because your son is involved or because it’s close to home or whatever allows that perspective to seep in, people can and do often make some pretty significant changes in their lives.

You know, I look forward to hearing your story. I suspect your mom has a lot to do with your radicalization, but, you know, it really is this: How do you give people a different perspective on the same event in a way that is powerful enough and compelling enough that they will begin to behave in different ways? So you’re right. I mean, Dad was there sooner but Mom came aboard and got very involved and did lots of things later on to the point of even writing that play.

00:30:00 PS: Yeah. Speaking of your mom and our trial, our trial in particular, you were—one of us

—I was the one who was nominally represented particularly by Ken in our trial. You opted to be attorney pro se for yourself, right? Am I remembering that right because you spoke a good deal in the courtroom?

BB: Well, but that was more boring.

PS: Even though none of us were ever on the stand as witnesses for the defense or prosecution.

BB: Yeah, I’ll tell you one quick story since you asked is that—so I went out and told Frank to call in a bomb threat. You remember that?

PS: [laughs] No, I don’t remember that.

BB: So he did. Good old Frank and during that—there was chaos during that time.

PS: This is while our trial was going on?

BB: While our trial was going on. And there was also another event, too. Remember some people came in and did something down the hallway?

PS: You mean in the courthouse?

BB: Yeah.

PS: I don’t remember that. I’m not saying it didn’t happen but I don’t remember that.

BB: Okay, so maybe it was the bomb threat itself. Do you remember that?

PS: I don’t really remember that either.

BB: Oh, okay, yeah, that took place and they got us all out of there. And the story, all I remember is that during the chaos, and it was chaos, is that—what made me think of this is when you—I’d forgotten I did the pro se thing, you know, which is—talk about arrogance. Is that Chuck came up to me and said, “Read this into the record.” And he had his Jewish book.

PS: Oh, the Torah?

BB: The Torah—is that it? And so he wanted that in the record so I was standing next to the gal who was doing the, you know, the transcribing, the court reporter, reading these lines from the Torah that I couldn’t pronounce and had no idea what was going on. [laughter] So that was kind of cute, a side effect of the big bomb scare.

PS: The thing I particularly remember about our trial was that we had a mistrial because some of the jurors, some of the people in the jury pool—

BB: You’re right.

PS: were overheard—

BB: Mom overheard these people at lunch.

PS: I thought it was your mom who was the agent for this happening, heard people talk, heard the jurors talking about us and probably in particular about Don, who had long, curly blond hair then, and saying disparaging things about long hair. What do you remember about that and what she really did?

BB: Yeah, just that. She heard it and they were clearly, while the trial was still taking place—

PS: It was really early on, wasn’t it?

BB: Yeah, had already made up their minds and were expressing that at the dinner table. Mom heard it and talked to Dad and they brought it up. I’m sure it went up through Ken formally but you’re right; it did result—it was a good move. It resulted in a mistrial and, you know, added to the chaos of the event, which I think really was kind of what—we wanted it to be a big deal. They were smart enough to break it down into three; they figured that out.

PS: Yeah, that was something that they, the feds, wanted to have happen. It wasn’t our idea to do that.

BB: Yep, and they were getting smarter and smarter as more of these things took place, especially when the Chicago 8 slash 7 took place and, you know, I remember that’s all I wanted to do during the trial is create as much chaos as possible. That’s why the bomb scare and—

PS: And to be in the news; I mean, to keep it on the front page so to speak of current events, at least locally here, right?

BB: Absolutely, yep. That was always the challenge. How do you stay on the front page which is difficult to do unless you’re doing crazy things.

PS: Yeah, I don’t remember the bomb scare. So Frank did that and we got evacuated. Maybe I sort of remember that but it’s—a lot of those details are pretty faint for me now. The broad strokes not so bad, but those procedural things don’t stick as well, at least with me. So Frank and Bill had already been convicted when—or Chuck and Bill had already been convicted and that’s when—so after that, that’s when Chuck gave you this passage to read into the record.

00:35:00 BB: I had no idea what it was. I should go back—he didn’t mention that huh? I wonder

 what it was.

PS: Yeah, I’ll ask him about that another time. So we were convicted as well and it was fairly straightforward. I mean, there wasn’t any real doubt about what was going on and then we got sentenced and we were out on appeal for a while. What was that period like between conviction and later on when our appeal was turned down and we had to turn ourselves in. What was that like for you?

BB: Well, are you talking before the third trial because I think the third trial is important.

PS: Oh yes, I’m not sidestepping that. I’m just asking, you know, particularly about you. How does that period, which was over a year, between our conviction and our having to report to start doing our sentences? It was a long period of time. What sort of things were you doing then?

BB: Oh, goodness. The—

PS: Were you traveling or staying in town here or—?

BB: Well, I did—I was living with a woman and I stayed there. I kept trying—I remember getting a little more—she was an artist—

PS: Lorna?

BB: Yeah, Lorna. Went to the Minneapolis School of Art [Minneapolis College of Art and Design, 2501 Stevens Avenue, Minneapolis, MN]; I remember having her paint—did a beautiful job of this picture of Marx [Karl Marx (1818-1883)] on the wall that we were living in and she did a fabulous job. It was kind of a silhouette type of thing and I remember getting a thirty ought six from a friend of mine with a scope and there’s a police station down where we were living and I would go to the windows at times and just go through that process. So, you know, I was—

PS: Thinking about it, huh?

BB: Thinking about, you know, just thinking about things and how you—what do you do next? How do you up the ante? So that was most of it. It was mostly—I did get involved in a free clinic.

PS: I didn’t know about that. I don’t remember.

BB: Yeah, and that was real interesting. In fact, it was a real credit to some of the Mayo brothers so one of the Mayo—it was obviously not the founding Mayo brothers, but one of the sons of or son of whatever—

PS: Grandson or something.

BB: Yeah, he was a very good doc, would come up and hold this clinic that was on Lake Street [Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN].

PS: Ah, sort of occasional free clinic kind of thing?

BB: And I was working in there so I did that on a regular basis and then experimented with these other kind of things and did, you know, try to just keep it together personally best I could with the relationship and things like that. I—I think that’s when Tilton and I traveled west in Frank’s car, which there’s a lot of stories that were kind of fun there. That’s when I—my wife was living with another man at a commune out in Washington—

PS: You mean your now wife.

BB: My now wife. And—who I hadn’t seen for quite a while, and Bill and I drove out there and I walked up to the door and, you know, started wooing my wife as she’s living with this other guy. Bill always got a kick out of that. He thought that was a pretty crazy thing to do. [laughs] He’ll tell that story almost every time I see him. You know how relationships are. You focus in on one or two things and repeat them again and again. So we did travel and then we went down to Big Sur and driving Frank’s little green rambler as high as could be and we had a couple stories there. It was enjoyable. That was the closest I got to Bill and the most that I liked him, you know, during our relationship. That was a fun trip, just kind of forgetting everything that was going on.

PS: A road trip like any young guys who were friends might do.

BB: Exactly, exactly.

PS: It’s not like you were trying to hit high points of resistance activity or things like that.

BB: No.

PS: You were just having a good time for a change, relaxing.

BB: Yeah, we were seeing, you know, we were seeing jail coming. It was kind of one of those things and Bill loves to travel—any excuse to travel he’s aboard.

PS: Yeah, so this was—anyway, this was after our conviction but before Frank and Mike’s trial probably? Hard to tell?

00:40:00 BB: Hard to tell, but back to your original question, what kind of—what were we doing

during that period of time? And a lot of it really was trying to—at each trial you try to learn from the last one and do something different in it and then the whole Ellsberg [Daniel Ellsberg (1931-)] thing came out in Frank and Mike’s and I remember us spending a lot of time talking about that.

PS: Us talking about that meaning the—?

BB: Do you involve Dan? How do you involve him? Can he, you know, can he really let this Pentagon Paper thing go at the time? I remember there were discussions with Ken and with Dan and then there were meetings so there was a lot more involvement around Frank—Frank and Mike right?

PS: Yeah, their trial where a lot of things were seeming possible because it was before a different judge.

BB: Before a different judge who had a bit of a reputation of crossing the line or potentially so—and I think that was a great lesson because everyone really thought that this judge was going to let more into the courtroom, more radical thought; more radical speech, you know, more evidence that would point out the wrongdoing of the war and, of course, he didn’t.

PS: Well, he let a lot of people testify.

BB: Yes, but then he said none of it is relevant.

PS: Yes.

BB: Yes, yeah, but you’re right. There was—that trial had—was closer to what we had hoped would take place in the other trials which were run by a real tough old-fashioned judge and it was just—This is about Selective Service operations and nothing else.

PS: Yeah.

BB: It has nothing to do with the war so cut it out.

PS: Yeah, no justification allowed there except for the statements that some of us made individually. But at Frank and Mike’s trial, there was lots of potential “why we did it” testimony, even though it didn’t come to anything in the end.

BB: Right.

PS: You brought up Dan Ellsberg and his involvement in that trial. There were many others who were prominent people, more prominent than he because no one knew really who he was then. What do you remember about that in particular because he became so notorious, famous, infamous, depending on who you were, not long after that. But his attempt in Frank and Mike’s trial was to do what?

BB: He had, as everyone may—who’s listening to this would remember he had the Pentagon Papers.

PS: Already had them.

BB: Already had them and was trying to release them. If you remember his story, you know, he had been CIA; he had been RAND Corporation [RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA]; and he had been in the military and been in Vietnam; had this great background. Very high strung, very bright fellow.

PS: And a real academic star, kind of, in his way.

BB: Yes, real bright fellow. He had the—and he had been trying to find a path to release these Pentagon Papers, which we all know what they were. And we know ultimately that happened to the newspapers. But, I’m not sure who brought Dan in, but somehow he saw—so he was having a hard time releasing them. He saw this as an avenue that they might be released. And that’s what his attempt was and so there were discussions because you’re right. Nobody knew who he was at the time. Who is this guy? What are you going to say? What are you going to do? How does this play out, etcetera? You know, and we thought we were big time and so the reality is he knew what he had and he knew how big it was going to be. So there was lots of discussion and fortunately, he did get to the stand and got to say some things but the judge did shut him down on introducing the Pentagon Papers.

PS: You mean even though the judge didn’t really know what he had then? Is that what your recollection is?

BB: Well, he—

PS: He was ready to introduce some of these things in his testimony, but did anyone besides he and Ken know what was in his briefcase when he was on the stand?

BB: No, I don’t think anybody did, including the judge, but I think that the judge in that—and you’re right, he was a better judge in the sense of letting people speak, but he was still the same judge when it came to, you know, We’re not going to be changing any law here, boys.

00:45:00 You’re not getting free on any justification. So it didn’t even matter; it was just that, No, you

can’t introduce this stuff because it’s got nothing to do with it. So whenever the—Neville [Philip Neville (1909-1974)] was his name. Whenever the situation came to, Am I going to alter the course of events here? Because people always knew we were going to be convicted and wanted us convicted, etcetera. You know, even not knowing what was—what documents Dan had and how important or unimportant they may have been—which is one path he could have gone—because hell, this guy’s got nothing, but no, he didn’t let Dan go any further than preliminary testimony.

PS: Okay, so at that point, when Frank and Mike’s trial was going on that you were just describing, we had already been convicted. We were out on appeal, an appeal bond, waiting for the circuit court to rule on our convictions, yours, Don’s and mine, and Bill and Chuck’s, because our—those trials had happened in close conjunction with each other, sort of one right after the other. The time came, ultimately, when our appeals were turned down and we were told to report to start serving our sentences. Talk about that a little bit and what you remember happening then and how that played out. We didn’t exactly do what they told us to do.

BB: No, we didn’t. In fact, we had a demonstration out at the Veterans Cemetery—

PS: At Fort Snelling [Fort Snelling National Cemetery, 7601 34th Avenue South,

Minneapolis, MN].

BB: At Fort Snelling, yeah. And we were a day later or a dollar short or something and we broke the time limit.

PS: We didn’t come in the day they told us to.

BB: Right, right.

PS: Do you remember much about that precisely? I mean, we were fugitives for a few days. It was more than a day.

BB: Yeah, I don’t remember a lot about it other than I do remember that the reality is beginning to sink in. I remember that at that rally at Fort Snelling that we had a hard time finding any optimistic energy. I do remember that we were watching all the time, thinking that at any time, they would come out of the crowd and grab us and pull us off because, you’re right, we were fugitives at that point. So we were still living a bit in that fog, fog of passion. But, it was good in a sense is that, you know, at most every corner we tried even though we didn’t have a lot of options, tried to continue the resistance, the, you know—I’m not going to do things the way you want us to do it. And, you know, I mean, that’s good stuff and maybe we weren’t the most theatrical and didn’t create the biggest stir but we did make efforts to do that. So that’s all I really remember is there still was an active defiance and resistance, just not so much fun. Like the raid was fun up until we got busted; all that stuff was fun and all of a sudden, it wasn’t much fun anymore.

PS: It got to be serious. Yeah, just to interject and see if this matches with your memory, what I remember about that—when we were supposed to turn ourselves in, and then actually did a few days later, they wanted us to report to be in custody the day before Thanksgiving in November of 1971. So we would be taken away from our families and homes the day before this big national feel-good holiday and that’s one of the reasons that we didn’t go along with that, that we did whatever we did with our families but we didn’t turn ourselves in. I mean, I remember being at Thanksgiving Day with my extended family. The day after, we were supposed to report for being in custody and it was a couple days after that on the weekend, or maybe it was the Monday after Thanksgiving, but that’s when we turned ourselves in and had that event out at Fort Snelling and then went to the Federal Building [Old Federal Building, 212 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN] downtown. And I heard that they hunted for you

00:50:00 at Lorna’s apartment. They tried to or they—feds, marshals or FBI went there looking for you

 but they didn’t necessarily make a big effort or that kind of effort with everybody else.

BB: I remember them—I didn’t know the latter part. I do remember that we left and went elsewhere because we, again, back to the fog of our passions, were sure that they were behind every rock and they were coming to get us so I was playing that fantasy out. I guess, I didn’t know; I figured they were doing it to everybody so I didn’t know it was just that. I think the important point that you make there, Pete, which is good is that, you know, the government and the—everyone involved in the court system and the policing system—they would go out of their ways to make things difficult for us.

PS: People like us, so not just us.

BB: Yes. Yeah, I think that’s fair; probably to absolutely everybody who goes through those systems from even the smallest things. I remember being driven down—we were going down to prison—it was in Janesville [Janesville, WI] and we were stopping for lunch and these—and I’m in chains and ankle bracelets and wrist bracelets and in some orange/yellow marked up suit and these guys had to parade me into McDonald’s.

PS: This was in Janesville, Wisconsin?

BB: Yeah. And it was like, Just like give me a hamburger.

PS: They made a spectacle of you.

BB: They needed to—so it was always, you know, let’s try to demean me or maybe they thought they were boosting their own—people are going to be looking at them like, Boy, oh boy, you’re super cops or something. I don’t know what’s behind it but there was always that effort made on a continuous basis. You can even say the stuff that Neville did where he would let people speak but would never allow the line to be crossed. Letting people speak was while it may make him feel good, it really kind of was in the situation. You know, let these people think that they’re going to get away with something. I don’t know. He’s a dead man; I not going to speak too much about him, but I didn’t see anyone go out of their way to be understanding or take a step to make our lives a bit easier. I saw people go out of their ways to make it more difficult, even on small, not with large things, but even on the smallest events.

PS: Yeah, I was struck and sort of shocked at just how petty and vindictive they could be, like this, Come in the day before Thanksgiving, you know, what—that was just meanness.

BB: Exactly and that’s what set me off on that. That’s exactly what that was; it was those kind of things.

PS: Yeah, and just meanness for its own sake; it’s not because it was going to accomplish some other greater thing. It was just being—

BB: Pricks.

PS: being snotty, yeah. Talk about your prison experience. You wound up in a couple places. You started out in Ashland, Kentucky, right?

BB: Yeah.

PS: We’re going to pause for a minute here. Okay, so recording again after another short break and time for the prison experience, what that was like and where it was and all that.

BB: Yeah, you know, I’ll go through some of the highlights because I’m sure since you spoke with everybody, you know, there’s going to be a lot of repeat things, but I think it was, as I mentioned—the whole Janesville experience, you know, the federal agents take us in—

PS: The marshals.

BB: Marshals, you know, put us in the car and drive and I end up going to Ashland, Kentucky [now Federal Correctional Institution, Ashland, Boyd County, KY], which was a youth camp because I was underage at the time. I must have been just twenty I suppose.

PS: So when we were arrested were you either almost twenty-one or in the summer of 1970, if your birthday is in–

BB: Forty-nine, so ’69 would have been—so I must have been just under twenty-one. I suppose twenty-one is the majority so I must have been twenty. And because of that I was sent to the youth camp.

PS: Like I was.

BB: Yeah, just us.

PS: Yeah, right.

BB: Down in Ashland—where did you go?

PS: Englewood [Federal Correctional Institution, Englewood, Littleton, CO].

BB: Yeah, that’s right.

PS: The west side version of the youth centers.

BB: You know, it was, so it was a long drive down with two snotty marshals and—

PS: Mine were snotty, too.

BB: Yeah, you know, who had nothing to say and the only things they talked about were boring and they didn’t want to talk to you and they had a terrible choice of music and it was a long, long drive.

00:55:00 PS: Was it just you or were you with other people in [unclear]?

BB: It was just me. The only interesting thing on the ride down, or the Janesville McDonald’s story as an example, is I did end up in Cook County [Cook County Jail, Chicago, IL] for about five days.

PS: Yeah, because they’re sort of legs of transportation with this so they parked you in Cook County—

BB: Which was an eye opener.

PS: I bet.

BB: If you thought Hennepin County was bad, Cook County is just unbelievable in the sense of the amount of people that they have in a confined space so it was really packed. And the—everybody, of course, you try to hang out not in your cells but in the common area.

PS: In the day room?

BB: Yeah, and, of course, that was basically Chicago hoods and kids like that. It was a more intimidating environment than Hennepin and while nothing happened, it was a wake-up that this might not be much fun, this next leg of my life here.

PS: So it was kind of nervous.

BB: Yeah, you’re always, you know, you’re a little white boy and you’re in a big, tough prison in a big, tough city and you don’t know what’s going to happen. Again, the reality is that most people are just people—they don’t care about you. They don’t want to mess with you. They’re not going to—it’s all your own racism and belief in the stories that you saw on TV and it’s all, once again, flawed fantasy and nothing else.

So I had a perfectly fine experience and, you know, spoke with people and nothing happened, but it was still intimidating and it was, you know, the real lack in these kind of jails, you just really are an animal. So these folks who are in for juvenile crimes, that kind of stuff, I mean, my heart’s with them because they’re in the worst of conditions with no consideration. If you need—I remember one guy needed some health care, you know, the cops didn’t care about that; wouldn’t get him any and you’d see people who really had major psychological problems and they were left to themselves. And when fights broke out there wouldn’t be any try to fix it, it was just inmates themselves would have to figure when it was over and who was involved and this kind of thing. So it—that is the whole county jail system is pretty rank. If anybody needs a cause, there’s one, you know.

So anyway, down in Kentucky it was close to Ashland. It was out, you know, I suppose outside of town somewhere. It was single level buildings, high fence, diamond wire, whatever that round wire is, whatever they call that stuff.

PS: Oh, that concertina wire?

BB: Concertina, is that, yeah, you know, around the tops, guard posts. And they put you in, as I’m sure they put you as well; they put you in solitary for the first week or so and that was a wake-up because at least in the county jails there was somebody to talk to and something going on or listen to or TV or radio or something going on. But in solitary it was you and a very small sight path to the prison guards and not much more. I remember being pretty darn depressed at that point in time, although the—what was kind of fun and came to be very useful, is that they had—as I drove down, and because I spent so much time in Cook County, I hadn’t shaved for more than a week or so. And they had just changed the regulations in youth camps that you could wear a mustache. You couldn’t wear a beard. So I let my—I kept the mustache and I was like the only guy in the place to have a mustache so I came out kind of looking like

01:00:00 the fellow, while I was in solitary, who was doing the food—talk about, Wow, man, that’s

 the old guy. And I remember cool. So I had status coming out, you know, I was big time.

I don’t know what to say about jail. There were a couple of incidents. I ended up bunking next to a bunch of southern hillbillies that were in federal prison because they were three time losers. They basically do car jackings is what they were and after a certain amount of time it becomes a, no longer state, but a federal—or maybe it’s if you cross state lines or something.

PS: Yeah, crossing state lines in a stolen car.

BB: And they were nice guys and they were young but they were just the guys; I mean, they were just absolute salt of the earth southern guys who didn’t want to do anything about politics or this or that. I was involved—I got to know a couple of very interesting guys who were CO’s, very bright guys—one who had been conscripted, but to be in the CIA, whose father was in the government, Eddie—I forget his name - and a couple other people. I did meet a fellow, Palmer Singleton, who ended up working for the Southern Legal—

PS: Southern Poverty Law Center [Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, AL]?

BB: Yes. And Palmer and I were good friends for quite a while and then after a while, things, just too far to maintain the relationship but I would always travel down—he stayed in Atlanta [Atlanta, GA]; still in Atlanta and worked for that organization for a long time, which, if anybody is listening out there, is really a great, and continues to be a wonderful institution, trying to get folks out of prison and people who’ve been either trumped up or lack of evidence cases, try to get them out of jail or people who have had bad attorneys. It’s a wonderful group.

PS: He was a CO as well, or—?

BB: He was a CO; he was a Quaker and he was a CO and then there was—so there was about

End of Recording 2

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 3

00:00:00

four CO’s from the east and they were all really interesting guys in their own way and in very different—so you had Palmer as a Quaker and there was this other guy, coming out of high level government and he being very bright guy and because the father, CIA looking at him early on to try to, you know.

PS: Oh, so they were recruiting him. He hadn’t been conscripted before but you meant they were trying to get him.

BB: They were trying to get him, yeah. So there was a group of us and we decided, I’m not sure what set it off, but we did organize a strike successfully and it was kind of interesting so that was one event that took place. And they got—there isn’t a lot of humor with police, you know, and prison guards and that whole world. So they—and they overreact to everything, just everything. So we had the strike, a work strike, and nobody showed up and we organized it and we put up signs in the bathrooms and that kind of stuff. And sure enough, the day came and nobody went to work and sure enough, the prison—what’s the guy who’s—?

PS: The warden?

BB: The warden overreacted and they brought in all kinds—they brought in the military; they brought in all kinds of state troopers and local troopers, you know, they just had cars and sirens and the whole thing. And then they moved us from—I think we still had, you know, they had to feed us. So then the walkways between the bunk areas, these single story buildings—

PS: Sort of like dormitories or like a barracks.

BB: Like a barracks, yeah, they’re just—there’s no place to hide. It’s just cots after cots and have a little thing next to you to put your—

PS: A little locker.

BB: Foot locker, yeah. And they would line the walkways between like the lunch place and the dorms or whatever they are, with cops with guns and march us single file back and forth. It was like, really guys? We didn’t want to do anything today. This was not some radical takeover or whatever. But we did it. I ended up then being in solitary for about four months.

PS: Really, so they put you in the hole in a big way—

BB: Yes, they—

PS: not just thirty days or a couple weeks or something.

BB: And it was with the rest of the guys that they identified, too. We had snitches; that’s how they identified—

PS: Sure.

BB: and it was those guys that I mentioned. And then I was shipped off ultimately to go—so there are a couple of other stories in there. I also made friends with a young black man from Chicago and he and I would lift weights together and he took my girlfriend’s picture because he didn’t have a picture of a girl. And he asked me for it and it was a really friendly thing. And then the black Muslims saw him hanging out with me and Sidney also—it was really funny—Sidney tried to escape like the fifth day we were there. And he tried to escape a number of times. He was really kind of an unusual guy. But the Muslims didn’t like seeing the black and white guys being buddies so they started recruiting him and sure enough, I mean, they were successful in it and he would just say, not in a—not really a mean way—but he’d just kind of say, “Brad, we can’t lift together anymore,” or “I have my bunk down with the black guys,” and yada yada. So that was just an interesting story. And then the strike was kind of interesting.

Solitary was a real drag. The way we did communicate because ventilation systems on the inside of the cells and we could yell through that so we would talk to one another a little bit. They’d come and shut you down.

Then, on the way to Sandstone [Federal Correctional Institution, Sandstone, Sandstone, MN]—

PS: So when you got out of solitary, you were on your way elsewhere? They didn’t want you there anymore?

BB: Right.

PS: So that was what? Promptly you went from solitary to transportation?

BB: Exactly.

PS: So you didn’t go back in the general population after that solitary after the strike at all?

BB: No, and I’m sure they do—I’m sure that’s a countrywide prison policy. They try to—they identify the gang leaders and then they get rid of them.

PS: Yeah, sure, put them somewhere where they don’t have a support system or anything so they’re re-isolated sort of.

BB: Exactly.

00:05:00 PS: Okay. So you went—you were sent to Sandstone back much closer to home.

BB: Yeah, but on the way up—

PS: And when in calendar time was that approximately? I mean, we went in the very end of November of 1971.

BB: We spent what? Twenty months in total? Right? So I’d say it was ten months into the deal. I spent about half the time at Sandstone and half the time—

PS: In Ashland?

BB: In Ashland.

PS: Okay.

BB: But on the way up it was interesting—so on the way up—

PS: Back here.

BB: coming up to Sandstone, which is like I was talking about Cook County, so this time they put me in Terre Haute [United States Penitentiary, Terre Haute, Terre Haute, IN], which is a state penitentiary, which was another eye opener. And so—

PS: So they parked you in a state institution rather than a county jail or a federal prison?

BB: Yes, and they put me on a different routine so I wasn’t with the actual prisoner routine so whenever they were out, I was locked up and vice versa.

PS: So they kind of kept you isolated there, as well?

BB: And I have no idea why but it was an eye opener in the sense that it was kind of like Cook County on a massive level. I mean, there were tons of guys there. There were really small cells; I think the smallest cells I’ve been in. There was no supervision, you know, you talk about shankings and fights and that kind of stuff, well, you bet, because when the yard was open or something like that the closest anybody was was up in the gun tower. And this place—this is one of those, oh, St. Cloud [Minnesota Correctional Facility - St. Cloud, St. Cloud, MN] type of things—brick, looks like a medieval castle.

PS: Big old—

BB: Big old thing, yeah. And nothing was updated and everything was beat up and there was just a lot of people very gang oriented and running, you could see that. But, again, the same lesson is that nobody messed with me, you know, the few interactions I did have. So I was there a couple weeks and, you know, your fear was self-created; it wasn’t produced by events that had taken place. But it goes back to that same thing is that, you know, this whole prison system from city to county to state to federal is just really a mess and there is no good coming out of them, you know, unless a prisoner, inmate—makes of it what they can and makes something happen. But there is no effort whatsoever by any of those people—don’t let them kid you—that they’re trying to improve the skills or whatever or the mindset or anything about it. It’s just total—a cattle yard.

PS: It’s just punishment and confinement; it’s not rehabilitation.

BB: No, not even an effort.

PS: Yeah, yeah. So in a way maybe you were just as happy to not be in the general population at Terre Haute for the time you were there.

BB: Yeah, but, you know—

PS: Just because—

BB: I had lunch with them—

PS: That was about it, huh?

BB: That was about it, yeah.

PS: So you went from there in your second leg to Sandstone? You didn’t stop over on the way anywhere else?

BB: No, went there and showed up in Sandstone and that was kind of a relief. It was recognizable country. In fact, Sandstone was close to where my uncle and aunt lived. In fact, when I got out of Sandstone, I walked to their place, took about three hours, but it was really nice.

PS: Nice to able to get out and be able to stretch and see the sky and all that, right?

BB: You know, so we came into Sandstone—

PS: And you knew people there.

BB: And I knew people there. They were good friends and I had fun. I organized this basketball team—that’s why that thing about Gutknecht [David Gutknecht (1947-)]—remember that email thing?

PS: Oh, yeah.

BB: So I would—when the new guys came in, I would watch the people going in and take the guys that looked like good athletes—

PS: You were recruiting ball players.

BB: Recruiting ball players.

PS: Instead of subversives, huh?

BB: So that was kind of fun. [laughs] And we did have a good basketball team. And it was cool because it was the only team—we had an Indian; we had a couple black guys; we had this big tall kid from the East Coast, you know, Gutknecht, Turchick, so we had them tall, short, black and white and it was—we always won, you know, just because everybody else would

00:10:00 play kind of ghetto ball, one on one, and we had a real—more of a team than that. That was a

 good time.

And then watching Chuck, of course, Chuck—and there was a Frenchman [Jacques Vermeulen] there, who was as good at table tennis as Chuck was.

PS: You’re talking about this fellow whose name I don’t remember right now, but yeah.

BB: And they would put on just exhibitions. I mean, everybody else is there trying to get good, but, you know, you’d sit back and watch these guys, it was like, Whoa, what’s this? We’ve got talent here.

PS: Yeah.

BB: Chuck was quite good at one point.

PS: He was a ranked player in Minnesota and this French guy, he was on—Chuck told me, I think, on the French national team of some kind. I mean, he was—

BB: He was good.

PS: Yeah. So these guys were way above the usual bouncing around kind of play.

BB: Yeah, it was like watching the Olympics. It was serious stuff. You know, there wasn’t a lot—I tried to make—so I was there about ten months, you know, made friends with some people, had some stories. You know, Mike Therriault was in the kitchen and he’d always sneak out chocolate and peanut butter and stuff to us, you know, and he made—did you interview him or do you because of—? Yeah.

So Mike made—Sandstone is one of those places where they would send mafia people.

PS: Yeah, there were lots of organized crime people there. And just to back up a little bit, so Dave Gutknecht was there; Frank Kroncke and Chuck Turchick and Mike Therriault, who were all part of our team at different locations.

BB: Right, even Pence [David Pence (1946-)] came in for a couple months.

PS: Right, so there were people from the Twin Cities who you knew and people that you were more or less convicted with there, too, although Don was never there and I was never there, but there were quite a number of draft resistance people there of one stripe or another, right?

BB: Absolutely. And they would bring in other people, you know, other draft guys, CO’s or whatever and back to what I said much, much earlier, is that we ended up having the biggest gang. Yeah, we did. And nobody messed with us; nobody messed with us at all. There were lots of fights. I was in a couple of fights in prison, down in Ashland, but up in Sandstone, we were—kind of did what we wanted to because they saw we hung together; we had numbers and—

Now the organized crime guys had it all, I mean, because they were paying off guards and doing that kind of stuff but Mike became friends with those guys; they liked Mike a lot; they just loved him and they would sneak food out, so there was some stories there but nothing too unusual. You read—there was a gal who came up—what was her name?

PS: A visitor? Like a Quaker visitor?

BB: Yeah, except she was a radical—Lenore Burgard.

PS: Oh, yeah. She wrote to me frequently.

BB: So she was quite impressive, you know, none of us knew her and out of nowhere—

PS: Not before.

BB: I mean, she was visiting I’m sure monthly would come up and see me and you’d have visits as you—and all the rest have said, I’m sure, is that they were not so much fun.

PS: Visits could be disruptive and upsetting.

BB: Yes, absolutely. And so I had like down in Ashland, I didn’t have any.

PS: Yeah, right, it was too far from home.

BB: Too far, so you just kind of make your friends and get your routine down and do the best you could. So Sandstone became a little more disruptive because everybody was around and sometimes you’re just like, I mean, I don’t want to go through this. I think mainly because it reminded you that they went home and you weren’t going home. And that’s kind of what it was; I’m not sure.

PS: Yeah, plus you had to shift gears from being on the inside to communicating, interacting with people who weren’t like everyone else around you. That’s something I remember and having trouble shedding that sort of—leaving that shell of self-protection behind and being able to be human again with people who were close to you, was difficult and sometimes I wasn’t able to do it.

BB: I think that’s a good point. And I think that I was fortunate or all of us were fortunate in Sandstone for that reason is that we weren’t intimidated on the inside and we didn’t have to

00:15:00 keep our guard up quite so high and whereas you and Don and guys who were out by yourself,

you know, it’s still an intimidating circumstance even though a lot of that fear and concern and heightened sensitivity is self-generated, it still is a prison and you got a lot of odd characters.

Like, for instance, when I got out—I don’t know if you want to go into that now or not—

PS: Sure.

BB: So a lot of the guys that we got to know were also in the radicals so there were some guys who were, you know, fake Black Panthers. Why do I say fake? I hung out with them after I got out and first things that they did is their names changed from Wadinga back to Pretty Freddy and they were passing bad checks and selling heroin, right? So I mean, it was just once the door had closed it was back to this persona, which was very instructive to me. So we thought on the inside, I mean, we were—

PS: Thought you knew who someone was.

BB: Yeah, and we were doing this radical stuff and what we can do later on and once you got out, the whole thing just really changed.

PS: It devolved into regular criminal life again, huh?

BB: Absolutely.

PS: Talk about that a little bit because my recollection is that when you got out, it wasn’t a real smooth straight ahead path for you.

BB: Yeah, I mean, it was a—

PS: To the extent that you want to talk about it.

BB: Yeah, I’m not sure—I ended up going to Winona to aircraft—when you got out, as you remember, you had to have a job or school or something.

PS: Something, right.

BB: So I’d always been—I always had liked aviation because when I grew up I grew up next to what’s called Flying Farmers and I always used to watch them out in the cornfields so there was an aviation school down in Winona and I went down there. And there were a few things happened there like one of the guys—the guy who ran it was a military guy and one of the students who was a young man and a nice man, drowned one weekend and I remember this military guy just went through it and nobody could talk about it, you know, and things as usual. It was just interesting to watch his reaction instead of letting people kind of mourn it or be involved, he did this military thing.

You know, I got involved with, you know, music, and the things that came along with music. So I taught myself, mostly in Sandstone, because I didn’t have it elsewhere, but I taught myself guitar in prison and got to be okay at it. And once when I was down in Winona at the aviation school, then I got involved in a band and started playing music once again, once again meaning I had done that in high school.

PS: When you say aviation school you mean pilot training rather than like airframe and power plant or mechanic or what?

BB: As a mechanic, airplane mechanic.

PS: Okay, A&P. [Airframe and/or Powerplant (A&P) certificate which is issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)]—

BB: A&P—there was something that, you know, I was still always—and even when I went to college, I was always, and it was probably through the radicalization sense, even though I grew up middle class I kind of always saw myself as a working guy. In fact, I always had summer jobs and worked at the Green Giant [Minnesota Valley Canning Company, Le Sueur, MN; now B&G Foods, 1903-present] factory and drove trucks and—

PS: Blue collar kind of things.

BB: Blue collar kind of things, exactly. So when I was in prison, I took welding.

PS: Yeah, I think I knew that at one time, yes.

BB: So I always kind of oriented myself that way and that clearly was out of politics and not out of background so yes, it was an airframe and power plant school. I went down there again, blue collar, and it was practical. It was a way to make a living. And I was never a good student in high school or in college so I was not prone to go off in that direction. It was not a strength.

But I got into some trouble, band related trouble, drinking, drugs, those kinds of things. I remember going to friends of mine, Dick’s; he was in college at the time at St. Peter [Gustavus Adolphus College, 800 West College Avenue, St. Peter, MN] and between Winona and St. Peter, I finished about three quarters of a fifth of whiskey and showed up, you

00:20:00 know, couldn’t show up. Ended up falling down and puking and falling asleep in some bushes

 on the way up to the church and so I fell into a few of those things. So I think that’s what you

 mean.

PS: Yeah, I mean, it was—do you think some of that had to do with the difficulties of merging back into civilian life so to speak?

BB: All of it, ‘cause—like I didn’t drink before.

PS: Before.

BB: So the drinking came after and all the [unclear] clearly we did before I did marijuana, you know, I would use marijuana and anything that presented itself drug wise after, which is not good for my personality. So I have a very addictive personality and going down those paths are not good paths for me. So I did have a hard time readjusting and part of that readjusting were these self-medication paths which just made it all the more difficult.

PS: Didn’t really help it, yeah.

BB: But as people do, you self-medicate. Not all people have a problem, but I remember having to introduce myself to people and try to make friends and how awkward that was because once the stories would start—I remember walking around these lakes in Winona and I’d see a guy and come up and literally introduce myself. That in and of itself is odd, right? So that sets them off and then, as you get into the stories, you know, they find out you’re just out of jail and that sets them off and so, you know, it was a real self-defeating practice.

PS: And you were isolated down there all by yourself and oddly, in Winona again—

BB: Yeah, Winona again.

PS: So you’re—I’m interested in more about the early years getting out. Did you—you just talked about sort of out of the blue, introducing yourself to people, but more generally then have—feel like you were having trouble or did you have trouble at all sharing your background with people? Like did you get responses that led you to sort of hang back in telling someone about what you’d done over the last few years and—

BB: Oh, yes.

PS: wait till you could get an idea if you thought you could trust them in some way or other?

BB: Yeah, that and the things that you thought about and were interested in I found were very different than most people. Now that’s probably true because we were doing things that most people were not doing, you know, which we went into to these draft raid type things again, so it’s inherent in our all of our personalities to some degree. But, yeah, I mean, I know where you’re driving and while I don’t have a lot of great examples, I did not find friends easily and in the efforts to try to find friends and build community, which humans do, it was very difficult to do that.

Winona may not have been why. I did it because that’s where the school was but there certainly wasn’t a progressive movement down there so there was no one to—try to, in fact, the only—So fortunately I guess the only fortunate part of it is that I did have music and I did play in a band and so that was okay, although I was still pretty dysfunctional. I ended up beating up one of the band members one day.

PS: Oh, wonderful.

BB: Yeah, so it wasn’t like a, you know, a band of brothers or anything like that so it was, yeah, that I guess, now that I think of it, is a good example how you really are not ready for prime time social interactions on a normal basis, carrying something.

PS: Did you find yourself having memories of being inside following you for a long time?

BB: No.

PS: That didn’t come back to sort of haunt you so to speak or—

BB: No, and that is—it’s funny, Peter, the—that is, you know, either fortunate or unfortunate but that isn’t me. It’s either lack of frontal lobes or DNA issues but I live in very

00:25:00 confined—maybe that’s why I was a risk taker—but a very confined time period. And I do not

have memories. That’s why it’s really even hard to talk about these things because I’m kind of grasping. Fortunately you’re very good at pulling it out, like a good interviewer is. But no, I didn’t carry that with me. I did carry the social awkwardness that we’re talking about, difficulty making friends, finding common conversations, those type of things. But I didn’t have flashbacks or dreams or those types of things about prison.

PS: I still have rarely have a dream.

BB: Do you?

PS: Yeah.

BB: How about the other guys in your interviews?

PS: It varies a lot and well, you know from our being around each other for years afterward, Frank was haunted by all that for a long time. That was really hard for him, not so much for some of the others.

BB: That’s true.

PS: And, you know, it took years for me before a day went by when I didn’t think about being inside in some brief way, long time.

BB: Interesting.

PS: So, yeah, it’s—these things persist in ways that are hard to predict or even recognize maybe and certainly not the same for everybody. But yeah, it’s not like it goes away completely either.

BB: Yeah, I think the way—besides the social awkwardness that it manifests itself which always kind of makes me mad, is probably the authorities know this and that’s why they do it—is that it really put a damper on my wanting to burn the state down. You know, I would retain my progressive left positions like in conversations and things like that but I would not seek out actions, those type of things. And that’s always kind of been bothersome.

PS: Does it sort of tone you down?

BB: It toned me down. I think they know that and that’s why they do this stuff.

PS: Well, that’s a way in which confinement in a total institution maybe has the desired effect, even if it’s not making you a better person or showing you the error of your ways, it can be repressive in a way that’s desired. So, well pretty clearly as time went by, you came back to the rest of civilian society well enough and did a variety of things that went beyond and real different from having a band and A&P. I mean, I don’t know if you ever worked at that but—

BB: I did.

PS: You did.

BB: In fact, I went out—minor league good story because I was still carrying some fever so I went out to Los Angeles to do that. I played in a what they call a cover band, cover charges, for about three years and I made decent money. I had it and was getting pretty good so my girlfriend and I packed up and went out to Los Angeles. We had actually packed up and gone out to New York before—

PS: So the cover band was here or in the Midwest—

BB: In the Midwest.

PS: for this three-year period approximately.

BB: Yeah.

PS: And then you—?

BB: That’s what I did right after the A&P stuff so I got A&P certified but, because I was in bands then, I stayed on the band path. Then I went out to New York, short period of time; then went out to Los Angeles, longer period of time to be a rock star, right? And then I was in A&P out in Los Angeles.

PS: As well. I mean, that was sort of paying the bills while you were trying to get on the—

BB: But the first thing that I did as I was looking for bands to get involved with is I got involved with this band that calls themselves a Maoist band and that was kind of—and their idea was they would—and it was fun for me for two reasons. One is—three reasons—the third reason being it’s just another observation of humanity. The second one is that I had never been around a political band before and there were some. I don’t know if you remember like the MC5 [MC5, Lincoln Park, Michigan, 1964–1972, 1992, 2003–2012].

PS: Oh, sure.

BB: Yeah, they were—

PS: Yeah, there were a handful that, I mean, it [politics] was a main theme for them, not the only thing but a big thing.

BB: Yeah, absolutely. And I listened to all those people. So that was kind of fun and, you

00:30:00 know, I guess it’s the same as the second one is that it still kind of kept me in politics. And

these guys were as weird as possible. One is that they were always surprised how long I could practice and keep playing. Well, you know, I happen to love music so it wasn’t—I was doing something I was enjoying.

PS: It wasn’t a chore.

BB: It wasn’t a chore, brought me a lot of relief in prison. In fact, there’s a couple stories. There was a great singer songwriter, Bill, in prison up in Sandstone who, you know, that’s the unfortunate side of this—when he got out he got hooked on heroin and he was married and had two kids and it was just a disaster. But in jail, when he was clean, he came out with some brilliant songs and he was just a marvelous talent. So Bill and I hung around a lot and played together and we had a band in prison and there were a couple bands in prison.

But so I was with this Maoist group and, you know, we’d practice and I want to keep playing, playing, but their idea was—their radical move—you’ll get a kick out of this—probably only in Los Angeles, is they’d get on the back of a truck. So first of all you probably figured out from the first statement about their not wanting to practice so much is if they weren’t any good—[laughter]

PS: If that didn’t work, I think that’s a positive factor.

BB: That’s right. And secondly a lot of the songs were their songs which weren’t very good. But what they were going to do with all of this no goodness is they got on the back of a truck, a flatbed truck, and would drive into the ghetto and places and play this really bad white people’s music. And that was an action, you know. And I’m sitting back saying, Jesus, this is the weirdest thing I’ve ever seen. But I was playing so I was happy.

PS: Bring the revolution to the ghetto, huh?

BB: Oh, yeah, it was unbelievable.

PS: That’s kind of hilarious in retrospect.

BB: Oh, god, and they were serious about it and they thought—they thought they were so much more radical than I was, you know, all these Maoist stunts. Yeah, I don’t know how many people know this but, you know, because I used to think Mao [Mao Zedong (1893 –1976)], was wonderful, but he was a horrible guy, killed millions of people. End of his life, he had to sleep with a girl every night even though he had syphilis and was, I don’t know, he was just—this is not a good guy. The things that he did were not really good things. But I thought they were.

And these people were kind of at that point and I had, you know, moved beyond that so, you know, you kept—I was intimidated probably more going into these ghettos on the back of this truck playing music than I was in prison because this was stupid and nobody liked it and it was like, What are you guys doing?

PS: And it was uncontrolled.

BB: It was uncontrolled and people had guns.

PS: And anything might happen.

BB: Anything might happen and these guys thought they were just moving the masses. [laughter] It was bizarre.

PS: Let’s put on a show, right? So things took a different turn for you after that, whatever the progression was, because I sort of lost track of your comings and goings, but you wound up way out of the music business.

BB: Yeah, Los Angeles was a total bust and I started picking up even worse habits, so after—now it would have been almost twenty years or so, I called Caroline, my wife. Just had a yearning for her; I was living with a woman out there and started connecting with Caroline again and came back. So Los Angeles was a bust with the relationship I had, a really bad one, and the music was going nowhere and I could see that it wasn’t and the facts are is that I wasn’t that good compared to how many people were out there. I mean, there were—

PS: There were a lot of good people there.

BB: A lot of good players in Nashville [Nashville, TN], you know.

PS: So anchor this in calendar time approximately if you can, when you decided or were—it was forced on you had to do something else and left L.A.

BB: So I get out of jail; I do about a year and half of the—

PS: A&P.

BB: A&P stuff and then I do about three years so, you know, it was four or five years after prison, you know, and I do New York and Los Angeles in between those two, maybe two years. So we’re like seven years out of prison and I’m going all over the place.

00:35:00 PS: So this would have been roughly 1980 when you came to the end of that experiment in

L.A.? Somewhere in there?

BB: Yeah. And then I came back and decided, you know, I needed to survive because it

was very difficult to survive out there and the A&P thing—I went back to my brother’s wedding and was gone for maybe a week. Came back and my tools had been looted by my fellow mechanics and I’ve always been kind of—sensitive, one of the, back to the early stories of what shapes you. When I was in the Boy Scouts as a gung ho Boy Scout for a while, until the leader, Gephart, [full name and correct spelling unknown] got busted for burglary, you know. And it was like I’ve never been able to—for some reason, I’m very apparently structured—it’s like if you deviate from what I think is right and wrong, you know, it really affects me. And it was kind of the same thing. I came back from and it was like, Wait a minute. I’ve been working with you guys for the last year and you stole my tools. What is this?

So I just said to hell with this and came back and ended up going to the University of Minnesota, Duluth [University of Minnesota Duluth, 1049 University Drive, Duluth, MN].

PS: UMD, not UM—not UND, UMD, Duluth? Okay.

BB: And one reason I did that is because Caroline, who was a nurse practitioner in North Dakota, was going to Duluth to study with a doctor there.

PS: So she’d already been in that level, that sort of medical practice for a while when you came back to Minnesota.

BB: Yeah, so she’d gone through—her story’s more interesting than ours, but she had gone through being a nurse and then a nurse practitioner and midwife and was kind of stepping towards being a doctor. So I chose Duluth for that reason. I was maintaining that relationship and we didn’t live together, but were both in the same town and were dating and doing those things. And then I chose accounting because it actually led back to what I talked about before. It was like I still see myself kind of as a working class and I needed to get a technical training as opposed to something philosophical or whatever. So I saw accounting as a welder.

PS: It’s a skill and you get a license and things like that, right?

BB: You know, it’s a way to survive. And I was very fortunate. One good story there, Pat [full name and correct spelling unknown]—I’m sure she’s still alive. Pat is a radical up in Duluth, continues to be. And Pat was in the university system and she was a counselor and I met her and she knew about the Minnesota 8 because she was a radical Democrat and was in the Democratic Party—I’ll tell you a story or two.

But so up at Duluth, in my last year, I had put all the business classes to the end so I took your liberal arts and then the accounting classes, the skill classes, right? And then you have all these things like business law, business history, and like that. I put that at the end and this was also before computers, so she gave me A’s on all of those classes that I never took. [laughter]

PS: You got to skate on those, huh?

BB: I got to skate on all those business classes which was like, you know, it was almost an entire year of college.

PS: Yeah, that’s a big chunk.

BB: Oh, yeah, to describe those. And Pat was—she got me into the Democratic Party because she’s the kind of gal that wanted to get her people and her agenda across so she would stack the ballot box, which I knew later on, I used here in Shakopee when I was really pissed off at a group. I was, for a while, treasurer of the local Democratic Thirty-five District, and there were a group of people who were just getting—they were getting the positions because they were there historically and nobody would push them aside. So I would go in and when they’d do these ballots of who’s going to be the—nominated for this position I would, even though it was their ballot, I would give it to somebody else because that’s what Pat used to do at the state conventions. And she would kind of, Well, I help her constituents, and anyone that wasn’t her constituent, she would get rid of by rigging the votes. Little insight into DFL politics; I’m sure all politics, all political parties.

So that was it. So I ended up being up at the university and getting a degree in accounting and

00:40:00 I fell into high tech in—my sister was working for a start-up company. I went in as an

accountant, found out that I was not only a horrible accountant, couldn’t remember any of the rules, and—but it was at the time when computers were coming in. So I got involved in computers and all of a sudden light technology, which I probably should have figured I would have because in high school I raced cars and then went to aviation school and it was all technology and all of a sudden these computer things came up and I thought that this was—I liked it. It was like music; I didn’t have to work at it. And that’s how I got involved in IT, and then the rest—

PS: This was in like roughly, 1985, something like that? You’d finished your degree or your degree minus one year at UMD and then were—sort of fell into this as a side step away from accounting.

BB: Yes. And then I’ve done IT since and then I tried to go back to radical things, progressive things a number of times in different ways. You know, I mentioned, not that the DFL Party is anything, but for Obama [U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama II (1961-)] it was pretty cool. So there was a guy locally here, who I still remain friends with; he and I and this wonderful, wonderful gal, who’s now dead unfortunately, died way—Nancy—died way too young. She like really was the heart and soul of what a progressive person was. While everyone else was talking big fantasies and philosophies, she used to talk about, well, you know, we ought to be on school boards and city councils and in the community talking to people and that instead of being in rallies and that kind of stuff. Marvelous person; worked for Target [Target Corporation, Minneapolis, MN].

And so, you know, I tried DFL politics and the three of us, Bruce, Nancy and I, we set up, even at the DFL, when the DFL came back, funny story—we set up even on the DFL. We set up our own website and we started selling Obama buttons and we did—and we would—I remember going out to, oh, these parks that are around here, Canterbury [Canterbury Park (NASDAQ: CPHC) (formerly Canterbury Downs Shakopee, MN, 1985-present] and Renaissance [Minnesota Renaissance Festival, Shakopee, MN, 1971-present] and stuff and getting run off for selling Obama buttons because they didn’t want you doing politics on their site.

But I got kind of inspired by it—the Obama stuff—even though I should have known better but I did. You know, I was like, This is different; this is pretty cool. And then only to find out how badly the DFL played it and we all know, ultimately with Hillary [Hillary Diane Rodham Clinton (1947-)] in this last election and all that kind of stuff with Bernie Sanders [Bernard Sanders (1941-)] and that. So I got involved with Bernie Sanders early on, you know, I kept trying to look for ways. I would talk to Dennis about Socialist Worker Party—

PS: Dennis Richter again.

BB: Dennis Richter and high school friend who’s still a Trot out in L.A. and—but, that story—it never changed so it never was any more appealing; it wasn’t appealing then; wasn’t any more appealing now. And, you know, I will kind of continue to try to find ways back in. One thing I think that is a good experience out of all of this fear is that I now have absolutely no fear to speak to—because I meet, not regularly, but on occasions, I meet with, for instance, the—at the time it was Hemsley [Stephen J. Hemsley (1952-), the CEO of UnitedHealth Group [UnitedHealth Group Inc., Minnetonka, MN] which is now the sixth largest company in the United States.

PS: Yeah.

BB: And started out in Minnesota. You know, I meet with these people who make tens of millions of dollars and all those kind of things. I was giving Obama buttons to the chief information officer, Mike Conley, at the UnitedHealth Group because he couldn’t—it’s such a conservative company he couldn’t do these things himself but he wanted his daughters to have them, so I was sneaking Obama buttons to him.

PS: Contraband, huh?

BB: Yeah, you know, but it’s—now it’s much easier for me to speak to anyone about how—it’s back to that thing about respect and if you can just crack a door open and somebody can look at something in a little different way, you know. Whereas before I probably would have grunted and groaned about philosophical arguments, now it’s easier to have an intelligent and insightful conversation about, Don’t you really see what Donald Trump [U.S. President Donald John Trump (1946-)] is doing? Don’t you really see how much of the world is controlled by these—? Don’t you really see what the trend of these things and if this trend continues—?

00:45:00 So you can actually—so I’m actually having better conversations with people that we never

 would have spoken to before because we were young and radical and foolish—

PS: Well, and not around those people either.

BB: Yeah, not around, too. So that, you know, I kind of—I remain progressive in my mind and I act out on it when I can. Probably the only difference is now it is when I can, there’s more, let’s say, when it’s appropriate as opposed to—we used to do it all the time.

PS: Instead of wild and crazy.

BB: Yeah, but it’s still a real problem for America is how to have a genuine progressive wing because I’ll tell you, the DFL—

PS: Well, and nationally, too.

BB: Yeah, I mean, the DFL would not let any of these people really come up. I mean, you’re not going to get—the only way you’re going to get a Bernie Sanders or something on the—and that’s what I meant—the story about Obama—I should have known better—is you know that Obama was vetted by a whole lot of people and they’re not going to let this guy be president unless he was still in line with what was going on. And that’s the same thing like the only way a Bernie Sanders or somebody is going to even be a candidate is if there’s no reason they’ll lose or something because this thing called America, you can still follow the threads and go back to money and the money becomes fewer and fewer people and larger and larger portions of it.

So, who knows? Maybe Dennis is right. Maybe it’s going to be working class people uprising. I don’t know. We don’t—people don’t seem to see when acts are against their own best interests. They don’t seem to recognize that and there seems to be, because of this attention deficit that we have, that people are always—and I understand it—continuously involved in the present and what’s next. You know, don’t have historical perspectives; don’t understand what’s happening to them, etcetera.

So the end of that speech is that I do find it difficult to plug myself in in different ways. Probably the best way is the way you and other people are doing which is kind of at the local level, you know, and I suppose I figure that’s just not grandiose for me or something. I don’t know.

So that’s the end of the saga. Good project, Peter. Thank you so much for doing it.

PS: Well, Brad, I am glad you were willing and able to talk to me and I think that’s a good place to bring us to a close for now and thanks for everything.

End of Recording 3

00:48:03

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