**Interview with William Leo “Bill” Tilton**

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

**Oral History Project**

**February 21, 2019**

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

Cultural and Heritage Grant.

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

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

**Oral History Project**

**Interview with William Leo “Bill” Tilton**

**Peter Simmons, Interviewer**

**February 21, 2019**

Name of interviewee: Bill Tilton - BT

Names of interviewer: Peter Simmons - PS

Recording 1

00:00:00 *Opening comments are not on audio recording.*

PS: This is February 21, 2019, and I’m interviewing Bill Tilton for the Minnesota

Draft Board Raiders Oral History Project organized with the help of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum titled currently, “We Won’t Go and We Don’t Want You To Go, Either.” My name is Peter Simmons and I have also been a draft board raider in the past or attempted to do that and I will be conducting the interview today.

Bill, would you please say a little something about the event that happened in July of

1970 that I was also involved in but at a different location, that is the reason that you first got well-known outside of university campus and student government?

BT: You are referring to the arrest of the Minnesota 8. The Minnesota 8 were eight folks, including you and I, that were arrested around Minnesota, three different draft boards, at about midnight on July 10/11, 1970. We had broken into these offices intending to remove their Selective Service records, their records of what young men were eligible to be drafted and we were going to feed all that paper to the Mississippi River. At that time, all these records were kept on paper. There weren’t even good photo copy machines of that day. And so the records that were kept in these Selective Service offices around the state were oftentimes the only data available to the government to permit the government to force young men to be in the Army, to draft—to require people to join the service under certain circumstances.

And this was part of a larger effort against the War in Vietnam and we were part of many draft board raids that were occurring around the country at the time and this draft board raid was just a very small part of my own activism. I was virtually a full-time antiwar activist at that time and resolved to become a draft board raider for a sort of a variety of reasons but it was a small part of my life but it became the biggest part of our lives for a while.

PS: So we’ll talk more about the details of those raids and what went on before and after them, but before we do that, please talk about your—you’re a St. Paul native, right?

BT: Yes.

PS: And I’d like you to tell a little bit about your growing up here, where you went to school, your family, so your—how you got to the point of being a draft board raider has some more context.

BT: Well, I like to joke that I’m a middle child from the middle of a midsized family, middle class family, in the middle of a midsized city in the middle of the Midwest. I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, near Central High School [Central High School, 275 Lexington Parkway North, St Paul, MN]. Some people will know where that is but otherwise you get a sense that it’s in the heart of the town. And my father went to St. Paul Central High School; all my daughters went there. This was, you know, a very sort of, in my mind, typical Midwestern, at least white Midwestern environment that I grew up in.

I’m from a family that was among some of the earlier settlers of the, earlier white settlers, of the St. Paul, Minnesota, area. And I got out of high school; I went to a Catholic all-male military high school, Cretin High School [Cretin-Derham Hall High School, 550 South Albert Street, St Paul, MN], and graduated in 1965. Went to the University of Minnesota as a totally apolitical person. I joined a fraternity; I joined Freshman Cabinet, which was the sort of entrée organization for student government at the university. I joined all sorts of student organizations and just had fun. I loved being a student; I loved the University of Minnesota. For me, going to Minneapolis at the big university was equivalent today of going to New York City for a kid who’d never been out of town. And I was a wide-eyed innocent and loved the university and had a good time.

And, because of the force of circumstances, because of the way that the Vietnam War affected me and my friends and the draft threatened to bring us all into it. And the way it was telling people on the front page of the news over the years of the late sixties, I got sucked more and more into the antiwar movement.

And I don’t know what your question as, but you asked me to give you an idea of who I am. I’m a Catholic kid from St. Paul, Minnesota, third kid of a five-kid family who graduated from high school in 1965.

00:05:00 PS: I forgot to ask you before, what’s your birthdate, Bill.

BT: October 16, 1947.

PS: Okay, so you said you said you went to St. Paul Central but then—

BT: No, I went to Cretin High School. My dad went to Central; my kids went to Central.

PS: Everyone else you talked about went to Central but you.

BT: Correct.

PS: So besides being a military school, was Cretin a church-affiliated school in some way?

BT: Catholic all-male military at the time. It’s still Catholic. Now it’s coed and not military.

PS: Okay. So, since you were immersed in that both military and Catholic atmosphere for high school, do you think now, or did you think then, that that had any effect on instilling ideas that, although you described yourself as apolitical when you finished high school, do you think that that came into play later on in your thinking or decision making?

BT: My Catholic education you mean?

PS: Yes.

BT: I’ll bet it did. A lot of draft board raiders were either radical Catholics or radical Jews and there has to be something about the philosophy of the teachings of both that are at the core there. You know, a number of these draft board raiders were either priests or former seminarians. I had gone, sophomore year in high school, to LaSalle Institute [LaSalle Institute, now LaSalle Retreat Center, 2101 Rue de LaSalle Drive, Glencoe, Missouri]. I thought I was going to be a Christian Brother. So maybe there is sort of a—I’m destined for special things or God expects me to do things special that underlies the motivation of people doing things. I don’t know. You tell me.

PS: Where is LaSalle that you just mentioned?

BT: At Missouri. It was the preparatory novitiate for the Christian Brothers at the time. I don’t know if it exists anymore.

PS: Okay, but it was a special institution for the Brothers—

BT: Correct.

PS: in Missouri?

BT: Correct.

PS: Okay. So notwithstanding your being more or less apolitical when you got to the university, you got—you took part in things on campus pretty actively, starting pretty quickly. You said you signed up for these different activities and things. Tell a little more about that.

BT: Things that weren’t political. I mean, Freshman Cabinet was just that—it was sort of the freshman entrée to student government. And what was student government at the time but, I guess, the political aspect was student power. You know, the student power movement had begun on the west coast at Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA] and actually I’m proud of the fact that I was part of student government during the late sixties when, at the beginning of our terms in office, there was no student representation on any university governing body. And by the time that we left in 1970, there was university—there was student representation on every university governing body except the Board of Regents, and that came just a couple years later. We plowed the ground for that.

But as far as my freshman year, I was more interested in the fraternity and drinking and women and whatever. I also joined Student Project for International Responsibility [Student Project for International Responsibility (SPIR)]; Student Project for Amity Among Nations. Student Project for Amity Among Nations (SPAN)]. They had a freshman week where you’d go and every day there would be different presentations and there were literature tables with all these organizations. I was a kid in a candy store. I signed up for all of them.

PS: So they were recruiting all the freshmen to come [unintelligible]?

BT: To do all these things and I wanted to do it all. The only thing I didn’t do, because I needed my parents’ permission was the Rovers and to be able to jump out of airplanes and do things. I needed that—I wasn’t eighteen yet; I needed my parents’ permission and they wouldn’t give it to me. And so for my first couple of years in college, I was just an average college student, you know, beer on the weekends and wondering what classes I should take. What do I want to do when I grow up? In the background, always was the Vietnam War, though.

PS: For all of us.

BT: You’re right. I got out of high school in 1965 and if you didn’t go to college, you were probably going to get drafted and if you got drafted, you were probably going to go to Vietnam. And then that probably became more and more true as those years went on, ’66, ’67, ’68, when all of a sudden we had a half a million people in Vietnam. And so you couldn’t, even if you were a party hearty frat boy, you couldn’t really ignore what was going on in the world. And partly by virtue of being in student government, and just partly by virtue of being a concerned citizen, I got more and more involved in the antiwar movement.

00:10:00 But my first antiwar thing was sitting at a Gene McCarthy [Eugene Joseph McCarthy (1916-

2005)] table. Gene McCarthy, you know, was the famous antiwar candidate for president in 1968.

PS: And senator from Minnesota.

BT: And senator from Minnesota. And “Be Clean for Gene,” and sit at tables for McCarthy meant you were antiwar or you were a peacenik. And it was actually interesting that it was a fraternity brother that got me to sit at a McCarthy table. At the same time, student government, of course, has its—way you can think of it—it has its tentacles in every movement on campus or at least properly pays attention to every student movement on campus. And increasingly, antiwar activities occurred on campus and the organizers of that sought participation from people in student government and some of us in student government wanted—were kindred spirits and were happy to provide some leadership.

By sort of chance, when was it? Was it ’67? I think I was treasurer of the Minnesota Student Association.

PS: Which is the—

BT: Which is the student government of the University of Minnesota. And the people who were president and vice president really devoted their time to the student power issue, meeting with university administrators and University Senate members, faculty, etc., working on dealing with student representation as part of all university governance.

PS: And that’s when that was really coming into its own here although it had started elsewhere in the country. It was really becoming more of an everyday issue on our campus, right?

BT: Very much so. If I remember correctly, it was 1964, Mario Savio [Mario Savio (1942-1996)] —

PS: At Berkeley.

BT: at Berkeley, correct, and so it came to the University of Minnesota, of course, a couple years later, but in any case, we were certainly—the telling social issues of the day were civil rights and antiwar stuff. And by dint of other people in the organization being very interested in student power stuff, I became the de facto sort of highest ranking Minnesota Student Association person at antiwar meetings.

PS: Because you were treasurer then?

BT: I was treasurer. And then in 1968 or ’69, I became vice president of the student body and being the Minnesota Student Association had certain advantages because we could get free meeting rooms at Coffman Union, for example, but I also, you know, had access and some cachet by virtue of that position and so—this is segueing months’ worth of events, but all of a sudden this kid from St. Paul, who never aspired to any particular leadership, I became the co-chairman of the state umbrella organization coordinating antiwar activities. It was called the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam or the New MOBE. In fact, Dave Gutknecht [Dave Gutknecht (1947-)] was the other co-chair, a very famous pacifist and friend and was still active in the clean food movement, Co-op.

And so, it was a telling experience. You know, I think of myself as somebody who gets along with lots of people and I’m also a big enough guy and I didn’t have a particular political point of view to push. I mean, within the context of being against the War in Vietnam, I wasn’t an SDS’er [Students for a Democratic Society]; I wasn’t a Socialist; I wasn’t a pacifist. I mean, so I’d end up chairing meetings that had all these groups. The crazy SDS’ers here and some of the loud Black Panther types there and then the gentle, quiet, self-effacing, wallflower Quakers and Friendship and Reconciliation [Fellowship of Reconciliation] on the other side of the room. And there were some profoundly interesting meetings with all these different personality types and interest groups that were going on.

00:15:00 Sort of in parallel, at the same time as the antiwar movement on campus, there were some

very high profile and high energy civil rights issues that were going on. In particular, in January of 1969, the Black Student Union or in the day it was called the African-American Action Committee, the Triple AC [AAAC], and the Triple AC, had lobbied—and its predecessor organizations, had lobbied University of Minnesota for scholarship money and conference money, etcetera, etcetera, and, of course, the university dragged its feet, didn’t do anything. And so they held an overnight sit-in in mid-January 1969 at Morrill Hall.

PS: Which is?

BT: Morrill Hall is the administration building at the University of Minnesota.

PS: So that’s the headquarters—that’s where the university president’s office is; all those sorts of—

BT: Upper floors—the university president’s there; the Regents offices; their meeting room in there; the university counsel’s office is there. On the main floor it’s the bursar’s office where kids—every day hundreds of people were going in and out because that’s where you get your grades; that’s where you pay your fees; that was the heart of the University of Minnesota as much as anything was the Morrill Hall bursar’s office. And so the African American Action Committee took over the bursar’s office. By reputation, they took over Morrill Hall. They didn’t—they took over the bursar’s office.

PS: Just the main floor.

BT: Just the main floor and not even all of the main floor, just the bursar’s office. They came in, said, We’re sitting down. And they didn’t prevent the tellers and all of the worker bees from doing anything, they just said, Once you leave, you can’t come back. And so they all left at the end of the day and the sit-in was on. Because we were in student government, we learned about it right away, you know, call comes from the university president’s office over to the Student Association office, You should know that there’s a sit-in going on.

And so we came over, both in support of the black students, and, you know, the unfortunate reality is, we didn’t really know that much about what demands they’d made because the white students and the black students didn’t talk that much and the focus of student government, while paying lip service to civil rights and stuff, student government was more on student power issues. So it was what’s important to the white student types, right? Free speech; student power. Civil rights we paid lip service to but we took smug satisfaction in being from Minnesota and we weren’t racist like those people in Mississippi. Well, we all learned—

PS: There weren’t that many black students on campus in those years right?.

BT: That’s what I was about to say. We all learned at that time that at the University of Minnesota campus, which was then the largest single campus in the country, and might still be—there are other bigger systems—Texas is bigger; New York is bigger; California is bigger; but as far as a single campus, the St. Paul/Minneapolis campus had over forty thousand students and I don’t think any other campus is bigger. Out of those forty thousand plus students, only eighty some were black, African-American, counting the athletes. And this was in an era where, you know, this was the beginning of recruiting of black athletes that hadn’t occurred before. And so it was a real wake-up call for the university administration and student government and everybody else.

And it was a profound influence on me as both, as a student organizer and as an antiwar organizer, because what happened was on the one hand, the African American Action Committee sit-in at Morrill Hall was one of the most short, surgical, successful, smart sit-ins of the time. It’s like five ‘s’-es so when I can think of more. You know, they only sat in overnight; they only took over the bursar’s office; they didn’t, you know, a couple of desks got hurt because they piled them up and stuff, but there wasn’t major damage. They didn’t go to the university president’s office and try to sit in there and smoke cigars in the Regent president’s chair like had happened at Columbia [Columbia University, 116th Street & Broadway, New York, NY] and stuff.

They just stayed. They were relatively low key; they had good faith negotiations with the university. We were blessed with a university president who was a good guy, a smart guy by the name of Malcolm Moos [Malcolm Charles Moos (1916-1982)], who was otherwise

00:20:00 famous for having written Eisenhower’s [U.S. President Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower

(1890-1969)] military/industrial complex speech back in ’59 or ’60. Malcolm Moos and the black student leaders negotiated a plan to create a committee to look into the creation of an African-American African Studies Department and the black students left, they left the next morning.

And, indeed, it was totally successful. That same year was created the African-American/African Studies Department at the University of Minnesota. There’s a fifty-year commemoration coming up this Monday. I’m part of it. I’m part of the all-day seminar that is celebrating the fifty-year creation, the fifty-year commemoration of the creation fifty years ago of the department and the sit-in and that led to it, because I was there in support of the African-American Action Committee in Morrill Hall that night and I remained or really became friends with the leaders afterwards. We sort of knew who each other was but, like I said, the blacks and whites didn’t know each other that well. The blacks were just getting to know themselves in many ways.

PS: And we were all young kids.

BT: We were all young kids. The president of the African-American Action Committee, Rose Freeman [Rose Mary Freeman Massey (1948-2018)], a dear, dear friend, who stayed at my house whenever she came to the Twin Cities for decades, was—she was from Mississippi. It was not like she knew all the black kids from St. Paul that were here. Horace Huntley, the other—who’s still alive—[one of] the other main leaders in the African-American Action Committee, he’s from Alabama. He’d just got out of the service. And so I mean, the black students were just getting to know themselves; we were just getting to know ourselves and certainly we were just getting to know each other.

What became a major issue in the Twin Cities was after the sit-in, then the county attorney felt the need to indict the student leaders. So they indicted Horace and Rose and a third person named Warren Tucker [Warren Tucker Jr.] for disorderly conduct. I forget what the exact criminal charges were. And so it was because of that, that all of a sudden, it gave like white progressives like me something to grab onto. Okay, I was in Morrill Hall in support, now what do I do? Well, there’s been indictments so there became a campus community organization called the Liberation Coalition that was students and people from the community, blacks and whites, and Hispanics, and old and young. I never would have had an opportunity to meet Syl Davis or people from The Way Community Center and stuff in North Minneapolis. Being a white kid on campus I never would have any need to meet any of these people and so—

PS: So you said—it sounded like Phil Davis. You mean Syl Davis, S-y-l?

BT: Yeah, yeah, and Matt Eubanks [Matthew Eubanks] and other names [unintelligible] that have sort of disappeared in history and so what happened then—that was in the spring of 1969. There was all sorts of impetus to have teach-ins and rallies and marches and solidarity events for the court appearances and stuff like that. So it was a tremendous organizing experience for me and for many other people who later on took many of those skills and transferred them to the antiwar movement.

I mean, I’d been active, you know, sitting at McCarthy tables and stuff in ’68, but it was really ’69, with first that civil rights issue, with the Liberation Coalition supporting the African-American Action Committee and the skills learned there, that we turned to the antiwar movement and where many people, who wouldn’t have otherwise met, then were a core organizing group for the antiwar stuff. Marsha Zimmerman [Marsha Zimmerman (1948-)] one of my best friends, was president of her Jewish sorority, right? She was just pissed off that the African-American leaders had been indicted and so we met on the picket lines or on the march lines for whatever, for the Liberation Coalition. She became very active in the antiwar movement.

00:25:00 PS: And this organizing experience and opportunity, really, was all really created by the

county attorney, wasn’t it?

BT: In many ways it was an unintentional result of George Scott’s [George M. Scott (1922-2006)] indictments of the leaders of the Triple AC [AAAC].

PS: Because the university wasn’t trying to get anyone in trouble; things were just moving along with dealing with the committee and deciding what to do on campus without invoking the police power.

BT: Correct. The university did not ask for these indictments. The university was always very careful to stay in charge of its own internal affairs—I can’t guarantee that there might not have been some agitation by a faculty member to penalize these students who sat in, but I do not believe that Malcolm Moos or his vice presidents called George Scott and said, Let’s indict them. There were conservative members of the state legislature who were calling for retribution and criminal charges and stuff so I mean, it’s not like this was only a campus thing and just one guy, George Scott, the county attorney, was an outlier in the road. There was anger that these blacks would be so uppity as to, you know, sit in and destroy a desk and things like that.

PS: Yeah, that was big in the news of—the state legislature at the Capitol—it was a big deal there, I remember, even though it wasn’t any longer the same sort of big deal on campus and among the administration.

BT: Totally, totally.

PS: Talk some more about some of the other things that were going on on campus then, the atmosphere just in general because of peace activities and the aftermath of the McCarthy campaign. It wasn’t just black student organizing that was getting to a higher pitch year after year.

BT: There was so much going on on campus; it was such a vital time. It just—if you think back, the first Earth Day was April 1970, and so I can brag that I was at the first organizing meetings that preceded the organizing meetings for Earth Day, the Earth Day celebrations at the “U.” I have a file down in the basement. It typically says “Ecology.” Didn’t even know what to call the movement, right? It’s just that we, you know, Rachel Carson [Rachel Louise Carson (1907-1964)] had written *Silent Spring* [*Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson, Houghton Mifflin, 1962] and that woke up a generation to the fact that we were slowly killing ourselves with pesticides and etcetera, etcetera. And so there was the ecology movement.

Like I said, when I was a freshman, I joined Student Project for International Responsibilities, Student Project for Amity Among Nations, SPIR and SPAN, they were called. I don’t know—I doubt that they exist anymore. But they, the University of Minnesota, always had a very healthy foreign student population so there was always a nice international aspect to the campus. There was obviously the free speech movement; there was the student power movement; there was the ecology movement or whatever you want to call it. Civil rights, antiwar and antiwar included pacifism; it included anti-draft activities; it included military organizing. On top of that, there was revolution in music. There was a revolution in use of intoxicants. I mean, marijuana all of a sudden was a part of our agenda, not just our radar screen, it was—became part of the agenda.

PS: It was campus life.

BT: It was campus life. I’m lucky enough to have gone to Woodstock ["An Aquarian Exposition: 3 Days of Peace & Music, near White Lake, Bethel, New York, August 1969].

PS: I didn’t remember that.

BT: You know, LSD had come into my life in the summer of 1969. We, my girlfriend and I took some to Woodstock and we didn’t take it; it was just too profound an experience.

PS: It would have been redundant.

BT: It would have been totally redundant, yeah, yeah. And so you asked what was going on on campus. I ‘m sure I’m missing things. I remember debates about the Israelis and the Palestinians in 1968, 1969. And so, so much was going on.

PS: And we had teach-ins about the war, too, didn’t we?

BT: Of course, I’m—

PS: Things like that. How about faculty? We’ve been talking about student activity and the administration a little bit, but university faculty was, some, were neck deep in all this, too, right?

00:30:00 BT: Oh, totally. We had some wonderful faculty back then.

PS: Talk about some of them and what sorts or what the departments were like or where there were hubs of support or anything like that.

BT: It’s interesting that sometimes it was the basic scientists that were most radical. The physics department had a number of people that came out of it that were very supportive. I mean, besides the other stuff that was going on, there was the Free University, an alternative university and all sorts of experimental learning opportunities that were going on as well.

And so, like I said, Roger Jones [Roger S. Jones (1935-2011)] from the physics department; Grover Maxwell from the mathematics department. I just remember physics and math maybe because of those two but not only because of those two. I remember Woods Hawley [James Woods Halley (1938-)], Alan Hooper [Alan B. Hooper], who was a geneticist and cell biologist, who’s still a dear friend. And so there were some wonderful campus leaders. [Maurice?] Visher, what was his first name? He was emeritus—that’s when I learned what emeritus meant. He was about—he was in his seventies; that seemed really old at the time. Now I’m in my seventies.

And so there were some very conservative faculty members. I remember fighting in particular the dean of the law school, a guy named Carl Auerbach [Carl Auerbach (1916-2016)], who was very opposed to student representation on campus; he was a supporter of the War in Vietnam; he was very opposed to any of the antiwar resolutions that we passed, strongly opposed to it.

PS: Resolutions passed by student government.

BT: Well, it wasn’t just student government because in that era—don’t ask me exactly what year—but eventually we got student representatives in the All University Senate, for example. And so, on its own, the all University Senate might not have entertained a resolution opposing the War in Vietnam; maybe it would have.

PS: So that means faculty, too, right?

BT: Well, it used to be the faculty.

PS: Previously, it was just faculty.

BT: Previously, it was just faculty, right. And we got student representatives on it. One of my favorite memories of that time was—I think it was shortly after we got student representatives on the Senate and there was a resolution opposing the War in Vietnam, at some particular event; I’m not sure what it was. I know there was a meeting in one of the, you know, large auditoriums around, Nicholson Hall or something like that. And Alan Hooper, who, as I said, you know, was a professor of cell biology, but has always looked ten or fifteen years younger than he is, and had sort of longish hair at the time and he stood up and started talking in support of the resolution.

And for some reason, the university administration was there and for some reason, Malcolm Moos, the president of the university, chose to interrupt Alan and in sort of a haughty way, said, “Excuse me, would this student identify himself?” And Alan Hooper just hardly missed a beat, just very quietly said, “My name is Alan Hooper and I’m in the department of genetics and cell biology,”— I think that was the department then—pause, “with tenure.” In other words, I’m not some stupid student; I’m on your faculty and I’m not just associate professor who just came down the pike and is, you know, wet behind the ears. I’ve got tenure already—

PS: And don’t interrupt me again.

BT: No, it was, I liked Malcolm Moos—he was not always on the same side of a lot of issues and he certainly was put down at that moment. And it’s one of those moments that in a debate can help sway the debate even though it might have nothing to do with the substance of the issue that’s going on.

PS: So, well, it sounds to me from knowing you and also from your telling the story, that

00:35:00 your engagement, particularly in peace activities opposing the war, tell me—say if I’m

mistaken—was based on a political decision or judgment rather than a moral stand or am I—?

BT: Can you separate the two?

PS: Well, some people seem to, but how do you balance that? I mean, I’ve thought that same thing myself, you know, how can—how do you think about one without the other? But some people did. You mentioned the Catholic Left and people who were doing draft board raids and things. It was pretty clearly a theological, moral stand based on a political situation with them. Do you feel like—what do you think about that for yourself?

BT: Well, let me think out loud for a minute.

PS: Because you said you weren’t a pacifist?

BT: No, no.

PS: And you weren’t a Socialist or a real out and out leftist?

BT: No, those sort of categories were new to me and in some ways confused me and since I knew I would have carried a gun in opposition to Adolf Hitler [Adolph Hitler (1889-1945)], I knew I was not a pacifist and so we were forced to confront the issue of the war at that time because of the draft. I think we were forced to confront the issue of civil rights and ecology, or whatever you want to call it, just by force of morality I suppose. So it was politics and morality. So civil rights was just the right thing to do and we just didn’t think it affected us here in Minnesota.

PS: Until we found out it did.

BT: Right, the antiwar movement was just—became the right thing to do—and we had fun with it. I don’t want to say it wasn’t fun. But in my life, it changed from a sidebar, like in 1968, sitting at a McCarthy table, to a full-time job, and that was partly because I was in student government and ended up going to meetings and all of a sudden ended up chairing meetings. And because I couldn’t trust it and didn’t want to give long speeches myself, I would run microphones; I’d be trusted with a microphone because I wasn’t going to monopolize it. I was just introducing. People remember me giving lots of big speeches and good speeches; I didn’t. They just—but I was at the microphone a lot because when Person A ended, I’d introduce Person B. So they saw me at the microphone a lot but I rarely gave a long speech, rarely. And so, it was politics and morality.

The reason I became a draft board raider—was it a combination of the two? I started talking about how the civil rights stuff, the Liberation Coalition, was really a way for us to learn organizing; learn how to make leaflets and organize rallies and get permits for this, that and the other thing. Actually, in early 1969, I got permission to get a second major in African-American Studies as part of that sort of impetus that—I found out it was going to be extremely difficult because the university hadn’t a clue how to do it and I ended up never doing it because my fifth year in college was spent all doing antiwar activities.

PS: Your first major was, by the way?

BT: Economics. What happened is, as a leader in the antiwar movement, I did give a lot of speeches; I have to correct myself, but not at microphones or not at rallies so much as—high school social science teachers would come and say, Would you come and talk about this to our class? Sometimes we’d go to a school and go from one class to another, be all day there. Or there’d be a Monday night Bible Studies group or a Sunday prayer service or whatever, and so we were—I was regularly giving speeches. I wasn’t the only one but I got picked a lot because I wasn’t a Socialist; I wasn’t in SDS, whatever, and I was available. I had fun doing it, you know. I had my materials. Why is the War Wrong?

PS: And so you had a position.

00:40:00 BT: Well, yeah, I often ended up debating VFW sorts and fundamentalist Christian sorts so

those were major categories of people that would be on the other side.

PS: Do you remember, speaking of VFW, during those years, especially as time went by more, there were more and more young veterans who were showing up on campus? What do you remember about what that was like and having these guys who’d been to war or close to it, being part of the student body and what sort of influence that was or was that close to you much?

BT: They were leaders of the antiwar movement. I mean, turn around, turn around. There’s Chuck Logan and me—[referring to photographs in the room].

PS: Oh, yes.

BT: Chuck Logan [Chuck Logan (1942-)] and me. This is at The Citadel in Huế [The Citadel, Huế, South Vietnam]. He spent his entire tour of duty up near the DMZ—he’s a genuine combat veteran and in the midnineties, we went to Vietnam. There’s me and Chuck; there’s me and Marv [Marv Davidov (1932-2012)]; there’s me and Clyde Bellecourt and Ken Tilsen [Kenneth Earl Tilsen (1927-2013)]. Here’s Alan Hooper, remember Alan?

PS: Sure.

BT: So the vets that I ran into were antiwar vets and so they were leaders. We looked to them for affirmation and for leadership and so there were vets around. The vets that I ran into were not hostile to the antiwar movement. They were part of it. So I can’t say—so when I give a speech and have like a vet opposing my idea and who was a supporter of the war, it was almost universally some Korean War vet, you know, somebody a generation older, rather than somebody our age.

PS: Anyway, so the young veterans on campus were an integral part of what you were doing and who you were around in the peace activism and antiwar type work?

BT: Yes, yes, they were integral. I didn’t see them provide a ton of leadership until probably 1970, student strike time. They were more of a presence; they were more organized. I mean think about it.

PS: There were just more of them.

BT: Well, they were just starting to return, just starting to return and sort of figure out where they were and figure out where is the locus where I’m, you know, friendly or whatever. I met Chuck Logan, one of my best friends, who was recently returned as a combat vet from Vietnam working at *Hundred Flowers*.And we didn’t even mention a hippie newspaper, *Hundred Flowers. Hundred Flowers* was over at 529 Cedar which housed *Hundred Flowers*, Twin Cities Draft Information Center, the Marv Davidov office on the first floor—

PS: Liberty House.

BT: Liberty House, selling handmade goods from the Mississippi Delta. The basement became the Minnesota 8 defense committee offices; the co-op movement sort of had some roots there because I think some of the early storage occurred in the back of Liberty House.

PS: Could be.

BT: And *Hundred Flowers* newspaper, the twenty-five cent hippie underground newspaper that I was proud to be part, where Dave Gutknecht taught me how to write.

PS: There you go. So, well, shifting gears a little—

BT: But I know where I was going. We were talking about politics versus morality. It segues into how I became a draft board raider. And so, it wasn’t the question you asked, but it fits in. I was explaining how by late ’69, I was a full-time antiwar activist. Not full-time, I mean, I went to Woodstock—that was August ’69. But we came back and there was still some remnant stuff for the civil rights, the Liberation Coalition issue, but then I was, like I said, co-chairman of the state organizing committee to End the War in Vietnam and there were major actions planned for October and November, which became organizing efforts—

PS: The moratoriums.

BT: The moratoriums. The October 15 moratorium was designed to occur at locations all over the country and to have rallies on October 15 against the war as part of a build to a November moratorium demonstrations in Washington, DC, where everybody was to come

00:45:00 from around the country. They were both massively successful. And so, as part of that, there

was a whole lot of chatter; a whole lot of interest by social studies teachers and ministers and community groups and stuff. And you go to these things and people ask you, Well, what do you think about draft board—draft resistance? What do you think about this? What do you think about that? I supported draft resistance. I said, “I’m not going to resist the draft myself, but I support these people.” What do you think about flag burners? “Well, I could explain why flag burners burn flags and why it’s constitutional.” I said, “I’m never going to burn a flag. I just don’t think that’s an effective way of communication, but this is why people do it.” They would also ask about draft board raids and—

PS: Because those had been going on for a while.

BT: Those had been going on for a while and some of them very public like the Milwaukee 14 had occurred. That was right across the river in Wisconsin, these Catholic priests, you know, that destroyed records and stood around and waited to get arrested and then very publically talked about what they did. Well, after they asked about this a few times, I finally decided, Well, I support this. And at that time, you tell me whether this is political or moral, “you are what you do.” Resistance is part of you as well. Once you decided, I support this, then you decide, Well, if I really support it, I should do it.

PS: It’s not just talking.

BT: You are what you do, so yeah, walk the talk. And so by then the Beaver 55 had happened which was January of 1970, wasn’t it, I think?

PS: End of the month in January or end of February. I think it was the end of February 1970, but it was 1970 in midwinter [Beaver 55, February 28/March 1, 1970]...

BT: Yeah, yeah, in any case, I knew who did it partly because I was the person they went to so they could get Coffman Union’s Great Hall for a rally in support—

PS: Afterward.

BT: afterwards, where Chuck [Chuck Turchick (1946-)] and Brad [Brad Beneke] and Sandy Wilkinson [Tilton is mistaken here: the four who “surfaced” were Turchick, Beneke, Joan Francis and Nancy Saunders] and one other person took moral responsibility for it, right? That they did it. So, at that point, once I decided I have to do it, then all I had to do is say, “All right. I want in the next time. I want in.” So I’m infamous because of the Minnesota 8, but the draft board raid was like 1 percent of my persona. It was just something, “Okay, I’ll do it. If I’m going to support it, then I’m going to do it,” but 99 percent of my time was aboveboard organizing.

PS: Strictly legal.

BT: Strictly legal.

PS: So back again after a short pause, you mentioned the Beaver 55 just now and that was the big raid that happened in 1970 in St. Paul and Minneapolis, statewide and two big city offices.

BT: They hit the Hennepin County board and the Ramsey County board and the state office where any duplicate records were held. It was one of the most successful draft board raids, if not the most successful, in the country.

PS: Biggest, certainly the biggest to date.

BT: Yeah, it was tremendously successful and it caught them totally off guard. People should have known. Once that happened, they flooded this area with FBI agents and stuff so we were going to get caught if we’re the next people around here doing it, but we were too dumb to realize that.

PS: So after that, I mean, you and I, all got arrested in July of that same year but you got involved in something else that you’ve talked about to me before that isn’t widely known at all because it never quite happened.

BT: The Detroit Action [Detroit, MI].

PS: Yeah, talk about that and how you got connected with that and whatever you want to say about it.

BT: It was the coolest, one of the funniest events. Can I do it justice in a story? I don’t know how I ended up in Detroit. I know that my decision to become a draft board raider and then talking to people that we know, and that would include Pete [Peter Simmons] and maybe Frank [Francis Xavier Kroncke (1944-)] or Don [Don Olson (Don Olson (1943-)] or whatever. Some of them were networked with people from other parts of the country who were also doing these raids. Maybe Frank’s the real culprit. I don’t know, because Frank Kroncke, one of our rap partners who was a theology professor at St. Kate’s [St. Catherine University, 2004 Randolph, St. Paul, MN], was, you know, Francis Xavier Kroncke,

00:50:00 very Catholic, and very much involved in the radical Catholic Left pacifist movement. Maybe

that’s how—I don’t know how.

But I ended up going to Detroit, maybe because I had a car, I don’t know. I ended up going to Detroit and I don’t even remember who I met. And I don’t remember if I went with somebody else from here. Did I go alone? I don’t know. But I remember there was this sort of hippie house somewhere in Detroit; I don’t know where. I own Detroit property, inner city Detroit property, because I did my prison time out there and friends started an organization, but at the time, I’d never been to Detroit. But I ended up at some hippie house where we were all sort of given this scenario that we’re going to one of these big downtown Detroit buildings, you know, some twenty, twenty-five story building and we were to go in groups of like one and two and three, just go into the building and look not suspicious.

PS: During regular hours.

BT: During regular business hours and we were to assemble at the top floor of the building. Like many buildings, the top floor has a sort of steep steel staircase that goes up to the roof because it’s very rarely used. And then there was, surrounding the top of that staircase, there was a room maybe twenty feet by twenty feet, where that just enclosed the top of the staircase so if a workman needed to come up, they could go out some door and, you know, do repairs on the roof.

And so over time, some afternoon, we wandered in there by twos and threes and stuff and all gathered up on the top floor of this building in Detroit, waiting for midnight. Midnight was going to be the time when we all moved, synchronized watches—some people had synchronized watches—because there were two people that were hiding in a different place like on the twelfth floor because to get access to where we wanted, somebody had to come from a different part of the building and open a door I gather. I don’t know what it was.

PS: There must have been a big like county draft board office in that building, right?

BT: Of course, Wayne County.

PS: Oh, the whole county.

BT: Wayne County is the major—or is Detroit, and the biggest county in Michigan and they beat McComb and other counties where their draft board was officed there in any case. So, yes, the major draft board office in this building, maybe the state office as well. I don’t remember. All I remember is that there were two people hiding in the midst of the building who were in some very small space. They had to stand very uncomfortably waiting for the midnight hour at which point they could get out and open the door that would give us access. And we were to come down from where we were on twenty or twenty-five, down to floor twelve or whatever. And we were all going to start ripping up papers.

What happens is, it must have been eleven or eleven thirty at night. We’re all sitting there quietly, you know, trying to hold our pee, etcetera, etcetera, and all of a sudden in the floor below us, we can hear a workman walking around. You know, a guy making very distinct noises of his footfalls and what does he do, he comes to the base of that steel staircase that comes up to the room up to the roof where we are. And you can hear him flick the light switch—and of course, we’d unscrewed the light, and so the poor guy—he’s flicking the light switch. It won’t go on and so he starts—he comes up this steep steel staircase. And, of course, he’s coming from the bright area down below. Our eyes are adjusted. We can sort of faintly see—we’re like shoulder to shoulder, butt to butt sitting. There was like twenty of us in this smallish room and to get to the door for the roof, he had to get to the top of the staircase and then take a right around the railing and go about six, five feet to the door.

Well, he gets up to the top and, of course, there’s a person there. And so he gets to the top of the staircase and bumps into this soft thing and he puts his hands down and realizes it’s a human being. This poor man did a, you know, one-eighty, turned around—I swear he took

00:55:00 that whole staircase in one leap. It was the blood curdling scream—clearly he didn’t do it in

one leap, but it seemed like it. He went down that staircase with a howl of terror that you can only imagine. And I mean Detroit had never been sort of an easy going city and there’d been super riots there and downtown Detroit was a dicey place and so here is this poor workman going out to fix some sign or something in the middle of the night confronted with these warm bodies in this darkened room and whatever.

So what are we going to do? The jig’s up, right? The jig’s up. It’s not like we’re going to stick around and wait for midnight and, you know, start ripping up draft records, you know. We’re all busted. And so there’s no real leader. There were some people, you know, smarter than others, but there was no real leader but for—somehow we realized, Well, we can’t take the elevators because if we take the elevators then we’re for sure busted.

There had been some—we knew something about whatever—where the watchman sat on the main floor. He could visualize the front door and the side door and we knew where the pay phone was; we knew where different things were. So we didn’t know what to do except don’t take the elevators. So we started—we ran down. We ran down twenty or twenty-five flights of stairs and came out on the second floor and, you know, we didn’t know what to do, but we were on the second floor. Better the second floor, than to see the watchman on the first floor, so we get out and there’s a mezzanine so there’s like a balcony around. And so we sort of quietly go out on the balcony and by then, the guy who we confronted, has gotten down there and he’s told the security guard and a couple of Detroit cops are there.

And so we’re looking down on these four civil servants; I remember two cops and two non-cops. My memory might be faulty but that’s sort of what I remember. They’re looking up at us and we’re, you know, this sort of hippie crew of—

PS: So did they see you?

BT: Of course, you know, it’s not like there’s anything else going on in that mezzanine. [laughter]. I’d love to go back and figure out what building this is in now that I think about it. I get to Detroit regularly. Anyway, and so we figure the jig’s up. We’re looking down at them; they’re looking up at us and, you know, Who are you? Get down here! And so we come down and they say, Who are you? Why are you here? And somebody said, Well, this is a be-in, a be-in, that was it. This is a be-in. And it was an era—remember this was on the heels of the Detroit riots of ’67, but of Woodstock as well.

PS: Just the year before.

BT: Well, exactly, is six months earlier if that. And here’s this unkempt hippie crowd and they let us go. It was so remarkable. They just sort of looked at each other and clearly the cops had bigger fish to fry, you know, the streets of Detroit were a little gnarly and they weren’t worried about a bunch of white hippie sorts having a be-in downtown.

PS: You weren’t overtly really doing anything.

BT: We hadn’t done anything. We were just sitting in the top floor of this building and that’s all they knew. And so we got let go. They weren’t looking—we couldn’t believe our luck. It was just an historical accident that this wasn’t that important to those people.

PS: What about the two people who were elsewhere in the building? Did you stop along to get them?

BT: Well, what we did. How did I get picked? Two of us went back and maybe I was expendable because I was from out of town, I don’t know. But me and another guy went back and we had a timing—we had the phone number for the—I can’t remember if it was the

01:00:00 guard’s desk or the pay phone, but—oh, I think what happened is those two people got out

and, of course, no one else was there, you know. This is the time to do our duty and no one else is there so they phoned back to the hippie house. You know, they had free run of the building; they broke into some office or I think they were already in some office and so they phoned, What’s happened? They learned that the jig was up. And so we coordinated that at such and such a time, a call would be made to distract the guard, to get the guard to move away from the guard’s desk, and they could—I think the plan was for them to have been in the basement and they could scurry up the staircase and get out without being seen or without being caught.

And so I was one of the two people sent back to downtown Detroit to make that phone call and drive those two people, it was a man and woman, drive those two people back to the hippie house. And so it was quite the adventure for this kid from St. Paul who had never been in Detroit. This was going to be my first draft board raid; it didn’t happen. But it made for a much better story, I think, in my mind, the image of that poor man leaping down the staircase and then having to secrete those last two people out at six in the morning.

PS: That’s just hilarious. What a comedy of errors, huh?

BT: It was a fun story and again, you know, I should ask Mike [Mike Therriault]. Is it his fault I went to Detroit? I still don’t know.

PS: Well, so that was—do you remember the approximate date of that non-event?

BT: No, but we could determine it because I missed a big rally, I think, at Macalester [Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN] Field House because of it.

End of Recording 1

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 2

00:00:00

Otherwise, I would have been running a microphone.

PS: It must have been spring, sort of, or early summer? I mean after [unclear]—

BT: Well, the student strike had not happened so Beaver 55 you think was February; I thought it was January, whatever. The invasion of Cambodia was late April and then the student strike right on the heels of that starting in early May and it would have been before that is my memory.

PS: Okay.

BT: So it could have been March/April of 1970.

PS: So late winter/early spring, something like that.

BT: Yeah.

PS: Okay. Well, so you were primed to do that and you still wanted to, even after that happened—

BT: Well, it was unsuccessful so yeah, the war hadn’t ended yet. We still wanted to throw grit in the war machine, in the gears of the war machine.

PS: So now let’s go right to our raid and infamy. I remember that there were some organizing meetings that happened at the house you were living at then over on West River Road [West River Road, Minneapolis, MN], but elsewhere as well. What do you remember about the lead-in to that, all those discussions that people had and—before the event?

BT: I don’t remember much because—I’d forgotten that I was living on West River Road there, but I do remember that double house. Fraternity brothers of mine had passed that house one to another over the years and all of a sudden, it ended up being the hippie leftist agitator house and it was very funny.

PS: With the red flag? You had a red flag hanging on the front of that house.

BT: It might have been. That probably would have been Ron Stevens or Jim Sweeney’s fault. I wasn’t a red flag guy necessarily but that may well have been and there may well have been meetings there because—was that where I was living at the time of the raid or had the Elliot [3813 Elliot Avenue, Minneapolis, MN] house started? I don’t remember exactly. In any case, so, yes, I’m sure there were meetings at my house on the West River Road.

PS: Down in the basement.

BT: That was my room in the basement, yeah.

PS: With the mandala?

BT: With that mandala I painted on that I was inspired by. I don’t know if I copied it from what was it? The Moody Blues [The Moody Blues, 1964-present] album—they had a mandala in there and so I painted one on the wall so we could get stoned and meditate, meditate on the mandala. So good memory; I’ve forgotten these things.

PS: It made an impression on me.

BT: Okay.

PS: I also remember something else from that, I think, from that precise time and place. I remember Paul Helm, who was on the radio and also had a column or something. He was involved with that sort of right wing newspaper here in town.

BT: Right wing radio guy and yeah, and journalist, yeah.

PS: And he was talking or writing or both, I think, talking on the radio—I think it was about your house or just—because it had the red flag—and I remember that he said or wrote—well, someone had called in because it was a call-in kind of a show, I think—and said, Ought to burn that place down, or Go in and mess those people up, or something like that and he said, in reply to this guy cautiously on the air, he said, “Well, I’m not saying what you ought to do, and I’m not saying what I would do, but I know what a real American would do.”

BT: Okay, I don’t remember that—okay, all right.

PS: And I think that it was in connection with your house there, whether you were there right then, partly because of that red flag that drew attention.

BT: Well, that would have been my house. Yes, that would have been my house.

PS: Yeah. What was the name of that newspaper? Do you remember?

BT: That Paul Helm would have written for? I don’t.

PS: Yeah, me either.

BT: I don’t.

PS: Oh well. So anyhow, we had—there were various kinds of planning and organizing efforts after the Beaver 55, after your Detroit visit, before we went and did our raids in July. And there were lots of people at those meetings. It was pretty various sometimes. Do you

00:05:00 remember if you had any active part in actually organizing or doing, traveling around and

looking at places that we might raid or—?

BT: No, no. I totally relied on other people to do that and so I would not have volunteered. The organizing meetings occurred in my room at the River Road—you remember it; I trust it happened because it certainly could have happened.

PS: Yeah, at least one time.

BT: Well, yeah, and so that would have involved my roommates. I mean, Ron Stevens, who decided not to get involved and a couple others. Weren’t we terrible on security? We just let everybody in the world know who we were and what we were up to.

PS: Evidently, because we all got caught. [laughter]

BT: So I forgot what the question was.

PS: Well, you weren’t very actively involved in our planning.

BT: Oh no. I just wanted to be a soldier. I’m serious. Ninety-nine percent of my stuff was above ground organizing. I became notorious after that arrest, but I just wanted to be a soldier. I just wanted to count coup; I just wanted to be what I supported. And so I never scouted something out. Brad was doing it.

PS: Yeah.

BT: You know, Brad was not an above ground organizer really. He was just a dedicated—isn’t he a former seminary student? Maybe not. No, he might not have been Catholic, but he was just a very moral person and so I—who besides Brad was doing the scouting?

PS: Well, Brad and Frank were in a way—they were central, but others who never got arrested, I think, were involved in some of the scouting, like maybe Sandy.

BT: Sandy Wilkinson, yeah.

PS: Maybe. I’m not clear about that. I’ll find out more from Brad and Frank when I talk with them because they would know better, but I know that I never was involved in scouting and, you know, or casing or learning burglary skills or any of that stuff.

BT: How did you get involved? You knew—

PS: Kind of like you did. I mean, I can’t remember who I talked to but I did sort of the same thing, saying to whoever it was, whether it was Don or others, Don Olson, or maybe Chuck because—and others who had stood up at that rally at Coffman, and said what you said, “I want in.” And so—and I’d been hanging around and being counseled at the Draft Information Center and doing other things on campus and elsewhere for a while and so, sort of on my personal request, I got included, an example of how bad the security was, I guess. Yeah, so I was like you—

BT: You weren’t the snitch.

PS: I was like you. I volunteered but I wasn’t deeply into it until after the fact.

BT: Okay, yeah.

PS: So what do you remember about where you were and what that—what your arrest was like and the immediate aftermath of that, just that big event because that was sort of pivotal for all of us for a while anyway. What do you remember about that night where you were? Where were you?

BT: Alexandria [Alexandria, MN]. I don’t remember how much notice we had that it’s going down tonight or today or tomorrow or whatever. We didn’t have too much notice and Chuck Turchick drove and he picked me up. I said, “Will you pick me up?” And there were three of us, Chuck Turchick, me and Cliff Ulen. And Cliff I’d never met before. Well, maybe I met him before. I don’t know. Wasn’t he Mike Therriault’s roommate or something?

PS: They, for a while, were in that same house, that Wellington house right off of Nicollet Avenue and like Eleventh or something like that.

BT: Okay, in any case, all of a sudden, I’m driving to Alexandria, Minnesota, with Chuck Turchick. I didn’t know where Alexandria was. Thank god Chuck knew.

PS: You already knew Chuck, though, at least some.

BT: I knew Chuck, yeah, just because we both went to antiwar meetings and goodness, I would trust his memory better than mine as to when I’d met him. But, certainly, I can’t claim that were bosom buddies, you know. We—I knew him; I trusted him. I think he’d been one of

00:10:00 the people who took moral responsibility for the Beaver 55 so I—

PS: Yes, and in fact, took part in it, too.

BT: Of course, of course, no, I know that, yes. Well, that we take moral responsibility was a thinly veiled fiction that they weren’t involved. In any case, we got up to Alexandria early enough because part of the plan was to go into the office to see if anything looked suspicious. Well, how did I get picked to go in to the office? I don’t know. I think Cliff was unwilling to and Chuck was probably too distinctive of a persona. In any case, I went into the office, you know, it was a second floor office. I can’t remember what was downstairs, downtown Alexandria. You know, it’s a nondescript, I think, two or three-story building and I went in and went into this office that wasn’t very big. There was like an initial office and then a second office came in from the hallway on the street with windows where this woman was sitting. And, Hi, may I help you? I had a look—well, I don’t remember what I told her. You know, maybe it’ll come to me in the middle of the night. But I made some excuse to why I was there and, of course, I’m supposed to look to see whether anything’s different or peculiar. I haven’t a clue what I’m looking for.

PS: Because you’d never been there.

BT: Exactly. I’d never been there and I wouldn’t have known if anything was different and, you know, I think I’m looking for suspicious wiring or something. You know, what would I know if they booby trapped it or whatever. I don’t know.

PS: Or an alarm system somewhere.

BT: Yeah, yeah. And so I know I looked for obvious strange wiring around the doorway or whatever but I didn’t have much time in there and so I just sort of made my pleasantries, looked around and left. And then, what did we do? We went and had pizza and shot pool until midnight. And then, you know, parked half a block away and breaking in was pretty easy insofar as the back entrance to the building for the first ten feet or so was only one story high so we were able to crawl on garbage cans or something to get onto the roof above that back entrance and then there was the common bathroom for the second floor. And I don’t even think that window was locked. I’m not saying that we had the prescience to find that room and unlock that window but I don’t think we did. I just think by chance it was unlocked and so we crawled in that window into—right into—I remember my hand went into the toilet bowl. I have this distinct memory of, oh my god—it turned out to not be the worst part of the night. [laughter]

But then we were in the building on the second floor and I forget whether it was Cliff or Chuck that knew how to cut glass. I think it was Cliff.

PS: It wasn’t you though?

BT: No, it wasn’t me, because it was one of those doors with, you know, that opaque glass—

PS: Frosted glass.

BT: frosted glass and so it didn’t take that long to cut it. And so we got in and obviously they knew we were coming and this suspicious guy had already shown up that afternoon. And so what the clerk had done was rearranged the labels on the drawers of the file cabinets. And so Cliff and Chuck went to the file cabinets first because I remember them sort of exclaiming that they were labeled incorrectly. I went for her typewriter first. The one thing we succeeded in doing was I bent the “1” key and the “A” key. For people who don’t know, typewriters, you know, had these sort of long pieces of metal at the end of which were these little letters that would then go up against the ink ribbon that would put the ink onto the paper in the shape of

00:15:00 the letter. And the 1A people, the category 1A was meant—that was the fellow who was

eligible to be drafted and about to be drafted. And so I bent those as best I could to a ninety-degree angle and I do recall that typewriter steel is tough. I don’t think I got them to ninety degrees but I got them both bent.

And it wasn’t ten minutes that we were in there. Then all of a sudden there’s this silhouette at the door of a guy with a gun. There’s a light behind him and so I just remember, there’s this silhouette of a guy with a gun saying, “Don’t move or you’re dead. It’s the FBI.” We didn’t move. We didn’t move. You know, we just looked at each other and, in fact, I don’t even think we gave him our names. I’ve only the vaguest memory of that. What I do recall, in contrast to many arrest situations now, is they treated us very courteously. Nowadays you see pictures of people who are suspected of being a petty misdemeanant and the cop throws him to the ground and puts their knee on the poor perp’s neck and, you know, abuses the heck out of him. They didn’t do that. I don’t think they made us get on the ground. I think they put the cuffs on us and very quickly took us out of there and drove us down to the Twin Cities.

PS: That’s what happened to me, to us, in Winona [Winona, MN].

BT: And so I don’t think we said our names or anything. We just shut up and I’m sure this has been talked about. And we hadn’t planned on getting arrested so this was a big shock, you know, Ah shit!

PS: It’s hard to remember everything that happens when you’re sort of getting shocked like that.

BT: Yeah. And so it wasn’t until we got to the Twin Cities and were in a corridor in the basement of one of the federal buildings [Federal Building, then at 410 So. 4th street, Minneapolis, now at 212 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN] and we saw each other and we knew the jig was up.

PS: Yeah. [laughter] I think it was in what was then the new federal building—

BT: Okay.

PS: And I think it was actually upstairs somewhere but somewhere in that building they had holding cells and I’d already been there with Don and Brad. We were sort of sitting around in a kind of a lobby there—

BT: Uh-huh.

PS: And all of a sudden, you stuck your head in the door and maybe I sort of messed things up by saying something like, Hi Bill. What are you doing here? [laughter] But I used your name.

BT: By then the jig was up.

PS: Yeah, but yeah, so that was the first clue that I had that it wasn’t just Don and Brad and me who were arrested. [laughter] Gee whiz, I thought it was all coming apart and so, yeah, that was a vivid memory picture for both of us then. “Oh, look who’s here!”

BT: So I want to hear your story. Give me the same outline of that day for you.

PS: Well, it was a lot like that. Chuck told me—or not Chuck, Don told me that I was the one who was chosen to go in and check things over even though I’d never been there either and I have only the vaguest recollection of doing that. But it was essentially the same thing. See if there’s any security emblems on the door or things like that, you know, and just look around. And I did that and then we hung around this little lake on the edge of Winona and drove around a little bit and hung out until it was good and dark and went in the back—kind of like you did except we had to climb up a cable that was stabilizing a telephone and power pole and then we went in and did the same things pretty much although we didn’t get to the point of bending any typewriter keys. They didn’t let us wait around very long. I’ll talk more about that when my interview happens so I don’t want to go into it a whole lot.

BT: Who gets to interview you?

PS: The coach who’s helping me do this project, the experienced historian.

BT: Okay.

PS: Because I can’t interview myself, but so I’ll be on record for those sorts of things, too, and we can talk about it.

00:20:00 BT: I want to see the transcript rather than listen to the interview, okay?

PS: Oh sure, I figure everyone will get a copy of everybody’s transcript. That’s my ambition and probably a flash drive that has everybody’s interview on it if they want it or to pass it on to family or who knows where.

BT: Sure.

PS: So that’s yet to come. I haven’t done mine yet, but it was much the same and they were polite to us, too, and didn’t push us around and, you know, they came in and really surprised us, which I’m sure is tactical training and did you get brought back to Minneapolis in separate cars? The three of you?

BT: I think so, I think so—

PS: Because we did.

BT: but I’m not going to swear by it. I have only the vaguest memory of sort of being spaced out on the way back. [laughter]

PS: Totally shocked, right? Yeah, they had a fleet of government cars there and they—because they had several FBI agents and they took each of us in a separate car so they could question us on the way and that was sort of an interesting experience, too, but they were each trying to get information out of the other.

BT: So you remember some conversation?

PS: Oh yeah, not a lot, but some. There was a lot of being quiet. So yeah, that was my first ever live contact with the FBI. So anyway—

BT: And they didn’t throw you on the ground?

PS: No.

BT: They were very polite.

PS: Yeah. We were standing around with handcuffs on but they let us stand there and they figured, I’m sure, once they had handcuffs on us, they might not have had us outnumbered but we were incapacitated and they were armed and we weren’t.

BT: Yeah, yeah.

PS: So we weren’t up there in that office for very long.

BT: Right.

PS: And then other arrangements had to be made to get our cars—the car that Brad drove us down there in just like Chuck’s father didn’t have a car the next day.

BT: Oh, I forgot, all right.

PS: So that was sort of the part of the residue the day after so we got brought back down to the federal building in downtown Minneapolis and then we wound up in the jail in old city hall [Minneapolis City Hall and Hennepin County Jail aka the Municipal Building, 350 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, MN].

BT: The Hennepin County Jail.

PS: Yeah, talk about that a little bit, what you remember about that.

BT: Well, Hennepin County Jail was a classic concrete and steel, you know, echoing sound and I remember that a significant number of the prisoners there were African-American. I mean, it was as black of an environment as I’d been in since some of the demonstrations. And we were very quickly celebrities.

PS: We were on the news.

BT: We were on the news.

PS: And TV was playing in the jail.

BT: Well, thank you for reminding me of that because I get some of my jail experiences confused and I remember watching TV through bars, like into the cells and then there was a corridor and then there was a TV. Is that right?

PS: Yes, exactly.

BT: So, okay, because there was a similar set up in Cook County Jail [Cook County Jail, Chicago, IL] and I’ve never been sure whether I was conflating the memory so Hennepin County Jail, yes, we were able to watch TV through—

PS: [unclear]some of the screening or [unclear]

BT: Yeah, yeah, okay. And so I—so gosh, that’s right. There were demonstrations that night weren’t there? That Saturday night was—it was a Friday night/Saturday morning we were arrested.

PS: Right, so it would have been Saturday—

BT: Saturday night the eleventh.

PS: Yeah, so it was early, early on Saturday morning that we arrived at our confinement in the new federal building and then later that day we were moved to the jail after they fingerprinted us exhaustively at the federal building. Remember that with, you know the sides of your fingers and all that stuff—

BT: Totally and don’t you remember Bud Goldberg [Bud Goldberg (1928-2010)] handing out his card? Bud Goldberg was in the jail, a bail bondsman—

PS: I know the name but I don’t personally remember that—

BT: He was—

PS: but I don’t doubt it. So it was later that—it was that evening or maybe early on Sunday, one of those days, that there was a big demonstration outside and that stuff was on

00:25:00 the news and people were figuring out that it was us when our fellow prisoners were watching

the news like we were.

BT: Yep.

PS: And they were setting our bail at what—

BT: Fifty thousand dollars.

PS: was a huge amount of money and I remember one of the guys on my floor, after this really high bail had been set, and we were there for several days. Every day he would say, Are you still here? Because the bail was so high it was like a prisoner joke.

BT: Yeah.

PS: But that’s getting into my recollection a lot. So we were there for a few days.

BT: Six days I think.

PS: That’s what I remember, too, and we were there until we got bailed out but we were arraigned in fairly short order, weren’t we?

BT: We were arraigned in the jail and, as I remember right, the U.S. attorney himself was there, Bob Renner [Robert George Renner (1923-2005)].

PS: I can’t remember if it was he, but I remember it was Earl Cudd [J. Earl Cudd (1930-2005)] who was the magistrate who conducted the arraignment. And I don’t remember if Renner was on hand himself or not. May well have been but that didn’t register with me. And there was racket outside from people having a demonstration then when that arraignment was going on. Does that sound [unclear] a little bit?

BT: Well, I trust your memory. That sounds familiar. I would not have volunteered that.

PS: Or maybe it was the day after the big demonstrations but they were close on each other’s heels, I think.

BT: I don’t trust my memory on that. I have photos from those events. I have photos of what’s her name with the staff with the flag on it—

PS: Ellen.

BT: Ellen Pence breaking the window to the front door of the city hall of the county courthouse there.

PS: With an NLF [National Liberation Front (NLF)] flag on the flag staff.

BT: Right. And I have pictures of Herb Ward and a few others who, by rumor at least, took down the American flag and put an NLF flag up in front of Minneapolis City Hall. I have pictures from those events.

PS: I would like to later get those so I can get copies made to include in this record.

BT: Absolutely, yeah, yeah.

PS: So talk about our arraignment a little bit. What do you remember about that because what we were arraigned for isn’t what we were later indicted for?

BT: We were originally charged with sabotage under the treason act and our bail was initially set at fifty thousand dollars but when we were arraigned a week later, it was set at ten thousand dollars. So is that the event that you’re remembering where Earl Cudd—so our bail was fifty thousand dollars the night we were arrested, and I don’t remember who set that.

PS: I don’t either.

BT: And then, you know, did we have a pro forma hearing in front of a magistrate? I don’t remember. But it was the following Friday, I believe, that we had a formal in-court hearing and the bail was ten thousand dollars and then our families were able to get that together. I don’t think they had to give a grand to a bondsman; I think it was a signature bond was it? Or do you remember?

PS: I don’t remember the term, but I was reminded by Chuck that it was, instead of a large amount and having to pay a bail bondsman, we were able, our families were able to make a deposit with the court, contingent on our appearing down the line for whatever happened so there was never a charge or fee to a bondsman for us. It was all personal family money that all came back to the people who contributed it. Then, I think, at the end that money wound up going for legal costs.

BT: Ken deserved that. Ken deserved it [Ken Tilsen].

PS: Oh yeah, oh yeah. So we were initially charged with sabotage of the national defense but later on we were indicted for—

BT: We were indicted some weeks later by a grand jury for attempted interference with the Selective Service System.

PS: By force, violence and otherwise.

BT: Okay, that memory, okay, all right.

PS: And that’s how everything continued.

BT: And that’s what we were tried for and that’s what we were convicted of.

PS: Right.

BT: Right.

00:30:00 PS: So between our arrest and being bonded out, and our trials, which happened at

different times, we—I remember that each of us, some more than others, went out to do

speaking engagements. You’d been doing that sort of thing in a different context for a long time. Do you remember what you did, what sorts of things like that you did? Did that change that part of your life a lot? I mean, what you were talking about and to who?

BT: It certainly changed the focus of the attention of the audience. So we’re talking from July—I think it was in November that Chuck and I went to trial, the first trial; ours was the first trial in front of Ed Devitt [Edward James Devitt (1911-1992)]. Bob Renner personally prosecuted it himself. He was the U.S. attorney, Robert Renner.

PS: By the way, Cliff wasn’t involved in that because he’d already pled guilty and was making a separate deal so it was just you and Chuck then.

BT: Cliff disappears into history. Cliff, the third guy arrested with Chuck and I in Alexandria, I didn’t know—I think was a scared kid in over his head. People have accused him of being a snitch and stuff. I don’t think so. I just think he was in over his head and once we were bailed out, his family got to him and said, You’re not going to be a cause celebre. You’re, whatever, and he was happy to cop a plea and apologize and I think he got probation, didn’t he?

PS: That’s what I remember.

BT: Yeah, and so do I remember speaking engagements in that interim from July to November? No.

PS: But there probably were.

BT: You know, I’m sure, get my old FBI file, maybe they’ll tell me. I got my FBI file and I learned all sorts of things that I didn’t remember, you know, antiwar meetings I went to in Milwaukee and Ann Arbor [Ann Arbor, MI] and things. I didn’t remember these events. And so the interim between our July arrest and my November trial, I don’t remember it that much. I do believe I had to move out of the West River Road and the Elliot house was created, 3813 Elliot, sort of a hippie house, a collective.

PS: That reminds me of something I wanted to ask you about before. Prior to all this, you’d been kind of a frat guy, as far as other associations and where you lived and like that. Was Elliot house the first time that you were living with a bunch of sort of like-minded more or less lefty resistance types?

BT: Well—

PS: River Road was a little bit like that, too.

BT: River Road was that way. When I first moved into River Road, it was just my fraternity brothers, who were pretty much apolitical and I came and moved into the basement just because I knew them. In fact, it was—for my physical for the draft, I can’t remember when it happened, but it had to happen late ’69—I can’t remember. But what I did for my physical is I had one of my fraternity brothers get out some Magic Markers and write on my upper chest—my upper body—I think I had a peace sign and probably, “Go, Go NLF!” I can’t remember what I had him write on me but—except I know I had them on my back, right? You have to understand that the head of the Minnesota Selective Service office was a guy named Hershey, General Hershey [Lewis Blaine Hershey (1893-1977)].

PS: No, it was national.

BT: Oh, was it national? Okay. National, national—that’s even better. So I had him write, “General Hershey Eats Here,” with an arrow pointing down to the crack in my butt. And so the guy who did that I’m convinced was Phil Flodin, who was just a very straight fraternity brother, one of the better baseball players on the University of Minnesota team. You know, he was just a sort of apolitical athlete. He became a dentist out in Stillwater [Stillwater, MN]. But he was the guy who wrote all these sort of semi-revolutionary comments on my body when I went to my physical.

00:35:00 And then to just segue to the end of that story quickly, your physical—eventually it involves

everybody taking off their shirt and lining up for an x-ray. And so, you know, here’s twenty or thirty guys lined up in front of the x-ray machine and Tilton takes off his shirt and there’s all this tittering, pointing, Who’s this guy? And they’re laughing. I’m embarrassed. I did not know what to expect. Nobody ever told me. I hadn’t really sought out information. I just—this was my guerrilla theater.

PS: And, of course, you’d never been there before.

BT: I’d never been there before and so, it didn’t take long for the soldiers who were running the people through the physical, to realize that I was causing a ruckus. And so they grabbed me and they said, What’s this? And I said, “What? What? What? Nothing. What do you want?” And they took me into another room and they asked me if I was refusing to go through the physical and I said, “No. I’m here. I’m here for my physical.” They didn’t know what to do with me. I mean, literally, there was phone calls back and forth. I sat in a chair for half an hour, forty-five minutes, seemed longer but finally I got my own physical, private, [laughter] all by myself physical so I couldn’t disrupt anybody else.

In any case, so that’s a story about the house. You asked about Elliot house—was that the first sort of progressive group that I lived with? No. River Road was because by the time of our arrest, Ron Stevens was there, a guy I who I went to Woodstock with, and who was a long-haired hippie sort. I think Jim Sweeney lived upstairs and actually, the house included two veterans. Tom Barker also shared the basement. He took the other side of the staircase. You know, you’d come down the staircase and my room was to the left; he made room to the right. He should have died of carbon monoxide poisoning because it was an old, funky furnace and he was right next to the furnace. That’s where Tom lived. And Steve Boyer was upstairs.

PS: Moyer? Say again. Steve?

BT: Boyer, B-o-y-e-r.

PS: Okay.

BT: Both of them were Vietnam—well not Vietnam vets—they were vets. I don’t think either of them had done service in Vietnam but—

PS: Recent veterans?

BT: they’d both been in the service and they were both kindred spirits. So you sort of asked, What was the veterans experience that I had? Veterans experience I had was they were, you know, the vets were kindred spirits.

PS: They were like us.

BT: They were like us, yeah.

PS: So you were never part of Colfax house [Twenty-sixth Street and Colfax Avenue, Minneapolis, MN] or some of—places like this—there were plenty around town.

BT: There were. The Harriet house [Harriet Avenue, Minneapolis, MN], the Colfax house—Dave Gutknecht lived at the Colfax house.

PS: Yes.

BT: I remember regularly picking him up because we would co-chair these meetings.

PS: But that was not your milieu too much until—?

BT: Well, until somebody else started the Elliot house. Marsha Zimmerman, I think. Connie unclear(??), the first woman I ever lived with, and other just assorted hippies and it was not as consciously political as some of those places were like Colfax house. That sort of set the standard for being conscious about diet and this, that and the other thing. It was more—

PS: Plus a bunch of resisters lived there.

BT: Yes, yes. And so our house was a collection of, like I say, there might have been one or two veterans; there was about half female; a lot of stoners. You know, Roger Chen(??) and his girlfriend. Roger had smuggled some hashish from Morocco and he smuggled enough that he lived off of the sales for years. And, of course, there was always plenty of hash around the house. In any case, where was I going? The Elliot house. Yeah, I ended up living in the attic of the Elliot house. That’s right, I was one of the—sort of rooms were taken and I went to the attic and it was an unfinished attic which was just fine until late November, December. It was getting really cold up there. You could only go to bed. We had to hang blankets to separate it because I think five of us lived upstairs. There was one insulated heated room and then me and Tim, Timmy, whose mother was living downstairs with some man. So I had like an

00:40:00 eleven-year-old roommate and Marsha Zimmerman and Jeremy[Zimmerman] had a water bed. How they

kept the water bed from freezing I don’t know.

In any case, I’m totally free associating and wasting your tape here.

PS: That’s okay. It’s still context of the time. So, to your trial. That was in front of Edward Devitt in St. Paul.

BT: Ours was the least interesting of the three trials.

PS: Why do you say that and why was that?

BT: Well, it was the first trial. We were sort of flailing about as to what to do with the trial. Ed Devitt was very restrictive insofar as what evidence that he would permit and so we ultimately decided to not really put on a defense. Neither—well, remember Cliff had copped a plea [unclear]; Chuck and I feared that if we testified as to what we did, we’d be threatened with either giving information that would be harmful to the rest of the folk, right?

PS: Yeah.

BT: Or perjuring ourselves. You know, we didn’t want to do either. And so we resolved to do nothing and we were hoping for jury nullification [viz. Zenger, John Peter,(1697-1746);seditious libel case of 1734-1735] I remember that everybody thought, Well, Bill will convince them, Bill’s final argument. I remember having meetings at Ken Tilsen’s office and we’d bring up some point and, Well, Bill can mention that. Because what it was was I technically represented myself and Ken Tilsen represented Chuck, which gave us two bites out of the apple with examining witnesses and statements and stuff like that. And I do remember us having this belief that Bill was this great orator and was going to say these things that hopefully were going to convince the jury to let us go. Didn’t work.

Anyway, so our trial was fairly pro forma. The FBI agents testified about arresting us and we sort of inquired, How did you know to be there? And they just said, Informants. Period. And the judge didn’t make them say any more than that. And it’s not like we were innocent. I mean, we were caught red-handed so it wasn’t that long of a trial. You tell me how long it was.

PS: I don’t remember that but Chuck told me a little while ago that what he remembered is that one of the reasons that you didn’t really put on much of a defense was the strategy at the end was to say that they had not proved that you had done what you were charged with because there weren’t any draft records that were destroyed. Nothing was damaged except—like this was just breaking and entering and where does Selective Service come into it? Something like that and so, you didn’t respond to the charges exactly and said, Well, they didn’t prove their case. That’s how he said the tactic was at the end.

BT: Well, but I don’t disagree. We were still arguing for jury nullification. We were caught red-handed at midnight inside of a Selective Service office. You know, well-known antiwar activists. Who’s kidding who here?

PS: Yeah.

BT: And so we were hoping, by jury nullification we were hoping that a jury would decide that they wanted to let these kids off and that their fiction would be that the case hadn’t been proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

PS: Yeah, okay. So later on things went on to appeals and my recollection is that there wasn’t anything too remarkable about any of our appeals.

BT: The habit at the time in the federal system was to let people stay out on appeal bond.

PS: Right, which we did.

BT: Which we did. And what did we get? Our appeals denied by the Eighth Circuit, at least the first five of us. Was it the following November? It was not until—

PS: Nineteen seventeen two.[Simmons is mistaken; the year was 1971].

BT: cold weather had come along in ’71. That’s all I remember is we had a ‘Turn Ourselves In’ ceremony out at the VA cemetery or—

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

Minneapolis, MN].

BT: Fort Snelling cemetery? Was that it?

PS: Yes.

00:45:00 BT: And it was cold that day.

PS: Yeah.

BT: I still have photographs from—of us from there.

PS: It was the weekend of—it was Thanksgiving weekend.

BT: Was it?

PS: Right. Because they wanted us to turn ourselves in on Thanksgiving Day [Again, Simmons’ error, it was Wednesday, the day before].

BT: Oh, really?

PS: Or the day after Thanksgiving. Right then. It’s like they picked the most disruptive, insulting kind of, You’re going to come in and bow down for us on this major national and family holiday. And we didn’t do it. We were fugitives for two or three days. Do you remember that?

BT: Only vaguely, yeah.

PS: So we did this thing at Fort Snelling and then trekked down to the new federal building in downtown Minneapolis to turn ourselves in after this, you know, commemoration of veterans, people who had died and we were doing what we were doing to try to stop that. So we picked Fort Snelling and then all this went down. Well, the five of us went down because Frank and Mike were still out.

BT: Frank and Mike were at the ceremony—

PS: Yes, but they weren’t having to turn themselves in yet.

BT: Right, right.

PS: So that was November 20-something of 1971. And then we went our separate ways by way of U.S. Marshals.

BT: That’s right; that’s right.

PS: What was—so they sent me to Ramsey County Jail [at that time attached to St Paul City Hall on Kellog Ave; is now Ramsey County Adult Detention Center, 425 Grove Street, St Paul, MN] after we turned ourselves in. Where did you go before heading off to Michigan and what was that like?

BT: I spent about two weeks in the Hennepin County Jail and then they drove me to Chicago and I spent a week in the Cook County Jail and then they took me to Milan Federal Correctional Institution, which is sort of between Ann Arbor and Detroit. And that was interesting. It was a better cellblock this time around.

PS: You mean in Cook County?

BT: No, in Hennepin County Jail. It was a better cellblock than we had spent a week in the previous year and I don’t know if that’s just by luck of the draw. I can’t remember what the circumstances were. Anyway, I think Chuck and I were in the same cellblock in Hennepin County Jail, at least for a while. I remember playing cards with him, euchre or whatever, you know, these jailhouse games. We would play a lot of cribbage where I had to keep score by addition in pencil. So maybe I’m conflating our week in July of 1970 with those two weeks in the fall of ’71. I’m not sure. In any case, Cook County Jail was a real experience.

PS: I bet.

BT: It’s loud, loud, crowded, two people to a cell. The beds were really short. My feet stuck way out over the edge of the bed. My roommate to take a pee had to sort of, you know, tip his head back from my feet. For many days I was the only white guy in the cellblock. And loud. And they permitted the prisoners to have radios and so there’d be one guy playing station A on my left and another guy’s playing station B to my right and they were cranking them up so they could hear their station [laughter] and Cook County Jail was a noisy place.

PS: Was it scary?

BT: No, no, you know, I’m big enough; people didn’t mess with me. I’m sure I got a few awkward looks or whatever, but it wasn’t like I was out hanging with the crowd, with the brothers, you know. I pretty much stayed in my room, came out for meals. There was a little cart with books on it so I’d go to that book cart every now and then. Otherwise, what the hell were you going to do? There wasn’t anything to do. It’s, you know, there was sort of a common area but, you know, it’s not like I knew anybody.

PS: Well, so you wound up in Milan, Michigan.

BT: Right.

PS: And that lasted a long time and there’s lots to tell there but what kind of a—? What was that like in a general kind of way? You were able to get out periodically later, right?

00:50:00 BT: The last few months I had minimum custody and actually got a work release kind of

job so—but for the first what? Year and a half or so, I was in federal prison. But after Hennepin County and Cook County Jail, prison was great. I mean, you had some space; you had a gymnasium; you had, you know, back then we had vocational training. I worked in the education department. There were real classrooms and things, you know, there’s a little community there.

PS: And you could make friends.

BT: You made—very fast friends, yeah, absolutely. And some of the best friends of my life were made in prison.

PS: How did administration at Milan behave to you do you think?

BT: Sensibly. We had a good warden, a guy named Hughes—I forget his first name—Tom Hughes I think, but I could be wrong on that. He was a good guy. He—I was kept in segregation until I talked to him so it was a couple of days I was in my cell. He just said, “I want to talk to you. I want to meet you before I put you out in population.” And he sort of asked, Are you going to be a troublemaker? And I sort of told him, I’m not here to make trouble, you know, don’t fuck with me. I don’t know how it happened but he was a straight up guy. He met with me, looked at me, looked me in the eye and he, throughout my stay there was a standup guy. We had a couple of incidents, just a couple, where it needed his intercession and he generally made the right decision and so we had a decent warden.

You know, it was about half as crowded as it is now. I go there. We had a big outside yard where they had activities at certain times of the day. They had a couple of, a few one-wall handball courts and softball diamonds and you could run around the perimeter and stuff. There was, you know, concertina wire and guard towers with guns but it was an outside yard. I’ve been back since then and all that acreage is now taken up with new cellblocks. So what were there? About six, eight hundred guys that were there when I was there. There’s easily twice or three times that now. And so whatever the infrastructure was, the weight room and the education room and the vocational thing and all those things were crowded enough as they were as it was back in the early seventies and now they’re doubly crowded.

But, you know, that was our first real immersion in a culture that was largely African-American, right?

PS: And radically different from what we grew up in.

BT: Radically different from what we grew up in and so for the first year or so, I was—it was in open dormitories. Did you have those big open dormitories?

PS: Like a barracks kind of.

BT: Correct, exactly. And so you had your house which was, you know, your locker was maybe two feet wide and three feet high and that was your house, that two feet on that side of your bed. That was your house and if you were really unlucky, there were parts of those dorms that were double bunk and you had lockers stacked on top of each other and you had half as much room and you really hoped that that other guy you bunked with was a tolerable guy.

PS: Because you couldn’t pick.

BT: You couldn’t pick. Your life would be miserable. You could pick up to a certain point. You know, as people would leave to either go home or go to one of the other cellblocks or something, you could say, Hey, can you put me next to Meyers or whatever. And so I remember because I like to read at night. You couldn’t stay up but there were certain places that had light from one of the outdoor lights that came in and so, if you had that bed, then you could sit and read at night. And so I remember specifically asking for a bed and got a bed that gave me light at night.

PS: Later on you had—did they have private cells or room-like cells?

BT: Correct. If you stayed out of trouble for about a year you could go to E-block and E-block was private cells and that was so much nicer, you know. I mean, you still—they were small cells, right, they weren’t very big.

00:55:00 PS: Six by nine or something kind of like that. That’s where I was anyway.

BT: Okay, I would have guessed—six feet is my wing span—yeah, maybe it was six by nine.

PS: Room for a narrow cot-like bed.

BT: Yeah, a narrow cot-like bed and your shitter and a table and a chair and a locker. That was it.

PS: Okay. We had one big bathroom down at the end of the hall so the rooms were—had a little desk and yeah, there must have been a locker or anyway, someplace for, you know, personal laundry stuff and that kind of thing that you have a little supply of and a bulletin board on the wall.

BT: In your cell?

PS: And a window.

BT: Okay. We couldn’t have anything on the wall but what I did was I salvaged a piece of cardboard and put things on the cardboard and that they accepted. It wasn’t attached to the wall. It was a moveable piece of cardboard and it permitted us to—so we had a shitter, you know, there was no privacy cover. You kept it clean because when somebody came in your room if they had two people, one would be on the bed, one would be in the chair and one would be on the shitter. You got used to just sitting on the hole part of the shitter. And we had a postage stamp size sink with those push button things. You couldn’t push hot and cold at the same time so to get mixed water you’d have to be really quick. I remember trying to spread a pinkie and thumb to try to get them pushed at the same time but that was always a struggle. But they permitted us to have cleaning supplies. You could buy like Ajax Cleanser.

PS: At the commissary?

BT: Right. And I never got busted. I hollowed out, you know, the bottom of the canister. I cut out the bottom.

PS: The tin bottom, right?

BT: Correct. And taped some plastic stuff and then had attachments in it so that if I shoved it up, there was a false bottom. I mean I put a false bottom in the canister and had it attached just by makeshift pieces of plastic that, you know, had male and female parts of the plastic and never got busted.

PS: What did you keep in there?

BT: Marijuana and rolling papers because every now and then they’d shake down your house and that’s what they were looking for, you know, and any other contraband obviously.

PS: Was dope fairly easy to come by there?

BT: Sometimes it was very easy to come by. You know, we’d smuggle it in up our asses, through guards, all sort of ways. Sometimes the problem was getting rolling papers so we were inventive and made pipes out of apples and things.

PS: Tinfoil was valuable right?

BT: Tinfoil was valuable and in our little sort of network, smuggling network, I wasn’t—I was only rarely the smuggler and that was only in the last couple of months when I was going out on the work release thing. But you had to sort of carry your weight and so my—when I got to E-Block, I was on the second floor way at the end of the corridor. Now they could come right next to me through a door but they never did. They never used that.

PS: That was like the exterior door or something, right?

BT: Yeah—

PS: which [unclear]—

BT: And so I was always sort of the farthest away and so it was my cell where—so it was my job to roll the joints. First you had to clean it out because back in those days all the marijuana was full of seeds. You’d clean it out and then I’d roll them. I could roll a good joint and they were skinny as could be. [laughter] The dope was shitty but they were really skinny joints because, you know, it’s—became a unit of currency.

PS: Sure, like packs of cigarettes.

BT: Exactly, a box of cigarettes, a joint and so they were skinny as could be and so that was my job on a regular basis was to roll the joints and actually I had the monopoly.

01:00:00 PS: You keep inventory sort of, too then sort of, right?

BT: Yeah, I was trusted. People knew I wasn’t going to rob them. It was the same—maybe in some ways I’m naïve, a Pollyanna, but it was the same, I think, got me a leadership position with MOBE right? You know, it’s just—I’m not trying to screw people. I didn’t rob people. I had the hot sauce monopoly for a while. Some of the things that were regularly stolen were yeast, obviously, because you could make jack out of it, but American cheese, because that was a great snack that kept well and hot peppers because that was the one thing that you could make that was a dip that was tasty.

PS: And you couldn’t buy that at the commissary.

BT: No, you could not buy any of that at the commissary. And so—

PS: When you said stolen you mean from the kitchen?

BT: Correct. And so I got a warehouse job. So they couldn’t keep American cheese—yeast was its own category. That got kept in, double-locked, in the coolers where the butchers went. But my best friend, Bob Wollack, still my best friend, was the butcher so we always had access to these [unintelligible]—but American cheese, you know, there’s the kitchen and then there’s a sort of storage area for the kitchen. They couldn’t keep American cheese or hot pepper there overnight because it would always get stolen. So every day—there was a warehouse upstairs above where everything was kept, and so my job—I’d get up at four thirty in the morning and we’d start our job at five and so every day the first thing I did was figure out what was going to be cooked that day and go up with a guard—

PS: Get that stuff, huh?

BT: And get that

End of Recording 2

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 3

00:00:00

stuff and the guy was always lazy and counted on me to do all the work and wasn’t watching

so when he wasn’t watching I could always secrete, you know, the American cheese came in those five-pound blocks. I’d just sort of sneak one of those next to the can of whatever fruit was going to be or whatever. And I could do the same with the cayenne pepper. I could always either just steal it outright or get some extras down so I could whatever. And so with the hot peppers, so then we’d get those gallon containers and what did we put into it? Whatever we could find. But cayenne pepper was the essential ingredient; condensed smoke I remember adding to it, water and ketchup—

PS: What was smoke?

BT: Smoke is that—it was flavoring. I’ve never seen it before or since. I don’t know but condensed smoke, whatever. But I just remember at one point I had three or four gallons of hot sauce cooking under my bed.

PS: Percolating under your bed. [laughter]

BT: If the cellblock had been shaken down that week or those weeks I would have been busted but, you know, it wasn’t like I was secreting heroin; it was just hot sauce. I remember once I’d stolen a five-pound block of cheese and it was in my room and it was interesting because you had to go walk the whole length of the cellblock and go up a staircase and then go back into the cellblock to get to my cell. And as I’m going up the staircase, one of the lieutenants, one of the guards, is sort of looking sheepish as he’s going by me and my antenna were up. Something is wrong. You know, he saw me and then sort of looked away and scurried past me down the hall. Why is he avoiding me, right?

PS: Yeah, yeah.

BT: My cheese was gone. [laughter] I mean, by this time I’d been down for a year, year and a half, and I knew this guard and he wasn’t a bad guy. He’d stolen my cheese and so I—

PS: And you can bet he didn’t bring it back to the kitchen.

BT: Hell no! I thought about it for a few minutes and I went right to the office and confronted him. I said, “You stole my cheese.” [laughter] I don’t remember the whole conversation but mainly he first tried to deny it and then said it was contraband and he’s like, “It’s contraband.” I said, “Yeah, but I stole it fair and square.”

PS: It’s like the Panama Canal.

BT: I said, “I stole it fair and square. I want my cheese back.” He gave me my cheese back.

PS: Really?

BT: He gave me my cheese back. It was so funny. [laughter]

PS: Talk about the informal things that happen in a total institution.

BT: Well, you know, it wasn’t like he was smuggling heroin or a phone or a gun in for me, you know, guards did all sort of illegal things. He just—he’d stolen my cheese and I stole it back or I got it back.

PS: That’s just hilarious. Well, life skills, huh?

BT: Well, sometimes honesty is the best policy, right? Damn it. You took my cheese. I want my cheese back.

PS: Son of a gun. Well, so—

BT: Do you want some more coffee? Are we about done here? What’s going on?

PS: Well, no, pause this here.

So we’re back again after a short pause and we’re talking about Bill’s after prison experience and some other things related to that, too. And one of the things that interests me about all this is the after effects of being in—

BT: I’m going to interrupt and just tell one prison story.

PS: Okay.

BT: Because it just, in case my kids ever read it, there was a lot of black/white separation. The only black/white group in prison that—when I got there—was the religious stuff. Otherwise there were two communities, black and white.

PS: Did you have almost anyone else from Latin, Mexican, Native, much at all there?

00:05:00 BT: Not many Latin. There was a Native guy and the Indian was always called Chief, good

guy, became a friend, and the warden permitted him to have longer hair as a cultural thing. He got away with longer hair and nobody resented it. It was cool. Nobody resented it.

PS: But it was mainly all black and white, right?

BT: Correct. There was a black line at lunch and dinner and a white line. It wasn’t like they were never crossed, especially after I’d been there for a while and days when they served bacon, I could go in the black line because so many black guys decided they weren’t going to eat swine, even—the Muslims for sure—but a lot of black guys, “I don’t eat swine.” So you could always get plenty of bacon if you went in the black line.

PS: Back to your story.

BT: So because of my university connections, I developed connections outside of my own prison, a guy named Tom Weisskopf [Thomas E. Weisskopf] was a member of the faculty at the econ department at the University of Michigan [University of Michigan, 500 South State Street, Ann Arbor, MI]. He was a friend of John Buttrick [John Arthur Buttrick (1920-2007)], who’d been my friend who was chairman of the department of econ at the University of Minnesota. I was contacted by Mort Cohen, a law professor at Wayne State University [Wayne State University, 42 West Warren Avenue, Detroit, MI] who wanted to do prison work. And so I started the Prisoners Cultural Collective. And we started bringing in university professors and movies—we brought in *The Battle of Algiers* [*The Battle of Algiers*, co-written and directed by Gillo Pontecorvom produced by Antonio Musu and Saadi Yacef, 1966]. Remember that movie?

PS: Yep.

BT: It was a revolutionary movie. They didn’t know. We brought it in. I taught an economics class. We got money; the federal government paid for what was the most radical economic textbook on the market at the time in 1971-1972. But I was president of the Prisoners Cultural Collective, which was the only black/white organization in the joint except for the religious stuff. And for months it carried on. I can’t say for years. We weren’t there two years but—and it didn’t start for, I would say, until I’d been there for a year or so. But for months we brought in university types, movies, books and textbooks and stuff so that was one thing I was proud of in prison. I mean, I did organize in prison, not to fight with the wardens or—we never went on strike or whatever but—

PS: Not what they were afraid of.

BT: Right. Actually the guy who succeeded me as the president of the Prisoners Cultural Collective when I left, he was an old Chicago junkie; he tried to start a riot. Ray—Ray ended up dying with a needle in his arm, but anyway. So I interrupted your—you were asking about post-prison.

PS: Yeah, yeah. Well, just what you did—what happened to you and also, did it take a while for you to get out of the “inside” state of mind as you got back to the more or less free world even though we were all on probation for a while or on parole supervision? What was that transition like and do you feel like you carried an inside prison mentality with you for a while afterward?

BT: To answer your last question first, no. No, I don’t know if I’m unusual or not. Prison was hard. I don’t want to say it was easy but it wasn’t the hell that Frank has written about and whatever. It was a hassle. It was boring. But, you know, as long as I had books to read and sometimes those pickings were slim. I remember reading, *How to Read Electrical Blueprints* from the 1950s. I just—it was something to read. I remember reading that. But, you know, prison was boring but, you know, it wasn’t like, some Turkish prison where somebody’s going to bite off your tongue or you’re living in human feces and stuff. It was relatively civilized, you know, relatively painless. People didn’t screw with me. You know, I ended up in a leadership position and made friends, that are still black and white and they’re still friends to this day back in Michigan.

00:10:00 So coming out on the street—I can’t remember. Where did I live at first? Maybe did I live at

my mom’s for a while? I—my job was painting houses around this neighborhood with just some old hippie stoner friends of mine.

PS: Yeah, that’s what I remember vaguely.

BT: Yeah, yeah, and it was painting houses in this neighborhood, you know, thirty feet in the air scraping paint above my head in ninety-degree weather where I decided I’m going back to school. If this is what I can do with my econ degree, I’ll go to law school. And then Turchick, damn him, convinced me to go to a meeting, the leadership trials for the Wounded Knee leaders got moved to Minnesota and Chuck got me to go to a meeting. This was only what? A few months after we got out.

PS: Yeah, that was hard on the heels of our departure.

BT: Yeah, right. And so I was painting. I was just picking up work here and there and I know some of the people from the progressive movement gave me work because I was this—

PS: Who you were.

BT; because of who I was so I remember a couple of ladies in Kenwood, I painted their houses and, Now, will you paint this next room? Now you do this. Yeah, I was happy to do it.

PS: So when you went to this meeting, you weren’t in law school yet?

BT: Correct.

PS: Okay.

BT: I had only sort of half resolved to take the Law School Admissions Test—maybe I’d taken it; I can’t remember. I made the mistake of raising my hand because Jay Schulman came—he had done the first jury work around the Catonsville trial; wanted to do survey work here.

PS: And he was?

BT: Jay Schulman was the first person to do jury work as far as surveying the community for purposes of helping pick a jury.

PS: Okay, was he an attorney? I don’t recognize that name.

BT: No, you wouldn’t know except he was this big, larger than life, Jewish guy, barrel-chested, deep voice, great guy. He came and Paula Giese [Paula Giese (d. 1997)] had a meeting at her and Clayton’s [Clayton F. Giese (1931-20110] house, the old Mary Tyler Moore house in Kenwood [2104 Kenwood Parkway, Minneapolis, MN], and he explained that we needed to get a representative sample of the people from which the jury pool will be picked and we’re going to interview them and make these sort of psychological determinations.

Who will gather this data? The only person in the room to raise their hand was Paula Giese and I knew her to be incompetent. I mean, she was a friend. We had LSD parties in that Mary Tyler Moore House, I mean, you were probably at a couple of them. You know, it just—naked people in their sauna room and stuff. I mean, we had good times but she raised her hand to do this work and I knew she wouldn’t do it right. So I raised my hand to do it—Turchick’s fault. He said, “Bill, come to this meeting.” [unclear] I raised my hand to take it on and it was a full-time, you know sixteen-hour days for the next six, eight months, probably eight months, whenever law school started.

I didn’t know anything about surveys but I was dating Diane Wiley. Do you know Diane?

PS: Say the last name.

BT: Diane Wiley.

PS: I don’t think so.

BT: Dear, dear friend. I knew she did [know about survey work] and she was a kindred spirit and so I came home from the meeting, “Diane, guess what I volunteered for?” [laughter] and, of course, she’s a wonderful trooper. She took on this job of going to the various voter registration or wherever records were kept. It was all paper records at the time. She took on that job, but by then I was hooked into what was named the Wounded Knee Legal Defense Offense. And so she took over the jury work, worked closely with Jay Schulman. Jay lived at my house for a while. I lived at—my parents had a summer cabin on the St. Croix River, at Afton, and it—

PS: Yes, I’ve been there.

BT: And it was really cold in the winter because it wasn’t winterized, but that’s—I realize that’s where I ended up living. Jay lived there for a while. In any case, so what did I do after prison? I painted houses for a while. Just painted and waited around till I decided I was going

00:15:00 to go to law school; got roped into working on the Wounded Knee Defense Committee and

that was, you know, ten, fourteen-hour days until August and the leadership trials of Russell Means [Russell Charles Means (1939-2012).and Dennis Banks [Dennis Banks (1937-2017)] got moved here. And that was a lengthy trial.

PS: Yes.

BT: And it might have been part of my motivation to go to law school. I realized the lawyers were having all the fun. I worked for months full-time on the Wounded Knee Defense Committee and only spent a half a day in the courtroom. There was just so much to do outside. I was partly office manager for their community outreach office down on Sibley Street [Sibley Street, St. Paul, MN], a couple blocks from the courthouse and a couple more blocks from Ken Tilsen’s office.

Anyway, so I got involved in the Wounded Knee Defense Committee. To make a long story short, a woman from Minnesota Public Radio, named Margaret Moos, came to do volunteer work at WKLDOC, the Wounded Knee Legal Defense Offense Committee, found out I was looking for a job for law school. She got me a job as an engineer at Minnesota Public Radio, just a third-class engineer, flipping switches, helping people record stuff. Didn’t require any real training.

PS: And I remember her name. I remember when she was an on air personality.

BT: Well, she was always a producer. There’s a different Moos that has—well, she might have been on air, too. She was also Garrison Keillor’s girlfriend but she was a force majeure in Minnesota radio, a great producer. Meanwhile, you know, we all listened to KQRS and KDWB and I had enough chutzpah to say—I went to both radio stations and told them they needed to start a news department and should hire me to do it. Where I got this idea I don’t know.

PS: This was after you were engineering at MPR?

BT: This would have been probably during Wounded Knee. Well, no, let me think. Maybe it was the fall, maybe it was before Wounded Knee that I did that outreach. Because then there was a hiatus. They politely threw me out but I had fun meeting the guy who managed KQRS, guy named Dick Poe, good guy, total sales guy. He wasn’t political at all. But we got along and back then radio stations had public broadcasting requirements. They had to promise the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] that they’d do a certain number of hours on certain subject matter.

PS: Public service kinds of stuff, right?

BT: Correct. And he decided that he was going to do it all with this listener call in and talk show on Sunday nights, KQ Scope. And he hired me to do it. He conceived of the program with someone else in mind. That guy backed out at the last minute or wanted too much money or whatever. I was willing to work for peanuts so all of a sudden, I was working at Minnesota Public Radio as a broadcast engineer and KQRS while I’m going to law school. So this would have been starting in ’74. And it was great. I had no social life. I worked every Friday night; every Saturday night; every Sunday afternoon at public radio and then I’d leave public radio and drive to KQRS and be on their show Sunday night.

PS: They were in St. Louis Park or—?

BT: Golden Valley [Golden Valley, MN].

PS: Golden Valley, okay.

BT: It was magic. I quit both of those gigs in the summer of ’76 so I could go study for a term of law school at the University of Ghana in West Africa. And so I quit both, went and studied for that term in law school at the University of Ghana. That was an epiphany for me. Had a chance to cross the Sahara Desert. There’s a good story. That took six weeks and a number of angels in that—I’ve got a bunch of stories coming out of that experience. I come back to the University of Minnesota and actually, I was a week late, one of my angels was a guy I hardly knew, registered me, because everybody knew, Tilton’s still in Africa, register him. Otherwise I would have had to wait another year to finish law school.

The dean’s office calls me [that Fall to tell me] that public radio had said that their promotion people had written a grant and gotten it funded for a series of legal programs and, of course, their news department was stretched and they didn’t know anything about the law. So they wrote the law school, dean of the law school. to see if any faculty member wanted to do these programs. Well, no faculty member wanted to do it but they remembered, Didn’t Tilton work in radio? All of a sudden I’m getting called to the dean’s office—

PS: This is a different dean than Auerbach years before?

BT: No, no.

PS: Still him?

00:20:00 BT: No, no, no—this is one of the great footnotes of history. Carl Auerbach, who had been

my adversary on many occasions in these University Senate meetings and antiwar resolutions and student power resolutions—we had been adversaries on a regular basis. He was the guy who got me that job. And what I learned is that he had stood up to people when I got admitted to law school. People were pissed that this felon got admitted to law school. Auerbach is, as much as we disagreed with each other personally, we always got always got along personally. I mean it was never—

PS: Professionally.

BT: Thank you. Yeah, it was never personal. We didn’t call each other names. We said, You’re mistaken and stuff like that but it was always principled. And so he might have done me a favor in admitting me to law school, but he certainly did me a favor by calling me and saying, Do you want this gig at public radio? So then starting that year, I—and for five years thereafter, I produced multi documentaries for Minnesota Public Radio on legal stuff. I won two national awards and by coincidence, Dick Poe at KQRS had hired Joyce Yu and M.E Kendall to replace me. They were alternating Sunday nights. He came back—he hired me. I got back in the mix. I only had to do it every third [Sunday] night so I got both gigs, both radio gigs back. You know, even though I quit them both to go to Africa.

So this is all what did Tilton do after [prison]: law school. Wounded Knee, radio, law school, what did Tilton do after prison. Painting, Wounded Knee, radio, KQ, MPR, law school and then I officed with Ken Tilsen who had been our lawyer.

PS: Right.

BT: I paid him rent. He didn’t pay me and for the first five years of practice, I made more money in radio than I did in law and I—it was sort of great. I would work on my documentaries late at Minnesota Public Radio because the news people would leave after *All Things Considered* [*All Things Considered* National Public Radio (NPR), 1971-present] was done. In fact, by the time it started they pretty much had their stuff in the can so I worked there at night till about midnight. I’d walk to—I lived on Lower Payne Avenue area over by MMC [Minnesota Music Café] in a house that doesn’t exist anymore in Railroad Island and I’d, you know, sleep late, walk downtown to St. Paul to my office and get there late morning and work all day.

I’d have dinner with Chuck Logan, Mike Sweeney, John Camp, who writes as John Sandford [John Sandford, real name John Roswell Camp (1944-)], the famous author, Katherine Lanphere [Katherine Lanphere (1959-)], I mean, on a regular basis, we had dinner. You know, Logan had been my friend from the antiwar movement and from *Hundred Flowers* and he and I were roommates for a year in law school. So we’d have dinner and then I’d go to public radio. I had this sort of routine for years. It was just magic.

Then by the early eighties, radio ended and I practiced law, practiced law and I don’t know where you want to go with all that. Since then, I’ve gotten married, three wonderful children. My daughters live in New York. We haven’t talked about our children. I don’t know where you want to go with this.

PS: Let’s back up a little bit to Auerbach helping you get into law school. That was—I don’t know if that was a first but I seem to recall it was kind of a first to have someone with a conviction like yours, which was never set aside, right?

BT: Right.

PS: Being admitted to the University of Minnesota School of Law. Was that—how big a deal was that then?

BT: Well, Chuck had plowed that ground. He started a year before I did.

PS: Oh, okay. I got the sequence mixed up.

BT: No, no, he started a year before me and he never passed the bar.

PS: Right, he talked about that with me when I interviewed him.

BT: Okay, and I will trust his memory on a lot of these things. I don’t really even remember him from law school.

PS: Well, maybe you didn’t intersect in classes that much or—

BT: We really did not.

PS: But by that time, by the time you were admitted, there was a sort of a precedent for it—

BT: For the law school and then we were both betting on the come because the people who regulate the bar, admission to the bar, would not give prospective rulings as to whether we’d

00:25:00 be permitted to take the bar exam. They said you wait until you qualify.

PS: So that means—

BT: Which means you go to law school, and then we’ll let you apply and then we’ll decide if you’re moral enough to be a lawyer.

PS: Yeah, if your moral turpitude is extensive enough that we want to keep you out.

BT: Exactly. [unclear]

PS: Yeah, Chuck talked about that, too, and he had to jump through hoops to be able to take the bar exam and—but that was a struggle for him. Maybe it wasn’t as much of a struggle for you by that time.

BT: Well, he plowed that ground. I still had to appear in front of the Board of Law Examiners. They sort of asked you, you know, Would you do it again? Well, I didn’t plan on getting caught.

PS: Was that an interesting interview?

BT: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, it’s always harder in the anticipation, than it is, you know, once these things start then they’re over before you know it and you sort of then think of what it would have—Gosh, I wish I’d said this; I wish I’d said that. Right? You know how that goes. Same thing is true for this interview. All night I’ll be thinking, I should have told Pete this, right?

PS: Sure. That sort of gets to something. You said they asked you, Well, would you do it again and what your reflections were not many years after we got out and were convicted. What do you think about that—all these things that we first got notorious for and known for way back very nearly fifty years ago now? Do you think it made a difference to other people or—meaning besides immediate family and friends—do you think we influenced other people? Do you—public impact? Do you have regrets? Do you think it was worth it? Talk about anything like that that comes to you now.

BT: I don’t have regrets. I do think that we inspired people. I think the fact that we were sort of average schmos was telling and we had some pretty good PR folk. Remember Molly Ivins [Mary Tyler "Molly" Ivins (1944-2007)]?

PS: Oh, sure.

BT: Yeah, well, Molly Ivins sort of said, Who are these guys? These are middle America. This is not some, you know, radicals, you know Commies, who are coming from Russia to try to undermine your society. These are us.

PS: I remember—I still have that front page story that she did and she was able to do because she was on the news desk that weekend when we were arrested. And the regular guy, she figured, if he’d been there, whoever that was, would never have let her story in, but she was the one who was being the news editor for the weekend and so she was able to put in whatever she wanted and there were pictures of us across the top of the front page or maybe it was inside. And it was like reading, “Teen Toppers,” you know, like here are the high school kid who won the National Merit Scholarship this year from some school. It was kind of like that.

BT: Yes. I remember that article. It’s somewhere in the archives.

PS: We had pretty good press there, didn’t we?

BT: We had good press. I think we deserved it. I mean, we broke the law but there were horrid things going on, worse than breaking the law. I’m not embarrassed that I tried to break into a draft board, you know. Would I have done it again in retrospect knowing I was getting caught, you know, maybe not. But we both know that we’re stronger because we went to prison. We learned so much more in those twenty months than our friends who were on the street. So, you know, whether we had my experience in prison which in my mind, you know, was almost a lark, right?

PS: It was kind of like being in the Army in some obscure base somewhere.

BT: Yeah, you know, listen, it’s not like we had a lot of responsibility. It’s not like we worried about where the rent was coming from. Anyhow, “a toke ‘n a poke.” All it meant was that we got three hots and a cot. All we need is a toke ‘n’ a poke, right? And oftentimes we had that toke. And if you were gay, you had that poke, right? I got hit on more than once. I had some of the prettiest men in the world hit on me, you know, I wanted to be gay. I did. I wanted to be gay.

PS: It could have worked for you then, right?

BT: Totally. Oh, I had opportunities, shit, I just couldn’t get it up. And where was I going with that? So, do I regret it? No. Would I have done it knowing we were going to get caught?

00:30:00 No. But I’m stronger because of it, you know. I mean, there are certain opportunities we

might have lost because people thought we were horrid enemies of the state, but in fact, you know, we can’t hide it so you might as well wear it on your sleeve. Yeah, that was me. Yeah, I did it. You know, at a certain point, I’m a little tougher than you because you didn’t go through it.

PS: You know, I said before, like in that—we never talked today about the play that got done about us [*Peace Crimes: The Minnesota 8,* by Doris Baisley, 2008] eleven years ago now, which is—

BT: Dorie Baisley’s coming in town.

PS: Yeah, for the McDonald Sisters [*Sisters of Peace*, by Doris Baizley, directed by Barbra Berlovitz, History Theatre, St. Paul, 2019]. I assume for the opening night and maybe the next day. I want to be sure that I’m there for that.

BT: Yeah.

PS: But I’ve said before that I feel really lucky because there were things that we did and happened for us that never would have happened otherwise. I couldn’t imagine. And it was a great time to have been deeply engaged in something that I still think was valuable and important. So, yeah, I don’t think that it was a bad thing for me. It was not easy. There were times that were emotionally difficult and difficult in other ways but I am not regretful, not at all. I wish some things had been a little different or that I might have said or done different things in some connections but I don’t feel bad about it. I mean, how many people get to be in a play while they’re still alive—

BT: Yeah. [laughter] True dat!

PS: for instance? You know, so. Do you want to back up at all and talk about those events in Virginia?

BT: Oh, Virginia. Virginia was fun. In May of 1971, the national antiwar effort was called May Day. It was called May Day and the idea was to shut down Washington, DC. And so antiwar activists from all over the country congregated in Washington DC, whether it was literally May 1 or whatever, I can’t remember.

PS: I think it was. So this is while we were out on bail awaiting appeal.

BT: Right. And I can’t remember if we got special permission to leave the state. Probably we did.

PS: We had to ask.

BT: Yeah, I think we did. And we got it. You know, things were more liberal then. And May Day was pretty neat. I remember a bunch of us went without a clue where we were going to stay and people in DC took us in. We crashed—I remember crashing on the hard floor, just wooden floor of somebody’s place because it was like wall to wall people around their dining room table and literally in their kitchen. They just let a whole bunch of us sleep on the floor. And then I got arrested. I think I was trying to let the air out of a cop car’s tires. But we got arrested and thrown into like a baseball, football stadium, some sports stadium.

PS: A big arena of some kind.

BT: A big arena of some sort and gave phony names and got out. I sort of, you know, they didn’t know what to do with all these arrestees.

PS: There were thousands, right?

BT: Thousands. Yeah, I mean, imagine yourself as the poor chief of police in DC. What am I going to do? I can’t feed these people. I don’t know where they’re going to poop. I have men and women. I’ve got old people, you know, they just wanted to get rid of these people. I can’t blame them.

In any case, after that, so there’s stories from those demonstrations. Brad Beneke and I went and visited his brother Bruce. His brother Bruce is a lawyer, a sainted man who has a career of running and building Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services [Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS), 55 Fifth Street East, St Paul, MN].He is just—he is one of the pillars of the legal community of Minnesota.

PS: And little known outside of—

BT: Little known outside of the legal aid world, yes. He’s a pillar in the legal aid world. He has tremendous amount of respect and I’ve worked with him for decades. I’ve been on the Committee for Legal Aid, the CLA Committee for SMRLS for decades and had a meeting

00:35:00 with him—it was telephonic but just earlier –was it last week already? Anyway, so and Bruce

Is a dear friend. At that time Bruce was in the JAG Corps. He was a lawyer in the Army. He later got out of the Army as a CO, as a genuine pacifist but he was stationed in the JAG Corps in Washington, DC.

PS: JAG Corps?

BT: Judge Advocate General Corps. JAG or JAG Corps.

PS: JAG, okay.

BT: And Brad and I went and spent the weekend with him. He lived in this lovely little place, you know, twenty miles outside of DC. And then I started to hitchhike to Atlanta [Atlanta, GA] with a guy named Phil and we got arrested hitchhiking.

PS: Was this what? Right after May Day?

BT: It was right after May Day. Brad and I went and spent the weekend with Bruce and then I must have gone back to DC. I don’t know how I met up with Phil and Phil and I were then hitchhiking to Atlanta because Phil said Atlanta is this island of sanity in the south. I was reluctant to go south but we got arrested in Dinwiddie, Virginia. Classic big old state trooper, “You boys know you ought not to be hitchhiking here? Put your hands up against the car.” I got ten stories coming out of this. I’ll try to pare them down. He searched us very closely, nut grab kind of close and I had boots that came up, you know, half or a third of the way to my knee and he went down and he felt just to that point and then said, “Take off your boots.” I had a gram of hash sitting in my socks, right? He had missed it by a half an inch when he hit the top of my boot. And so I pulled off the boot and I pointedly pulled my socks way up and he started right where the top of the boot had been. By then, I’d moved the hash—

PS: It slid further up.

BT: further up. So I got into Dinwiddie County Jail with a gram of hash. [laughter] I didn’t intend to smuggle but I did. And while we were in there, they searched our packs and I had a pipe, a marijuana pipe in my pack. And so—

PS: Just the pipe

BT: With yeah, just pipe but with residue of marijuana in it. A corncob pipe. And this is a funny Beneke story. It’ll end up in the Bruce Beneke story. But so we were arrested like on a Friday and we spend the weekend in jail. We don’t get a phone call, nothing. And we appear on Monday and they have all the prisoners come and I learned on Monday that there is a reason—that our cellblock was not completely full of people and it was all white. We went around the corner and there’s an identical cellblock with two or three times as many black guys in it. They segregated it and there were many more black guys. In any case, we all get set and put in the jury box and all morning we watched all the misdemeanants get arraigned, including the racist dogcatchers. I’ve got more stories about the Dinwiddie County dog catchers—two white guys with half their teeth—were arresting all these black guys for dogs running wild. It was one of the most sort of Jim Crow instructive events of my life.

In any case, we finally get in front of our judge in the afternoon and Phil gets released because he didn’t have anything in his pack and I finally get a phone call and I call back to Ken Tilsen’s office and, you know, whatever, and so a week later—so there’s only arraignments on Monday.

PS: Okay so after you were arraigned you got—

BT: Yeah, I’m arraigned for possession of marijuana. Phil didn’t even make a phone call for me. He just disappeared. In any case, I got a hold of Ken and Ken got a hold of Bruce so the next Monday Bruce Beneke comes down in his captain’s uniform. Yes, he looked good, you know. He was trim back then and in his captain’s uniform and this is a classic old southern courthouse where the windows are open and during the breaks people are smoking

00:40:00 off in the courtroom but just but off by the windows. You know, it’s sort of an informal place

where everything’s going on.

PS: Like *Inherit the Wind* [*Inherit the Wind*, produced and directed by Stanley Kramer, 1960] and the ceiling fans going and all that.

BT: Yeah, I don’t remember ceiling fans but now I will, now that you mention it. And so there gets to be a time for a hearing and at the time, it was an iffy search. They didn’t have any reason to search my pack, certainly not into my ditty bag to find this pipe that was sort of within, within, within, you know, different layers. And so Bruce was challenging the search and challenging probable cause that they had to do the testing or whatever.

PS: And in his full dress uniform all the time.

BT: In his full dress uniform all the time and you know, and he says, “Well you know, Your Honor, I’ve been known to smoke a corncob pipe myself.” At which point he pulls it out, you know, makes a point of packing some tobacco in it and my guess is he probably purposely smoked it—he never smoked in his life—but he purposely smoked, you know, during the break or whatever. And I just remember the judge. I mean, the judge was a southern cracker, but younger and sort of got the joke in a certain way. I just remember him the judge sort of leaning over his glasses and looking at Bruce and looking at looking at [unclear]. “Captain Beneke, does your pipe—is it lined with tinfoil?” Because mine was lined with tinfoil. It wasn’t a corncob pipe so that’s the punchline. “Captain Beneke, is your pipe lined with tinfoil?” [laughter].

Anyway, I credit Bruce the fact that he showed up in his uniform and we were all polite, etcetera, etcetera. With—I’d been in jail for ten days by then and so I was—I copped a plea with time served. I was on probation in Virginia for two years then after that. Had I been caught with that hash it would have been a felony. I would have done two years in a Virginia prison farm. Oh, I got lucky as could be.

PS: I guess.

BT: Holy Cow did I get lucky.

PS: There’s nothing like a search that doesn’t quite work out. [laughter]

BT: I was in a couple of those, yeah.

PS: When we went in in Winona, we were carrying bags, fabric bags to bring files out with and I had a big, fairly big sort of light canvas laundry bag which I had folded up till it was kind of narrow and wrapped it around my waist underneath my belt and underneath whatever kind of shirt I was wearing so I could get at it easily but it wouldn’t be in the way. And they missed it in all the searches, all the searches, and I wound up putting it under the mattress in the Hennepin County Jail.

BT: What do I do with it? [laughter] Isn’t that interesting?

PS: And it probably didn’t wind up making any difference because Don had some laundry bags inside his shirt and they found those right away but it was just really comical, you know, those little slip things like that that happen. Of course, I never said anything until afterward. It was pretty—these funny little stories.

BT: I got to tell you one more smuggling story because it’s another one that’s sort of funny. This would have happened at the last couple of months that I was in prison because I’d been out on the street. I worked at the Vaudeville Delicatessen as a dishwasher and a counterman and no, no, this had been a church visit. Trudy Huntington, this sainted Quaker lady, took me out on a church thing.

PS: She was a Quaker living there?

BT: She was my Quaker visitor. She’s just a most wonderful person. And so some friends were visiting. Connie Ganapes, my old girlfriend, Ron Rosenbaum, my old partner, and they brought some killer marijuana. And so, of course, I put some in a rubber and put it up my butt. I’m smuggling this shit in the joint, right. And so I do this at Trudy’s house. She’s got this old house that is just clean as a whistle and so I’m in her bathroom doing this and so I’ve got the

00:45:00 remnants of the rubber and I can’t leave that in Trudy’s wastebasket because then I’ll be

busted because then there’s nothing in her wastebasket. All right? And so—

PS: And you didn’t want her to know it—that anything was up?

BT: Correct, correct. And so I wrapped that in some toilet paper and put it in my pocket and didn’t think a thing about it. And had also—the baggie, the empty baggie with [marijuana] particulate matter I put in my pocket, too, intending to get rid of it. Well, I smoked some of this dope. It was killer weed and so I forgot all about this shit. And I don’t know if you remember—you never had minimum custody, but what—did you?

PS: No. I was never out on a work release or anything.

BT: So imagine a big room that is sort of the reception area that’s maybe twenty by forty or thirty by fifty or whatever with, you know, couches and stuff.

PS: Sort of like a visiting area—

BT: Visiting area, clearly, yeah, yeah. And, in fact, the visiting area was even maybe a little smaller. But then there’s a distinct corner of it which is the sally port, which is bulletproof glass, you know, the upper half and there’s the guard’s there and there’s that door that they control into an interim area where we’d leave our shoes. That was maybe, you know, fifteen by fifteen and then another place where we’d go back.

Well, and so all the people who’ve been out on trips are out there and so there’s, you know, ten, fifteen guys and everybody’s sort of lined up and you get searched before you go through that first door. And everybody’s sort of watching each other as they’re going through this door and it comes to be my turn and I put my hand in one pocket and it’s the marijuana bag. And everybody’s watching me, you know. Right next to me, two feet away, but with bulletproof glass, is the guard controlling the whatever—there’s probably two or three guards in there—and there’s a few guys in front of me that have already been searched and another guy behind me and a few guys behind me.

And so I put my hand in there and there’s the marijuana bag. And I put my hand in my other pocket—I think we had to pull out our pockets and there’s the tissue paper with the rubber. And I’m looking like the cat that ate the canary. I’m looking as guilty as can be and meanwhile, you know, the sergeant Saenz, you know, they run their fingers through your hair and then they check the collar and at that point I’m supposed to be putting my hands up, emptying, you know, pulling my pockets out. And so I pulled up—

PS: And you were still wasted right?

BT: Oh, totally wasted. I’m totally wasted. And so, the lesser of two evils, I pull out the hand with the tissue paper in it and I’m looking just—I’m stoned; I’m looking guilty as can be and everybody stops. And Saenz says, “Tilton, what’s that?” And I say, “That, Sarge, it’s tissue paper.” “Tilton, what’s in the tissue paper?” He thinks he’s got me busted. “Ah, Sarge, that’s tinfoil.” “Tilton, what’s in the tinfoil?” And I go, “Ah, nothing, Sarge, it’s from a rubber,” at which point everybody breaks out in laughter, grand laughter.

Meanwhile, in my other hand I’ve gotten this baggie all up into a little ball and I do my, Aw, shucks kind of thing and put it behind my collar where he’s already searched my collar. And nobody sees it. I mean, I’m in the middle of—everybody’s watching me and nobody sees that because everybody’s—it’s a magician’s trick. They’re all looking at that [tissue paper in my other hand]. And so, he doesn’t even open it up. He just laughs at me, you know, like I got laid, right? I didn’t get laid. And he puts it down and I go through. I’m sure they looked at it later but I’m sure they just figured they’d trusted me on that. And so I get through that one area where we leave our shoes and then we’ll walk down the hallway where we get naked and get strip searched and somebody’s cleaning the offices. And there’s a wastebasket out there and so I look around, nobody’s looking, and I throw it in the wastebasket—

PS: The baggie.

BT: The baggie. I’m clean now. And I come back after getting strip searched. I’m in my prison uniform and here’s—Cathy is his name. You know how some guys have female names? Kathy, a good kid; always my friend. “Tilton, psst, psst, I got it. I got it.” He was the guy who was cleaning the offices and [laughter] and he thought I was smuggling in and he was just doing me a favor. He was just, “I got it for you.” I go “Get rid of it!”

PS: No, no—

BT: “Get rid of it!. I never want to see that thing again.” Anyway, so I had to tell that story just because it’s a funny smuggling story that might get lost to posterity except now Pete Simmons’s record has it.

PS: We can make sure it’s in the (phone rings?) university archives. So back after a brief telephone call interruption. Bill, is there anything else, after talking about all this stuff for hours now that you feel like you want to add or focus on or any last chance to fill in a blank spot?

BT: Oh, god, I got too many stories. No, no. I just want to give a shout out to my children. I mean, what have I done for the last thirty years but raise three children. I have good, strong daughters. They’re all nice kids; they’re all healthy; they’re good friends with each other; they’re all in damn New York. [laughter] And none of them have produced any grandchildren if you’re reading it.

PS: So far.

BT: So I mean, you know, my life story, we get hung up on things that happened decades ago. We’ve done a lot since then and our children are our real legacy.

PS: Right and, you know, this reminds me of something that Fred Ojile said to me last fall when I interviewed him. He said, Well, something like, This was certainly a big thing, the Milwaukee 14 and the aftermath of that, but he said, My life didn’t revolve around it afterward, and, you know, I think that’s more or less been true for many of us although some have been more—I’m not sure how to put it but, you know, some have been more active in the resistance and peace activity world and—but it’s not like the only thing that ever happened to us. It’s not like the big high school football game and after that everything is a big splat, a big nothing.

BT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We have children. We’ve done other things and it’s fun to talk about these things. We had some fun experiences.

PS: Oh, it is.

BT: Yeah, so thanks for preserving the history but we’ve done a few things since then.

PS: Yeah.

BT: All right?

PS; Yes. And worth doing, too, and well, just to finish up, thanks a lot, Bill. I’m grateful for your taking the time to do this with me and indulge my hobby about this and—

BT: Well, I’m glad you’re doing it; I’m—it’s wonderful you’ve got some financing to help it.

PS: Yeah, it would—even if it wasn’t about the money, I would not know how to go about this if it wasn’t for the help of this organization.

BT: All right.

PS: So, real important. So thanks to the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum for all their assistance here in this.

BT: Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum.

PS: So signing off, turning off this recording for today, February 21, 2019.

End of Recording 3

00:53:52