**Interview with Frank Kroncke**

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

**Oral History Project**

**April 7, 2019**

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Name of interviewee: Frank Kroncke—FK

Names of interviewer: Peter Simmons—PS

Also Present: Dave Gutknecht - DG

Recording 1

00:00:00 PS: My named is Peter Simmons. I’m doing the interview here and the person I’m

interviewing is Frank Kroncke, proper name Francis Kroncke, and we’re talking at his home in the town of Viroqua, Wisconsin. It is April 7, 2019, in the early afternoon, Sunday and we’re going to be talking about some of Frank’s activities and history. This project is being sponsored by and assisted by the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum and funded in large part by a grant from the Minnesota Cultural Heritage Fund.

And to begin, Frank, I would like you to please say something briefly about the event that took place in July of 1970 that you and I were both part of; what that was and what your role in that was and then we can go into details later about that and other things.

FK: Okay. On July 10, 1970, in the summertime, Mike Therriault and I drove up to Little Falls, Minnesota, and we entered a draft board and then we tried to open the draft files. Our intent was to destroy them and we found out that they were locked. And so, as we tried to pry them open, we heard noises to the side and eventually it was the FBI. And I just want to say from the start with here we were really thrilled it was the FBI and not just some local, you know, yahoos, who were going to come in and beat the shit out of us so we can talk more about that later.

But so that night we got arrested and when we were in the county jail, in Hennepin County [Hennepin County Adult Detention Center, 350 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, MN] slowly other guys kept coming in, Brad Beneke and other people, part of the group. And eventually there was the—

PS: Also Frank, that happened a few months before that, that’s less well-known. The Minnesota 8 were in the press a lot and for some long while, but before that, at the end of January or the end of February, right? There was something else that you were involved in.

FK: Actually it’s the largest draft raid in American history. Why is that? The Minnesota 8 draft raid was typical of draft boards. Little Falls, Minnesota, is a small town up in the northern central part of the state and when—in Minneapolis and St. Paul, I’ve thought about this over time, the director—who later on we called as a hostile witness—he had—

PS: Director of?

FK: Selective Service System.

DG: For Minnesota.

FK: For Minnesota, right, yeah. Which is right. He was a Selective Service—he was a Colonel—

PS: Robert Knight is what I remember.

FK: Yeah, Robert Knight, yeah. So I presume that in his infinite wisdom and for efficiency, they didn’t have alarms so that alarm systems, which is interesting. They took all the draft boards from St. Paul [former St. Paul Post Office, 180 East Kellogg Boulevard, St Paul, MN; now Custom House Apartments] and put them in one place; all the draft boards from Minneapolis and put them in one place. So when we did this draft raid we destroyed forty-five draft boards in one night. Forty-five in one night, right there in St. Paul and people did I don’t know how many in Minneapolis. But the—I went upstairs—it’s another part of the story—to Colonel Knight’s office and we destroyed his office. But as an aside, his son recently contacted me and he’s still sort of pissed off at me. He feels that I’m not telling the true story, I don’t know; his father was a hero or something, I don’t know. But anyway, so nobody got caught. We got out of there; it was absolutely amazing.

PS: The date of this other raid was?

FK: It was in late February in 1970; I don’t exactly know the exact day. Isn’t that terrible?

PS: Was it over the weekend: Am I remembering right?

FK: Yeah, well, we were antiwar but we were also nonviolent so what we did is instead of freaking people out and doing this in the daytime like coming in the office and getting the secretaries all hysterical or whatever, we put at least a dozen people in the top floor of the post office building where the Selective Service office was located.

PS: In St. Paul?

FK: In St. Paul and we stayed there for like twelve hours; I remember because we were eating—astronauts that were flying to the moon at this time and they had created these little sort of nutrition, I guess bars, like Tootsie Rolls and we were up there eating that stuff to keep ourselves, you know, from—we were young people so we were hungry, right? So we waited till like midnight to go downstairs and actually we took Charlie Turchick [Charles Turchick (1946-)], who was the shortest guy in our group, and we threw him over the transom so they could open the door.

But again, I mean, nowadays you can’t do this anymore because they make copies of the files

00:05:00 in their databases or wherever. Back then there was no security system and once we destroyed

these files, there was no way they could recover them. So what happened is that the draft

board sent out these letters to people saying, Your draft board’s been destroyed. Come down and re-register. How do I know this? Well, years later, when they did the play [*Peace Crimes*; viz. p.17] in 2008, I was back in Minnesota and guys came up to me and they showed me these letters. They still had them. They didn’t answer them because they said all the men in whatever county of the part of the county they were in, Come and re-register. So they didn’t re-register so they were invisible to the system. Well, that can’t happen today but it happened then.

PS: This event in what I think was the last weekend in February in 1970, was called what? Or you called yourselves what?

FK: Well, you know—

PS: Say something about that.

FK: you got to laugh at some of the stuff I’ll tell you because back then it was like—this was before the Internet and this was before cable television was ubiquitous—so the idea was like—and we were like in Minnesota. Like where’s Minnesota? Like, you know, that’s in the middle of nowhere for most people who live on the East Coast or the West Coast, right? So there was a group in Pennsylvania called the Conspiracy to Save Lives so, you know, we called ourselves, you know, the Minnesota Conspiracy to Save Lives and Beavers—we signed it the Beaver 55 to try to make them think that there were a lot of us. You know, it was all early PR—I mean, Brad Beneke was one of our group; he always makes the joke about how we were early PR people, you know, and so we tried to make ourselves look like we were connected to the people back east, which we weren’t, and that we were multiple, like beavers, we’re out there gnawing at the bottom of the table, the foundation of the system.

PS: There were, if I remember right, at least two other raids of different kinds that had happened by people who called themselves Beaver 55 wherever they got that name.

FK: Media, Pennsylvania, was one—[in 1970, the FBI offices in Media, PA, were burglarized, and documents taken were later released to the press. The story is told in *The* *Burglary,* by Betty Medsger, Vintage Books, 2014]

PS: No, I don’t think that—there was a draft board raid in Indianapolis [Indianapolis, IN].

FK: Could be.

PS: Then there was also Dow Chemical Company [Dow Chemical Company, Midland, MI] raid in Michigan.

FK: Yeah, I mean, we—

PS: That’s what I remember.

FK: That’s possible. I mean, you’ve got to understand that this was again, like I said, pre-Internet so—and we had to read the paper to find out what was going on and so some of this stuff we didn’t—I didn’t find out until years later, you know.

PS: So it was kind of free form back then.

FK: Pretty much so. We just tried to deal with the anonymity of being from Minnesota which still like, you know, when my son, who I raised in San Diego [San Diego, CA], graduated from Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA], came to visit me here in Viroqua, Wisconsin, he said, “Oh, I thought Wisconsin was west of the Dakotas.” [laughter] I said, “Well, Jed, how—that’s crazy” “Well, Dad, I just fly over this place.” So back then it was sort of the same thing—Minnesota? Where’s that? Is that next to Mississippi or where is that, right? So we tried to connect ourselves up and make us seem a little bigger than we were. Which worked actually so when Minnesota—when Mike and I got arrested in Little Falls, the FBI agents went around the room, waving their guns and saying, Guess we got some beavers now; guess we got some beavers now. Had to laugh.

PS: Well, and they were actually right, weren’t they, in that case?

FK: At the trial we found out that they were at all types of draft boards where nobody was that night; nobody raided; that they had sort of mixed information so they were at some—and two of the people in our draft raid group, two boards, people went down to and found out they had alarm systems recently put in and they aborted. And on one side it’s kind of humorously and a little bit unfortunately in some instances is that the women who were involved were in those draft raid groups and so when people look at the Minnesota 8 and look at draft raids they think, Well, it’s just a bunch of guys. Well, there were women, basically Quaker women involved in draft raids. And one of them lives down here and I won’t mention her name because she’s somewhat beyond all this at the moment but she and I meet every now and then and laugh about the things that we did back then.

PS: Well, let’s back up to your—I’d like to talk about your origins and sort of follow your early years up to the point where you got involved in something as bold as these draft board raids. I know before, from knowing you, that you’re not a native Minnesotan; you’re from New Jersey, right?

FK: That’s correct. Yeah, I mean, I’m one of nine kids; I’m the fourth child, third son and nobody would have ever thought that Francis was going to turn out to be a criminal, right? So I mean, at the early years, I mean, I was the guy who my grandmother, my Irish grandmother, picked me out to be the priest. And my name is Francis Xavier. Well, if you’re from the East Coast and you’re name is Aloysius Ignatius or Francis Xavier, you’re supposed to be a Jesuit;

00:10:00 those are Jesuit names and everybody knows it. I mean, people in the Midwest don’t know

that but people back there do.

So when people call me Frank it sort of covers up this sort of lineage and expectation—and I was the third son. So like Mom and Dad had two boys who gave them grandkids; they didn’t need to have children from me, so, you know, I mean, I was picked out to be the priest. And so when my family moved to Minnesota in 1960, I decided God was calling me. We moved to Hastings, [Hastings, MN] which was a small town of about four to six thousand at the time. My father worked for 3M [3M, St. Paul, MN], which has a plant just outside of town. And so I walked around town for a while and then I decided I’d go back to the seminary and I started out in Staten Island, New York, at a Franciscan seminary and then they moved me because my parents were living in Minnesota to a new province which—so I was in this town, Clarksville [Clarksville, KY], which is out right across the river from Louisville [Louisville, KY].

PS: Province meaning—this is an ecclesiastical designation?

FK: An ecclesiastical designation, right. So that’s where their minor seminary was and so I went into the minor seminary and so I graduated; my senior class had thirteen people in it. How’s that? And we were, you know, ready to go into—back then they allowed young people to go into—they wanted to keep you forever, so they started young. They took kids right in—freshmen in high school and put them in the system. So I came in the last two years, my junior and senior year, in there and that’s where I played all my basketball so that was one of the plusses of a small school is that I’m six foot three and back then I was a center, not a guard. So I played a lot of basketball.

And so I started out in the novitiate up in Hanover, Indiana, and I got—they ask you to select names so you like you change your name when you become a friar. And so, one of—my father’s middle name is Otto, Charles Otto Kroncke, right? Which later on I find out was one of the reasons, because of the anti-German sentiment in the country during World War II, that he ended up, you know, he had four—I was—my mother was pregnant with me when he went into the Navy. He already had three kids—part of—and then he had a chemistry degree from Notre Dame [University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN] so, to prove that he wasn’t a Nazi, he joined the Navy. So anyway, I took his name, Otto, so my religious name was Friar Otto and I went through this whole thing and was a novitiate and stuff and after six months I realized this really wasn’t—

So I should just tell you a little bit about that so you get a little bit of insight to me. I mean, life in the seminary was easy. You might think it’s hard other than not having sex, I mean, which at that time, I wasn’t having anyway, right? The idea was that my future was secured. They had picked me out to go study in Rome [Rome, Italy] meaning I’ll be—and I had all the clothes I wanted and I had my own room to sleep in. I mean, I grew up where I always slept with my two other brothers, right? Here I had my own room and the door shuts. This is my place. Now, it seems so weird to people who were raised with like, I only have two sons and you know, they have their own rooms. But, you know, back then, I never had my own room until I went into the monastery. I never drank wine at dinner till I was in the monastery. They were serving wine on Sundays. It was like, Wow, this was really crazy stuff.

So, ironically, I was taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and poverty was sort of not really there. So I was sort of lost. I was sort of set adrift because, you know, my whole family had this expectation that I was supposed to become a Catholic. And so when I—

PS: You already were a Catholic, you mean a priest.

FK: Become a priest, yeah. So when I leave and I come home, I can still see my mother and father standing there as I get off the train and my father is just like dejected. And necessarily, as a young man, who realizes there’s nothing you can do that will ever reestablish yourself in the eyes of your father, like you failed at the most important thing, you know. There’s a Biblical Proverb phrase that says, “He who plows and turns around is lost to the kingdom of God,” something like that so the idea is I had put my hand to the plow and then looked back.

PS: And the event that led to all this was your leaving the seminary, right?

FK: Leaving the seminary, right.

PS: Yeah.

FK: So I went up, you know, my dad had graduated from Notre Dame but without going into the whole thing of my history, I mean, my father couldn’t afford it. They had all these kids at the time; there was already six of us at the time so I went up to St. John’s University [now College of Saint Benedict, a women's college, and Saint John's University, 2850 Abbey Plaza, Collegeville, MN] in Minnesota and I remember him taking me up there and this is before you had to take the S.A.T. and I sat down outside this room and he went in and talked to this monk. He came out to me and he said, “You’re in.” That was it. Some months later they called me down and said, Listen, you’ve got to take this test; this is what they’re doing now. So I sat down and took the S.A.T. after I’d already been enrolled in the school. And it

00:15:00 was an all-male school; an all-male school run by the Benedictines, the largest Benedictine

Abbey in the world is in St. John’s, Collegeville, Minnesota.

And so I’m there and, of course, what’s the next best thing to being a priest? That’s being a doctor so I tried to go into pre-med, right. Well, I mean, It really wasn’t my thing. I was getting “C’s” in physics and all this other stuff. So in my junior year I tell my dad, “I’m going to study philosophy.” And I remember him sending me a letter that says, “As far as your mother and I are concerned, your going into philosophy is for the birds.” Well, so life is not—so, you know, I’m strong-willed and I decide, Well, why not? I’m going to get my degree in philosophy, which I ended up doing. I’m in the honors program, but again, like I said, none of this means anything. I had lost in my sort of subculture, the Catholic—the Irish/German Catholic subculture, my status. I am no longer a seminarian; your son’s not going to be a priest, I mean what’s? There’s nothing I can do.

So I’m just sort of banging along and so this is when the Vietnam War starts, 1963, right?

PS: So that’s when you’re a junior at St. John’s in ‘63?

FK: I’m at St. John’s, right. So I’m wearing a ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] uniform one day coming home from the ROTC program and the guy walks up to me and says, Hey, they just shot your president. This is when Kennedy [John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy (1917-1963)] got killed. And I remember I was dressed in military garb and then going home and watching the burial of Kennedy and all that other stuff and I wasn’t against the war because Catholics had what’s called the Just War theory. Oh, it’s Just War.

PS: So, for a second, Frank, so back up a little bit. You, when you were at St. John’s, you were in ROTC? Was that mandatory?

FK: It was mandatory, yes.

PS: So everybody was.

FK: Everybody. You just had to do it, right? So it was like, you know, you’re a good Catholic, you go to—it’s like when I later on become a Conscientious Objector, and I go to my draft board. I remember this guy at the draft board stopped and he said, I’m a Catholic; I fought in the war. It was like, We Catholics kill people. What the hell’s wrong with you kid? You know, type of thing. So, you know, there was—I was in ROTC. I didn’t oppose the war so this is ’63, ’64. I graduate in ’66. I’m still—I mean, there are people out there protesting, doing stuff and I’m just saying, Well, you know, it’s war and Catholics have the just war theory and so I then get, you know, go out to the University of San Francisco [University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA], which is a Jesuit school, to do my master’s degree in theology.

And again, I’m like the most conservative guy in the whole theology department because all my friends are going off to these rallies. I remember going down to San Francisco and standing at the edge of these rallies of hundreds of people. These guys are burning their draft cards and all this crazy stuff. I’d just think, Wow, they’re really crazy. I came from a very conservative background; I’m not going to break the law. And there was no tradition that said, you know, breaking the law was a moral imperative or anything like that, right?

So, after I leave—I got my master’s degree. I spent one year teaching out there in San Francisco while I do that and then I start my doctoral work at Chicago [Chicago, IL]. This is now 1969.

PS: University of Chicago [University of Chicago, 5801 South Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL]?

FK: University of Chicago Divinity School, which was like, Well, that’s great. I’m going to become a professor and that’s the best place to say you’re from, the University of Chicago Divinity School. In the world I lived in, that was like top rank, you know. So part of what’s happening is that I come from the West Coast right at the time. So the nuns at this school that I was at called Rosary College back then is the Dominican School; it’s called Dominican University now. The Dominican sisters looked at me. I had a beard; I had what’s called an ankh, which was an Egyptian peace symbol and I had come from San Francisco so they assumed that I knew all this antiwar stuff. So they come to me one day and they say, We want to get the Black Panthers out here, to talk at this one event they were having. Call them up, Frank. I didn’t know any goddam—I didn’t know any Catholic Workers, which was sort of the radical Catholics. I didn’t know any draft people at the time. I didn’t know any Black Panthers.

And so I make this phone call. I talk to this guy called Fred Hampton [Fred Hampton (1948-1969)] I didn’t know him from a hole in the ground and so I get him to agree to come out and talk. He comes out to the suburb called River Forest [River Forest, IL] and I can still see it in my mind. Fred’s walking down the street next to the college. There’s a fence so he’s walking toward the main entrance. And he’s followed by this line—I mean, there must have been ten cop cars following this guy, right? I mean, at that time the Black Panthers—all they were doing is feeding kids, but Fred was this young, energetic, very impassioned, you know, powerful speaker and so he, you know, heads to the rally and so this is important. So after—

PS: This was in what year again?

FK: We’re now 1969.

PS: Okay.

FK: The fall of 1969 so wait a minute. No, it has to be the fall of 1968, so anyway, yeah. I graduated in—fall of ’68. And so I’m sitting there with Fred Hampton and at one point Fred looks at me and he said, “You know, Frank, the only difference between you and me is you go that way,” and he points to the suburbs, “and I go this way,” pointing to the inner city. And I

00:20:00 never, as you can tell, I never forgot that. It was like what the hell is this guy talking about,

you know. But he was right. He was a dynamic, you know, highly educated, very powerful speaker and he saw that the difference between us was the simple fact of where you lived, you know.

And so, the story is is that, you know, I had a—one time I went into a Black Panther event in South Chicago and I was making a little joke about myself. It was like I was holding onto Fred like a little kid holds on to his daddy. I’m in this sea of black faces, this white guy. And Fred says, “Oh, here’s Frank,” and I get up there and started to say, “You know, oh yeah, I don’t believe in the war. They’re all, you know, they’re laughing at me because for black people, I came to find out years later, is that the military was a way of getting ahead. It was one of the few parts of society where they could become officers and do different things. You know, even though there was racism involved, it still was like—so there weren’t many black draft resisters.

But the Black Panthers, you know, were, you know, challenging the status quo and some people remember that Mayor Daley [Richard Joseph Daley (1902-1976)], was running the show, the senior, the older father.

PS: Mayor of Chicago.

FK: Mayor of Chicago, right. And so, he had his eye on Fred. So, anyway, so there I am teaching, you know, I started graduate school at the University of Chicago Divinity School and Nixon [U.S. President Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994)] decides in 1968 was it? Sixty-nine? That—

PS: Decides what?

FK: To do away with all deferments. So all of a sudden they abolish all deferments. When was it?

DG: Seventy.

PS: Nineteen seventy?

FK: Well, whatever, what happened is that I had to go to my draft board and they said, You know, what do you—? Well, I said, “I have a master’s degree in theology.” Oh, geez, I think you’ll be okay so we’ll give you this Conscientious Objector thing, pick a job. So this is one of the turning points. It’s kind of interesting.

PS: Because you couldn’t get a student deferment anymore.

FK: No more student deferments.

PS: All those things—

FK: Which is what they gave me, you know, not have to deal with me, right? They said, Oh, you’re a student here, take a student deferment. Okay, you’re teaching; take a teaching deferment. The only thing I didn’t do was get married which was the other way out; to get married and have kids but I didn’t do that. So I always make a joke when I meet kids who are—I said, “Did your parents have you so that your dad didn’t have to go to Vietnam?” Some kids know that; some kids, I never thought of that, you know. It’s not a—and I understood why people did that. It’s like, you know, it was an easy way out so to speak in one sense.

PS: So your deferment was gone and you had to go to your draft board.

FK: The deferments had gone so I had to face my draft board in South St. Paul, Minnesota, because my family was living in Hastings. Even though I was in Chicago, my draft board was in this town of South St. Paul, Minnesota. And so I go in and I had first gotten in there right after when I was still, you know, graduating from St. John’s and said I’m a Conscientious Objector. And I had a guy with me who had led a bomb squadron in World War II who was not antiwar but he said, Frank’s telling the truth. I mean, he didn’t respect what I was doing but he said I wasn’t lying. I wasn’t trying to avoid the draft you know.

PS: He believed you in any case, right?

FK: Right, yeah, so anyway, but so the thing—they still had deferments so when the deferments ran out, they called me in and by that time I had my master’s degree in theology so they said, Okay, pick three jobs. So I thought I’d—

PS: Pick three jobs?

FK: Yeah, as alternative service, you know.

PS: Oh, okay.

FK: Usually they just give you a job as a working in a hospital as an orderly or something, you know, something that’s supposed to be degrading and you’re supposed to be below you so to speak, right? You’re not supposed to like it. So I talked to this guy, Father Harry Bury [Harry J. Bury], who everybody knows is a very famous antiwar guy in Minnesota, who’s still running around doing good work right now as a priest. And Harry had a job at the University of Minnesota Newman Center [formerly St. Lawrence Newman Center, 1228 Fourth Street SE, Minneapolis, MN, 1926-1998], you know, and to teach. So I said, “Okay, I’ll put that in. I never, never, never thought that they would approve that job. So I go to my draft board in time about this and they say, Well what do you want to do, Frank? And they’re asking me, What do I want to do? Well, I’ll take this Newman Center job. At the time, I thought this is going to not work out the way I think. But at the time, I was, This is great. I joined the Newman Center faculty.

Because of my background, the priest at the time, the Newman Center at the time at the University of Minnesota had—we’d have Sunday events and they’d have hundreds of students come. And they had all this early liturgy stuff, you know cymbals and music and candles and all sorts of stuff and part of the situation was that, you know, these other priests said, Well, Frank, you’re better educated than we are, which was true. I was better educated than the people who went to the seminary because I went academically. The seminary was a formation

00:25:00 period so for instance, none of them had never read the Protestants. Of course, I had read the

Protestants, especially the Quakers. I had somewhat of a minor in Quaker history and so they

said, Well, why don’t you preach?

I was a lay person. I wasn’t a priest but, What the hell, you know, given the times. So I start doing the sermons. Again, I’m thinking, This is great. I’m up here doing sermons and so what’s the result of that? So after mass, I started having these lineups at my office of these guys coming in, this one year, right? It was 1969 because we did the raids in ’70. They come in and they say, Ah, yeah, I really don’t want to go to Vietnam and blah, blah, blah, and then they would say, But, you know, I’m from Little Falls, Minnesota, or I’m from Hastings or I’m from International Falls [International Falls, MN], and my uncle and my brother and my father were in the military and, you know. Or, I want to become a doctor and if I resist the draft I’m never going to be able to become a doctor or an accountant or whatever, you know.

And I can understand that. You know, that made sense. It’s like, Well, I’m not going to tell you to sort of screw up your life. So I always say 99 percent of the guys that I met went into the military, okay? Right.

PS: So you were being a sort of lay pastoral counselor to these guys who were coming for counseling about the draft.

FK: Yeah, because I was young. At the time, I mean, I was not prepared to really be a counselor. I mean, I wasn’t qualified and I was a theologian. So anyway, so what happened is year number two, which is going to lead up to the draft raids, instead of young men who were going to be drafted or were faced with the draft call, we had returning veterans. So I had these guys coming in and saying—

This guy Gordy Nielson, who becomes a witness at my trial, says, he looks at me and says, “Frank, I heard you preach.” Well, fuck man, I mean, I’m saying to myself this guy is going to nail me to the wall. “I heard you up there saying this stuff. You’re articulate; you can speak,” you know. “This is what I did. I was in Vietnam and I killed people and I was out on patrol and I did this other stuff and you’ve got to stop; we’ve got to stop the story from being told; we have to shut the system down.” This is what, these are the exact words he said to me. I remember because I always say, The little fucker left my office. And I just went berserk. I took the books off my shelf. I just didn’t know what to do.

And then I walked over to the West Bank, to the—I remember standing downstairs at the Twin Cities Draft Information Center, creaky stairs to walk up to the second floor—I walked up to this place and I meet all these weird guys like Dave Gutknecht [Dave Gutknecht (1947-)] you know, who are draft—guys who’d been to prison even, you know, and guys who were refusing the draft and they’re—and they look at me and I tell them my Catholic story. They sort of said, Oh, okay, Frank, you know, that’s your story. You willing to resist the draft? Yeah. Okay, come on then, you know.

So slowly, all of a sudden, I’m part of this, you know, antiwar draft group and then at one time, a guy says, you know, We’re getting a whole bunch of people at Al Hooper’s [Alan B. Hooper], house. Remember Al Hooper? He was a professor at the university? A great guy. And Al—we went over there and we were having this big meeting and people were talking about, Well, why would we raid the draft board? What happens if you go to jail and stuff? So it was a big thing among most of us that we only involved people who were not married, you know, single people at the time. We were all single and we talked about what would happen—what was the impact of raiding a draft board? Well, you had to come down to accept the fact that it was a symbolic act. Well, that’s really not satisfying. Try to explain to somebody that you’re throwing away your life.

You know, my family would look at me and go like, Are you crazy man? I mean, you’ve been enough of a problem. This is really—who would have?—this is just too much, Frank, you know. You’re throwing away your whole life for what? You know, you’re not stopping the war. Because we soon came to understand that if we shut down, just like the Selective Service System in Minnesota, they just went to other states and they got bodies. There was no way we could prevent them from getting bodies.

Okay, so we do this big draft raid, the Beaver 55. Can we go there?

PS: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, but just a question.

FK: Yeah.

PS: At this point in—you were talking about going to the Draft Information Center probably in 1969?

FK: Yeah, the fall of ’69, yeah.

PS: Were you aware then, or did you become aware then, before the Beaver 55 raid, that there had been other draft board raids? You were not ignorant of that.

FK: Oh, yeah, I used to actually teach about that stuff. In fact, Fred Ojile [Fred Ojile (1947-)] from the Milwaukee 14, one day when I was in Chicago teaching at Rosary College [now Dominican University, 7900 Division Street, River Forest, IL] my guy that I had been in, you know, my roommate in college, Jim Hunt, who was the very first sort of pacifist I ever met, he said, “Oh, I want you to meet my friend, Fred Ojile.” “Hi Fred, what are you doing?” “Well, I’m on trial up in Milwaukee. You know, we raided the draft board, a group called the

00:30:00 Milwaukee 14.” And I’m like, Oh my god, this guy’s a criminal. What is this, like Jimmy, I

just—it just totally blew me away that they would do that. So that I knew of these kind of things that happened and I knew some of the people, you know, who did these different types of things but I never saw myself doing any of that. I thought it was a total sort of waste of time.

But then I came to a point, as I tried to explain at some point and people understand this, when I decided to do draft raids, I had to take everything that I had ever learned and sort of believed in and just say, Forget about it. You know, I had to get up in the morning and look at myself in the mirror. Am I doing something—hiding behind, you know, whatever it is? Being a professor or whatever? Oh, I’m in graduate school, you know, or like I’m married or, you know, whatever, or my girlfriend is pregnant or whatever, you know, whatever you would do to try to assuage your conscience. And so, you know, it was a very—it was a time when you sort of take that step outside the boundary and you’re in a land that you—you know, when people would say, Frank, you’re a complete fucking idiot. Yeah, okay, I understand your point of view, Pete, you know, but I’ve got to go do it anyway.

PS: And you were in your middle twenties at this point, like twenty-six, twenty-seven.

FK: Yeah, twenty-six to twenty-seven so yeah. So the idea was that—I was born in 1944 so this is ’68, so I’m like twenty-four years old. And so, you know, I meet these guys—I mean, I remember hearing about the Gutknecht brothers and other people who were involved in the antiwar movement, draft resisters and stuff and I was really kind of intimidated by it all. I mean, I had my little Catholic—I was really influenced by a guy that some people will never read called Pierre Teilhard de Chardin [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)]. He personally changed my life because he basically said that everything that you do counts, even when people aren’t looking. Everything you think; everything you say; everything you do. Ah, shit, you know, I hadn’t—there’s no place to go to escape responsibilities. Even if you’re all by yourself sitting in a house in Viroqua, Wisconsin, you know, you’ve got to go do something about the war. It’s right there in front of you. You can’t say, Oh, I’m doing this; I’m doing that. You can’t avoid it.

So, you know, I was very—I did a master’s and my honors thesis at St. John’s and my master’s thesis on Teilhard de Chardin and he was the basis for my understanding that I had to go do something. So all of a sudden, all my Catholic training was just like, put out the window because the Catholic training, you make excuses not to do stuff. Oh, I’m going to become a priest so I’m not going to do that. Oh, you know, the just war theory gives me ability to say, Well, the government can do whatever it wants, you know, that type of thing.

All of a sudden I had to be responsible. When people said, What are you doing? And if I said I was raiding a draft board they’d laugh and they’d look at me and say, Well, you’re kind of an asshole, you know, that’s kind of a stupid thing to do. But, you know, you just—you had to go do something. I mean, you’d turn on the TV and as, contrary to today, thanks to what’s happened in America, is they don’t really talk about the war. The Vietnam War used to be on every night. You know, you’d see it happening and you’d hear about soldiers coming home and you know, all that type of stuff. And people getting hurt and arms and legs blown apart. You know, and the one part you had to sort of admire of those guys and say, What am I doing? I mean, I think they’re wrong that they’re out there risking their lives and some of them are getting injured trying to stand up for what they believe in. I thought a lot of them being lied to, being tricked but, you know, so what am I doing? So that’s the reason I got involved in draft raids.

Even though, you know, I knew it wasn’t going like instantly stop the war so this is the impact. So we get together with all these guys and we do what becomes the Beaver 55 action and nobody gets caught. We go in and destroy forty-five draft boards in this one place.

PS: Thousands of files.

FK: Thousands of files. We go upstairs to the state director’s office and we steal—I steal stamps; I have all the 1A stamps and all the other stamps because this was the last court of appeals and I took them up to Toronto [Toronto, Ontario, Canada].

PS: And blank draft registration cards?

FK: Yeah, we all, yeah, blank. We had just a ream of blank draft cards. In fact, years later, but I’m out of prison; I’m living in Oakland, California. And I come home one night and my former wife says, “Oh, the FBI was here today looking for you, Frank. They want to know what you know about Karleton Armstrong [Karleton Armstrong (1948-)] who was the guy who blew up—and somebody died.

PS: The Army Math Center [Army Mathematics Research Center, Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Madison, WI] in Madison, Wisconsin.

FK: That’s it, right.

PS: Yeah, and a graduate student [Robert Fassnacht (1937-1970)] was killed then?

FK: And I had been at his trial, trying to explain that I understood what he was doing but that his method was wrong. But, anyway, they found out that he had one of these draft cards that said he was like, who knows, whatever.

PS: Because he was a fugitive for a while.

FK: Right, right.

PS: And he had one of these draft cards.

FK: That they knew it was a Minnesota based one that, you know, so they wanted to know if I was helping him out. I didn’t—I never met the guy; still have never met the guy. But

00:35:00 anyway, so we stole—we did the Beaver action and then nobody got caught.

So here this shows you how stupid smart people are. I’m sitting at home in South Minneapolis

watching the television and they’re talking about this draft board raid. And they’re showing the files on the floor and all this other stuff and it’s like, yeah, but nobody claimed that they did it. The FBI is all over the place, you know. So a group of us got together, you know, Brad Beneke, Don Olson [Donald Olson (1943-)] and myself, and some other people, Mike Therriault and different people at times. And we held this big meeting at the University of Minnesota. Were you there?

PS: I’m not sure.

FK: Okay. Big meeting at the University of Minnesota at the Northrup Center at the university?

PS: The Coffman—Coffman Union, the student union.

FK: Oh, Coffman Union. That was it, yeah, that’s right. And we said we accept political and moral responsibility for the Beaver 55 raid but we’re not going to say we did it. Click, click, click; they’re taking all these pictures of us. What a bunch of dummies. [laughter] But what that legitimized was that we could then go to all these colleges and places and talk. Say, Hey, we’re representing the Beaver 55; we want to come talk about draft resistance, which we did for about three or four months.

PS: So you became the face of this event that otherwise was faceless.

FK: Right, and nobody got caught and so we were able to be interviewed on radio stations and have all these things that are in the Minnesota Historical Society. And they’re not coming to arrest us because back then, this is, I guess, before they had fingerprints or whatever. They just didn’t—I don’t—I mean, the FBI would have to tell us their side of the story I guess. The fact is they never arrested us but obviously they infiltrated us and infiltrated the community in Minneapolis, you know.

PS: Frank, I want to back up a little bit because you’re about to talk about the Minnesota 8 raids that came after the Beaver 55 raids. I am interested in how you got into or became part of the Beaver 55 group. Brad told me something about that and I’d like to hear what you remember about how you actually made contact with the planning of that and how involved were you in that and besides this meeting at Alan’s house.

FK: Well, so I’m going to reveal how sophisticated we were. [laughter] I mean, sometimes when I tell this, I—there was another woman from the Minnesota Historical Society who was doing a project and I’d say, “No, we weren’t that smart.” We were desperate, so the fact is is that, you know, somebody tells somebody that they’re having a meeting, whatever. You go to the meetings and they say, We’re going to talk about draft raids. If you want to hang around? Dave? Bill? You know, type of thing. People would say, No, I’m going home; I’m not going to do any of that crap and other people would stay and we’d start talking about it. Well, what’s the benefit of a draft raid? How effective is it type of thing?

So eventually we end up having this meeting at Al Hooper’s place and this is where I met my first Weathermen [Weather Underground Organization, 1966-1977]. These guys wanted to go into the draft boards and burn down the draft boards. And so here we are, having this meeting. I’m out there yelling at these guys—“You’re stupid. We can’t do that. We’re nonviolent. We’re not going to destroy—[unclear]. We’re only going to do the 1A files. We’re not going to burn down the buildings.” And so we had some future Weather people involved in our group who promised they weren’t going to do those things which they didn’t do.

So, I mean, it has its own sort of movement, this junction of people had different motives for why they were doing draft raids, you know. And so the Beaver 55 had people who were not living in Minnesota as part of the group; some people came up from Chicago and places, Milwaukee and stuff. But when it was over and it had women in it, too, so when it was over, nobody got caught. So we basically were out talking to colleges, basically, driving around all over the place, and we weren’t going to do anymore draft raids; it just seemed a little too dicey. You know, I mean you’d had the Berrigans [Philip Francis Berrigan (1923-2002) and Daniel Joseph Berrigan (1921-2016)] that started this way back when, the Berrigan Fathers, the brothers, back east and the Catonsville 9 and there was all, you know, there was the Milwaukee 14. There was all types of groups that, you know, had different things—the Dow Chemical people, all types of stuff.

And so we did the Beaver action and we got away with it. Gee, this is a convict or a criminal’s biggest dream is to be able to actually get it [unclear]. You know, if you commit the crime and don’t get arrested, right? So what happens between, you know, in early 1970? Well, there’s Kent State [Kent State University, Kent, OH]; Jackson State [Jackson State University, Jacksonville, FL]; Fred Hampton get killed. It was like—

PS: Hampton, who you had met in Chicago—

FK: Right, right. I open up the paper one day to find out that he got assassinated by the cops, you know, shot in his bed, betrayed by somebody. This was somebody I knew like I know you. You know, and now he’s dead. Jesus Christ! I mean, his son came in two thousand—*Peace Crimes* [*Peace Crimes: the Minnesota 8 vs. the War*, by Doris Baizley], two thousand nine?

PS: Two thousand eight.

00:40:00 FK: Two thousand eight—his son came to the play because we had a little, you know, part

for an actor whose said he was Fred Hampton, so—but Fred, you know, had had a big impact on me personally and, you know, and he gets killed. So when Beneke—I decided, Well, I’m going to, you know, I’m going to travel to communes; I’m going to write a book about communes because I’m an academic, right?

And so, as I always say, that little fucker Brad Beneke, comes to me, “You got to do one more, just one more. We’re going to create a ring of fire.” And they [unclear] to all these different draft boards around, you know, in the rural areas that circled the Twin Cities, you know, LaCrosse [LaCrosse, WI]; and Winona [Winona, MN]; and Faribault [Faribault, MN]; and Wabasha [Wabasha, MN]; right and where I was up in Little Falls and different places that you know of. And it would look great except that when someone went down to the draft boards they found that they had installed alarm systems and so they called it off, which I always, like I said before, humorously was when the women were involved. So when people look at the Minnesota 8, they say, Well, there were no women involved. Uh, not exactly true but we’re not going to tell you. And the woman who was involved who lives down in this area of Wisconsin with me—we get together and chuckle about this every now and then.

And I’m not going to name her because she’s just—she’s a Quaker and that’s in her past and she’s been doing other really good stuff, so anyway.

So we decide, you know, I was not going to do anymore stuff. I was going to travel and so I actually had all my stuff packed up and stored away, especially at that time, I was living with a woman named Karen Clark [Karen J. Clark (1945-)], who turns out to be historically the longest serving lesbian politician in Minnesota history as a legislator. But, anyway, at that time we had lived together for a couple years and Beneke kept hounding me. You’ve got to come, Frank, just one more, just one more. Then you can go on your road trip type of thing.

So Mike Therriault and I, you know, we get in this car; we take a very circuitous route up to Little Falls in case we were being followed, you know. We’re so smart, right? We’re some really smart criminals. Like I say, we were part-time criminals, you know, anyway, so we drive up to Minnesota and we had gone on—I had gone on a trip dressed as a Catholic priest and found out where all these different draft boards were up in this different part of the country, which again is another joke. I mean, I walked in and saw—I can just see after I left them calling the FBI saying, Yeah, we had this guy come in. He was a tall guy, about six foot three, Frank Kroncke—I don’t know. He didn’t really say his name. I think he was Father Otto I think he said he was. Oh, yeah, that was his name and he was a Franciscan. Yeah, he wanted to know about the Conscientious Objector and he was checking out the office, you know, and Frank thinks he’s getting away with something, right? And he’s being real clever and smart. And I obviously must have put my fingerprint right on these different draft offices.

So when Mike and I get up there we should—another sign we should have known is that the window was open and the draft—this part of the building we had to climb in. There were no plants on the windowsill. They were all taken off, you know, so we climb in and we—the draft board was easy to get into, almost unlocked. I mean, it was easy to break into but we get to the cabinets; the cabinets are locked. So we had to try to break open the lock to free up the drawers.

And so at one point Mike says, “Frank, I think I hear somebody.” I said, “Nah, nah, don’t worry about it.” So all of a sudden he does something again and then shadows of guys with guns—Don’t move or we’ll kill you. And so this is true. I always—not only—I mean if you’re a psychologist, whatever you might understand how people act when they sort of get sort of shocked or whatever. I remember walking over to these FBI—I didn’t know they were FBI guys at the time and saying, “We have nothing to fear from you. You have nothing to fear from us.” How fucking stupid was I, right? I mean, you know, they could have beat the shit—and so when they said they were FBI agents, like I’ve mentioned to you guys before, I was relieved that they weren’t locals who were going to do some weird shit with us, right?

So they tie us up and handcuffed us and they’re running around saying, Guess we got some beavers now! Guess we got some beavers now! So, I mean, these were guys who were hunting down the Beaver 55. And so, you know, this really brilliant young man Frank Kroncke knows, is so goddam stupid but he doesn’t even realize it yet. I go, How did they find out we were here, right?

So they take us down and we’re driving down from Little Falls, which is quite a—about a couple hours from Minneapolis. And we—they’re driving us down to the Hennepin County Jail in Minneapolis and they initially handcuffed us behind our back. So I asked them if they could put it in front so I could sit more comfortably. Well, they were very kind and they did that. And so, of course, being a blabbermouth that I am, if you haven’t already figured that

00:45:00 out, I’m, you know, talking to these guys and then at one point, I realize this one guy is

writing everything down. [laughter]. I says, “What are you doing?” He says, “Well, I’m writing down what you’re saying.” And I said, “Oh, shit!” I realized then I’m a total asshole. So I stopped talking and, you know, and we drive down to the jail.

So we get into the jail and we thought—Mike and I are just by ourselves. It’s like we could be the only two. So at one point, this loud screaming noise comes in and it was Beneke and he’s yelling about something. Who knows what? [laughter] So eventually we find out over time that there’s eight of us and that was—

PS: So people you knew somehow were filtering into the office where they were initially holding you, right?

FK: Oh, yeah, right.

PS: And you—so you figured out that something had gone wrong elsewhere, too?

FK: Well, no, at the time we didn’t know that, like we started out with fifteen of us and eight of us got caught and other people, went to, like I said, boards where they found out that they had signs that said, Protected by whatever system, and so like five or six people just didn’t do raids that night. And they came back and said, Well, you know, they had put alarm systems in. So we didn’t—that made sense.

PS: But you weren’t particularly expecting to see the rest of us?

FK: No, I wasn’t; not at all, so—so I don’t know for you but when I went into—they did the arraignment, I guess, I didn’t know anything about legal stuff—I still don’t know very much about legal stuff, even though my oldest son Al [Jed, in fact] is a lawyer. We doing okay on time here? Okay. So I go in and they have this arraignment and the guy who’s arraigning me is a graduate of the same college I went to. He was the Renner [Robert Renner]—he’s dead now, I guess. He became a judge later on, he was the prosecuting attorney and so he started saying, “Frank Kroncke, member of the Minnesota 8,” you know, “partner with the Berrigan fathers,” and he gets in this long, almost Catholic radical stuff. I’m going like, “I don’t even know the Berrigans.” [laughter] You know, sort of tying me into everything that’s going on in the country and so, he asked—they gave us at that time ten years. Were you—did you get the same sentence?

PS: Well, it wasn’t a sentence it was the sentence that could go along with the charge.

FK: Right. Well, the charge, I’m saying, the charge was like ten years and it was sabotage of the national defense and so we go back in the county jail. It was like, oh, my god, we’re never going to get out. We’ll be old men by the time we get out of here. So then, what happens in history is that unbeknownst to us, I make a phone call to Karen Clark, you know, “We’re in the county jail,” blah, blah, blah, and this guy who was there talking to us, a Catholic priest—I’m going to forget his name, Charlie[Sullivan]—oh great, I’ll—

PS: Maybe it will come to you.

FK: Well, Charlie’s now—runs a successful project down in Washington, DC. He and at that time his girlfriend that was a former nun, they start organizing the Minnesota Defense Committee, the Minnesota 8 Defense Committee and so the very, very next morning, there were like hundreds of people in the street protesting our arrest, and getting arrested. And Father Harry Bury was the head of the Newman Center, where I had been technically working, also got arrested and stuff. So, you know, say after a week, every day there were these protests out—were you part of that, Dave?

DG: I got busted.

FK: So, I mean, people around the streets like, you know, we didn’t tell anybody. We weren’t expecting to get arrested. Ha, ha, ha.

DG: Was that Joe Selvaggio?

FK: No, no, Joe, Charlie [Sullivan]—it will come to me.

PS: Just an interjection here. Also present in the room is our friend, David Gutknecht, whose been referred to earlier in this narrative of Frank’s and once in a while he’ll be asked a question or interject something, but he’s here incidentally, not the subject particularly of the interview just to clarify who’s on the scene here.

FK: Well, Dave Gutknecht was legendary at the time. The Gutknecht brothers and, you know, David had a Supreme Court case, right, David? And later on, we end up in Sandstone Federal Prison [Federal Correctional Institution, Sandstone, 2300 County Road 29, Sandstone, MN] together so—but I mean everybody knew the Gutknechts. We learned to spell that funny last name of yours.

PS: The demonstrations you were referring to a minute ago, those were outside the courthouse and the Minneapolis City Hall, where the Hennepin County Jail was where we were being held.

FK: Right.

PS: That’s what you were talking about. And every day and a bunch of people at first being arrested and so forth.

FK: So at the end of the week they go through this process and they indict—the formal indictment from arraignment, which was that we were arraigned on sabotage of national defense, but indicted on interference with the Selective Service System by force, violence or otherwise. I always said otherwise with no violence. So we’re considered, still today, violent felons, which is a little ironic, but that’s what is true.

00:50:00 And so, you know, because of this protest, they lowered it from fifty thousand to ten thousand

and then people could post bail and we, in a sense, we all got out.

PS: Plus we weren’t charged with sabotage anymore, which was a whole different league.

FK: Right. Well, but the lawyers felt that we could win on sabotage like, you know, how do you define sabotage, you know?

PS: And there wasn’t a declaration of war.

FK: Right, right, and so they had this very narrow interference with the Selective Service System. Well, who could argue that, you know? We did that even though we said, Well, we were protesting the war, that’s not relevant. Interfering with the Selective Service System, that’s a crime. So we get the maximum sentence of five years in prison. So, I don’t know if you want to talk about the trial, but, you know, we got our trial.

PS: Yes, I do a lot because your trial was sort of special among all of ours.

FK: Can we take a break here?

PS: If you like, we can take a little breather here. So I’m going to pause this recording so we can come back in a little while.

All right so we’re back after a break of a few minutes and Frank, you had talked about our having been indicted and indicted for interfering with the Selective Service System and let’s go to the trial that you and Mike had. It was not the usual Selective Service violation kind of trial and I’d like you to talk about that. When it was, if you remember the date approximately, and who were [unclear] including the judge.

FK: Yeah, so this is part of the sort of background. The Chicago 7 or Chicago 8, however you want to look at a trial, where in sense the government lost it, at least in the media, you know, that they—the guys—Judge Hoffman [Julius Jennings Hoffman (1895-1983)] who was running the case, was ridiculed and everybody [Chicago 7 supporters] thought that, you know, thought that Abbie Hoffman [Abbot Howard Hoffman (1936-1989)] and everybody else, Tom Hayden [Thomas Emmet Hayden (1939-2016)] and all these guys, should have gotten off. So it sort of was egg on the government’s face.

So when they came to our trial, against normal practice—so this is normal practice. You get a group of guys who are really the same gang and they’re committing the same crime. To save money the state consolidates their cases and has one trial but that would mean there would be the trial of the Minnesota 8 and then we’d have all these witnesses and it would be a big thing. So part of the government’s ploy at the time was, instead of having one trial, they broke us up into three trials and—which meant there was two or three people like with my situation it’s going to be Mike and I.

PS: These trials corresponded to the locations where each of us was arrested.

FK: Right, which is what I was going to say, so Judge Edward Devitt [Edward James Devitt (1911-1992)] had two of the cases and Edward Devitt was a graduate of St. John’s University, the same one that I was. And his—what he decided is that there was no defense so his—but he would allow guys to get up and say whatever they want. So like when my friend Brad Beneke got up on the witness stand, I mean, he could swear to do whatever and as he was talking the judge was doing other things and not paying any attention until it was over. It was over, so they had no legal argument to make about what they did. They just said, Yeah, we did it, and this is why we did it and they told their story.

And Edward Devitt said in his sentencing, he said, “You gentlemen are worse than the average criminal who attacks the taxpayers’ pocketbook. You strike at the foundation of government itself.” And he gave them—and so, Edward Devitt, like I said, went to St. John’s just like I did so he was a Catholic and the prosecutor was a guy who later became a judge, Renner [Robert George Renner (1923-2005)]. Renner also went to St. John’s where I did and [unclear] teachings that I had. But when it came to my trial, because I was arrested in Little Falls, Minnesota, I fell under the purview of Judge Neville, Philip Neville [Philip Neville (1909-1974)], and they didn’t consolidate them.

So I didn’t have Devitt and I didn’t have Renner. Renner, instead of prosecuting me, he sent this other guy, you know, to be sort of his henchman, who was not related to St. John’s or anything like that so—

PS: He was an assistant district attorney, right.

FK: Precisely.

PS: This was Thor Anderson [Thor Anderson (1937-)].

FK: You’re right. And so the reality is that in order to do draft raids you have to sort of cut yourself off from your past. You know, if you want to see some perfect continuity between what I believed and that I did draft raids, it’s like I said, when I got arrested and I’m in the county jail, now I have to explain to people why did I do this crazy ass thing, you know, break the law. So I had to sit down and say, Okay, I’ve got to go back and construct some rational

00:55:00 way of talking to people. So I went back to my traditions and documents that I have from

Vatican II and I—

PS: Would you say that again? Documents of—?

FK: Vatican Council II [Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, aka the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II, 1962], which was the big council in the Roman Catholic church and they had these documents that spoke against, you know, international war and that sort of stuff. And so it was theologically what I based myself on but when you actually do something, you sort of step beyond the past and because, you know, the same people can read the same stuff and not—they don’t go out and raid draft boards. And that’s understandable, you know, they just in a sense, We must do everything to prevent the furtherance of war. Well, some of us read that and we say, Yeah, we have to do everything. Other people just sort of read it and then they go along and they, you know, whatever.

So you get caught in the situation and in order to do something like we did, raid draft boards, is that you had to step outside your comfort zone. You’re sort of out in no man’s land and so when people say, Well, you’re a criminal, you say, Ah, I don’t think I’m a criminal. No, no, Frank, you broke the law. You broke into a draft board center, you’re a criminal. You need to go to prison. You go, Well, I was doing it because I was opposed to—No, no, that’s not relevant; you’re a criminal. You broke the law; you broke into this draft board center in Little Falls, Minnesota.

In the same way I had to go back and find a way—I’ve got to talk to people. I’ve got to talk to my own family. My crazy brother Francis, you know, he’s in Hennepin County Jail for raiding draft boards. Oh, my god! You know, he’s your brother?

PS: That guy?

FK: Yeah, what happened to him? Was he smoking dope? Was he dropping acid? What was he doing? I mean, he was—I thought he was doing alternative service. I thought he was not—I thought he got his ass, you know protected. Well, that’s what he realized; he realized that you don’t mean—he became a Conscientious Objector but that was a privileged deferment, not everybody could get it. You had to sort of go through this song and dance in order to get it and he went through the song and dance and he got it but now he’s raiding draft boards.

So how do you explain raiding draft boards to people, other rational people who, you know, we were better understood by Vietnam veterans who actually went into battle, who in the middle of battle, sort of were sitting there like, What the fuck’s going on here, man? I’m shooting at them; they’re shooting at me. I’m going to die for America? What’s this all about? You know, I mean, the battlefield experience is really different than just talking about it, you know. Oh, you’re a hero. Yeah, but I just killed a woman and a couple babies. Oh, yeah, no, but they were Commies. I don’t know if that really works, you know. And so, like this guy, a lot of guys had psychological difficulty coming back because it didn’t make sense.

So in the same way, guys like me who, you know, you go into the battlefield so to speak and you leave behind all the trappings of your upbringing. So when you get arrested all of a sudden the brakes get put on and people say, Explain yourself, Frank. Ah, okay, how do I explain myself? Well, you try to explain how as a young kid growing up, went into the seminary, studied theology, did all this other stuff. Vatican Council II happens and, you know, I went to this trial where the judge said there’s no defense for this and my friends.

So one of the realities is that before our trial started, much against sort of judicial protocol, and the judge in the other trials, two trials, actually sentenced the guys to five years in prison, which is the maximum sentence. A lot of people went, Aah, five years is like, you know, guys were like getting six months or the year or some guys were even sort of told to sort of sit outside in the corridor of the courtroom and then at the end of the day the judge told them to go home. I mean—

PS: You’re talking about more routine draft refusers, right?

FK: Right, so the idea is that we actually broke into an office and destroyed government property and they were going to make an example of us. So part of the deal is—so we’re sitting in the Hennepin County Jail and realizing that you’re the worst of the worst. You’re it, man. You’re the bottom of the barrel, you know, you betrayed everybody. This is what Judge Edward Devitt, who had the first two trials, didn’t allow them to present any defense basically said to them. You’re the worst of the worst. You guys have betrayed your sort of—he didn’t say these exact words but betrayed our class and betrayed our upbringing and stuff like that.

Because everybody, like, you know, Brad Beneke was another guy who came from a Republican family background. That’s my historical position, you know, we grew up—my father would say, FDR hssss, like, you know, he hated FDR [U.S. President . Franklin Delano Roosevelt, (1882-1945)]. So, I mean, I grew up sort of with that same sort of understanding. I mean, I’m already out of college when I’m just beginning to realize that from a moral position, I don’t want to be involved with the war. It wasn’t really a political decision for me;

01:00:00 it was more a moral decision. It was like, you know, you only live once. There are certain

things you don’t want to do if you cannot do them, you know.

I mean, I had been a small guy growing up. I grew ten inches in a year, so now I’m a big guy. I’m six foot three. So I realize there were a lot of people who were, you know, can be physically beat up just because of their size. And in the same manner, I mean, there are things you just don’t do. You’re a big guy; you can do those terrible things but you don’t do them, you jerk. So I mean, I had to make a decision about how I was going to live my life. Well, you do something and everybody in the world—the government says you’re a criminal. How do you go home to your mother; how do you go home to your brothers and sisters? My father was dead by this time. And how do you say, Well, this is what I had to do? This was a good thing to do; this was the right thing to do. I mean, if you said it was the right thing to do, people are going to say, Well, Frank, you’re smart, you’re intelligent, you could teach; you could write books; you could lecture. You do all these other things. Why did you have to do this? Nobody’s going to think draft resistance or raiding draft boards makes any sense, you know. Bunch of fools. All these guys you’re hanging out with, they’re a bunch of crazy people. This stuff has no impact. And this is how I felt.

So when we’re ready to go to trial I have to figure out some way of defending myself so we’re with this Judge Neville and the other trials are not only over, the guys are sentenced to five years. So our trial begins and in one sense we know what our sentence is before the trial even began because we know the ‘equal time for equal crime.’ You know, the reason Devitt did it—he was the—I don’t know what they call it but he was like the head of the federal district.

PS: He was the senior judge of the district, I think.

FK: So I mean, usually Philip Neville, who was a Humphrey [Hubert Humphrey [Hubert Horatio Humphrey Jr. (1911-1978)] appointee, you know, would follow whatever he did. So to make sure that he didn’t deviate, Devitt sentenced the guys before our trial began. So Mike and I really know that we’re going to get five years no matter what. So we come up with this defense of necessity. Charlie Bisanz [Charles F Bisanz Jr.] is an appellate lawyer and Kenneth Tilsen [Kenneth Earl Tilsen (1927-2013)], who was our lawyer, and was the lawyer for the

End of Recording 1

01:02:08

Beginning of Recording 2

00:00:00

other guys and is a legendary sort of social justice lawyer and he defended us—actually mostly for free. Got a little bit of money but not much.

PS: Name the other fellow again.

FK: Charlie Bisanz.

PS: Can you spell his last name?

FK: B-i-s-a-n-z.

PS: Okay.

FK: And Charlie was an appellate lawyer so I mean—

PS: Oh, at that—

FK: Kenneth Tilsen is a trial lawyer and he takes us through the—and he sort of knows as a lawyer that legally we’re not going to get out of this thing. But it was—a little sort of side humor is that Ken sits me down—Ken’s Jewish. He says, “Frank, I’m Jewish. I don’t understand a goddam thing you’re saying. [laughter] I had to laugh because I’m talking about socio and political sacraments and all this Roman Catholic type of stuff, right? Using the documents of Vatican Council II and there’s Ken, going like, What’s this kid saying? You know, I mean, just get up there and tell them you don’t want to go kill people.

So anyway, I had this, you know, elaborate defense so Ken says, “Well, listen in the model penal code there’s this thing called the defense of necessity and so things that make sense to most people is that I stole a car to take a pregnant woman to the hospital. I’m not going to be charged with stealing the car. I blew up a dam and killed five thousand people to save fifty thousand. Well, it was a proportionality thing—they would say, Okay, you’re not a terrible person; you were trying to save lives. So some people got killed.

Well, it was a little bit of a stretch to say I raided draft boards because I was trying to, you know, oppose the war and stuff, but nevertheless we didn’t have anything else to argue with so we sort of tried to make this argument. So I end up having upwards of a dozen witnesses at my trial, Vietnam veterans, you were there, Dave Gutknecht, right?

DG: Yeah.

FK: Got up there, gave his eloquence. I went to prison because of you, Gutknecht! [laughter] So, I mean, everybody gets up there and you’re trying to sound as rational and it all makes sense and yeah, raiding draft boards makes sense and opposing the war makes sense and the government is wrong and the war’s never been declared. You do all this stuff and, you know, the war is raging on and guys are being drafted all the time and being killed and the whole country is just like, you know, in turmoil.

So anyway, so then one day Ken Tilsen, the lawyer, comes to us and says, “We got this guy named Daniel Ellsberg [Daniel Ellsberg (1931-)]. He works for McNamara [Robert Strange McNamara (1916-2009)], Secretary McNamara in the government. He’s the highest ranking—he has the highest rank clearance of any civilian and he wants to come testify. “What’s he going to talk about?” “Oh, no, don’t worry about it. He and I will talk about it.” So this guy Ellsberg comes to our trial and we don’t know who the hell he is from a hole in the wall. Here we are up in no place, Minnesota, again, back before the Internet and long distance telephones were costly at the time so here’s a guy coming to Minnesota. I mean, you might as well be going to Kalamazoo [Kalamazoo, MI] or wherever.

But we noticed this abrupt change in the judge the day Ellsberg comes in the courtroom. The judge was like laid back and doing paperwork and stuff and he was like leaning, hands on top of the desk of his dais, leaning forward. Every time Ellsberg (gasp) inhaled and he said, “Objection. Sustained.”

PS: Wait now, you mean the judge or the prosecutor?

FK: No, the judge.The judge was like, you know, had gotten calls. We found out later on he’d gotten calls from the FBI saying, Hey, this Ellsberg, this is what he’s doing. He’s releasing the stuff which later on becomes the Pentagon Papers. So Ellsberg never really gets to say what he wants to say in the courtroom but, of course, he talks to us about things and we saw—so his wonderment, which is the wonderment of many people is like, What are you idiots up here in Minnesota, which is like god—most people think Minnesota is part of Canada—What do you think you’re doing, you know, opposing the government? Why would they react to you guys? This is what Ellsberg was basically saying, like, Who are you guys? The Minnesota 8? You’re nothing. I mean, the Berrigans were in Catonsville, Maryland. I mean, they’re right next to Washington, DC, you know, people back east when you go farther west, you know west of Pittsburgh [Pittsburgh, PA], you’re in the Wild West and here you are in Minnesota doing all this crazy ass stuff, destroying draft boards. What do you think it’s going to do?

So Ellsberg can ask us all these questions and about like, Why are you risking your life, Frank? I mean, you’ve got nothing to gain by doing this. And so we say, Well, you know, Dan, I just can’t sit and do nothing, stuff like that.

My hero, Dave Gutknecht, you know, those guys are out there—they’ve been, seriously, leading the way of resisting the war and stuff like that. So, Brad Beneke and I, who’s part of the group, you know, our trial gets over—

PS: By the way, your trial was with Mike Therriault.

FK: Oh, yeah, Mike Therriault.

PS: And to back up a little bit, in the other trials, usually—in each of the previous trials, at least one of us wound up representing himself in the trial as a way to be able to talk to the jury

00:05:00 without being thwarted from using this necessity defense. But in your trial, were both of you

being represented by Ken or—?

FK: No, Ken represented Mike and I was attorney pro se. Like I said, Ken came to me and said, “Listen, I’m Jewish. I don’t understand a thing you’re saying.”

PS: Okay, so you had a free—

FK: You can defend yourself.

PS: you were kind of on a free rein then and Mike was the one who was being—

FK: Being represented by a lawyer.

PS: represented by Ken.

FK: To normal people at the time I was the mad guy; I was the crazy guy that was out there babbling and all this Catholic theology and talking about stuff so—

PS: So the necessity defense was presented really by you—

FK: By me, right.

PS: but for both of you, but by you because you were representing yourself?

FK: Right, precisely. So, you know, I had called Mike as a witness and he was able to talk and stuff like that but, you know, the thing is the judge wanted to move the trial along so I wanted to bring the Berrigan Fathers out, who were early draft board raiders, but they were in jail at the time and so we had to work with whoever was there.

PS: But there were still a lot of variety of witnesses.

FK: Oh no, we had thirteen witnesses. We had Vietnam veterans, scientists and we had a guy from the American Academy of Science, who talked about Agent Orange and all the stuff that happened in Vietnam. So I mean, everything was sort of laid out about this, you know, the war is a horrible mess; the people hate us; it was not going to work; soldiers are coming back really screwed up, you know, it was like, We’re against the war—half the country’s against the war—all this other stuff, but Nixon’s [U.S. President Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994)] being elected, right? And Ellsberg is out there not being able to really give out the Pentagon Papers yet.

So the trial gets to a point where we come to closing argument. Now normally when you get approval to be attorney pro se, which is what I was, the judge listens to what you say and then you go into this room and have this conference with the judge about going to closing argument. And that’s usually when the judge says, You can’t do that. I’m going to tell the jury you’re a raving idiot and I’m throwing out your case. But Neville says to me, “You know, Frank, you get a closing argument. I get a closing argument. I thought, Wow! This is really crazy, right? So I go to closing argument. I talked about my brother who was stricken with encephalitis and my father and all this other stuff, you know. I talked about my theological development and my whole life and I closed by saying, you know, If you can, give life; don’t take it, type of thing, you know.

And so, there’s the jury, who, of course, as most people know, who can’t ask you questions or anything so you don’t know if they understand anything that you’re talking about, which we find out later on they do. And so then instructions to the jury—instructions to the jury, which is usually just sort of a template of—

PS: From the judge.

FK: from the judge, you know, don’t talk to one another; don’t do this; don’t do that. I think it was like number eleven or something, he says, “Now I want to address the testimony of Francis X. Kroncke. It’s irrelevant and immaterial.” I’m sitting there—so all of a sudden I’m irrelevant and immaterial. Like I say, the rest of the world sort of didn’t react the way but I like fell through this cosmic hole. I’m irrelevant and immaterial, right? And so like he said, Throw it out. But this is the part—

PS: So he told them they could not consider all the evidence that you had presented?

FK: Right, so here’s the thing that I’ve never, because of time and people dying and my leaving Minnesota, find out. The clerk of the court, instead of taking out the documents about Vatican II, which we had introduced as evidence and a paper Mike had written when he was in the seminary about peace. She leaves all the stuff in there and so, we’re in the building and Ken Tilsen, who’s a very good lawyer, who’s familiar with all these trials, he knows that this is not going to take long. So we don’t even leave the building to get coffee; we just go downstairs a floor or two and we’re sitting there. And about an hour goes by and—

PS: This is while the jury is out.

FK: Right, the jury is out, two hours go by. Well, that’s not so unusual. We get called to come back in and we come back in, the jury comes in. I can always remember this woman leaning over to the foreman and tugging on his pants and whispering something to him. And he stands up and he says to the judge, “Can we read the documents of Vatican Council II?” And, oh my god, they’re reading the documents that I’ve provided, underlining all the stuff against the war and all sort of stuff.

PS: Because they, by mistake, still have this.

FK: Right, right. So that’s why I always said like, What was it? A mistake or did she [the clerk of court] do it on purpose or whatever? Was she sort of on our side? I have no idea. So the judge just—he just gets—he just like almost blows up and he starts screaming, “You cannot read the documents of Vatican Council II.” I mean he does—he just really lets it out. And, you know, it was like Wow! I mean, that was like—I mean, this was that quiet judge who was sitting back there during the whole trial, all the witnesses, not—except for Ellsberg, who’s the only one who also got him tense up there—but he just like lost it.

And so, like I said, it took about ten more minutes. They came back in and, of course—So the jury gets interviewed. It’s in the *Minneapolis Tribune* [now *Minneapolis Star Tribune*] article

00:10:00 about the trial. Today you can go find it where the reporter is interviewing the jurors and they

said, Well, the judge coerced our verdict. Well, it didn’t make a goddam bit of difference to my getting five years in prison, but that’s what they said, you know, is that they felt that they should have had the right to consider all the stuff and they weren’t going to convict us. Well, Neville couldn’t do that because Devitt had already given five years to the other guys and this is what Devitt wanted to avoid was the fact that some of us would sort of, from his perspective, weasel out of things.

So I fall through this hole in the universe and I’m getting five years and everybody’s going, Aargh! And all this sort of stuff so the next sort of chapter in all this is that, you know, the wait. So you guys who were part of the first two trials, I think it was January or February—I think it was January, you know, get ready to go to prison and where was it? At the national cemetery we had some—?

PS: Well, we went through appeals process; I mean, there was still—

FK: And it was very summarily dismissed.

PS: Well, it still took a while.

FK: Yeah, horrible making you wait.

PS: And so we were, because the cycles of the court calendar were different for the first two trials that happened pretty much one right after the other, and then your and Mike’s trial happens months later.

FK: Right.

PS: So we were convicted and appeals turned down—

FK: Right, because we went to the event you had at the national cemetery—

PS: way before yours was and we had this event at Fort Snelling Cemetery [Fort Snelling National Cemetery, 7601 34th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN].

FK: Right. So Mike and I go there and so we’re—you guys are heading off to jail, right? So we figured we’re just any day it’s going to happen. Well, only guys who’ve been in this position will appreciate what I’m going to say. It’s like, you know, you’re in no man’s land. I mean, you meet a woman you like and say, “Oh, sweetheart, let’s be lovers. I’m going to be—any day, have to go off to prison.”

PS: Yeah, by the way.

FK: That doesn’t work. Or I’d like to get a job.” Oh, you know, I might be going to federal prison in a couple weeks or a month or I have no idea.” Oh sure, Frank, don’t worry about it. I’ll hire you. So I’m living with some people, just sort of waiting every day. So the humorous part of it all is after three months, I start saying, Well, I dress up like this again before the Internet or long distance phone calls—I dress up as a Catholic priest, collar and all sorts of stuff and I go visiting the guys in prison. I go to Milan, Michigan, and Sandstone, Minnesota, and the guards are looking at me like, you know, are you really a priest, everything? Well, Francis Xavier Kroncke, I mean, I looked like a priest my whole life. I always used to just make a joke—I looked like a priest naked.

So I’m out there, you know, I’m visiting. I’m up in Minnesota visiting, you know, one of our Jesuit counterparts who was part of the Milwaukee 14, Joe Mulligan, Joe Mulligan [Joseph E. Mulligan], yeah. Chicago 15—he was part of the Chicago 15.

PS: Yeah, that’s right, not Milwaukee.

FK: Not Milwaukee. So I’m visiting Joe. “Joe, what’s it like in here?” [laughs] Type of thing, trying to find out what’s going on type of thing because, I mean, so I do that type of trip and then we’re still waiting, the fourth month. Nothing’s happening. We’re going to find out later on from the woman who was the clerk to the appellate judge is that when I went down to St. Louis [St. Louis, MO] with Ken Tilsen and we split the time, making our appellate presentations—

PS: Because you were still representing yourself.

FK: Yeah, well, this is where Charlie Bisanz came in—he was an appellate lawyer and helped me write my appellate brief which is published in this magazine *Cross Currents* [*Cross Currents*, published by The Association for Religion and Intellectual Life (ARIL)] So I make this—I make a presentation in front of the—in St. Louis—in front of the appellate court and afterwards, these lawyers, always I mean, they had French cuffs and they were all, you know, expensive suits, the appellate lawyers, right? A couple would say, You really did very well. And I’m going with my, you know, headband on and thinking like, Yeah, I’m going to jail for five years and these guys are saying, Oh, you really—that was a really good presentation. And they have these lights, the judges have these lights so like the yellow light goes on; the green light means you can start; the red light means you stop and I mean, it was all this weird shit. And, I mean, it was just my road to prison. I knew that.

So I’m waiting for this appellate decision to come down. I find out years later when I’m—that the clerk of the court felt that we had—the judge should have ruled on our behavior—

PS: Do you mean on your behalf?

FK: On our behalf, yeah, so that the—he [the appellate court judge] was—represented a certain part of Minnesota and he—I keep trying to figure this out. I mean, he never would communicate this to me when I did ask him once. But the fact of the matter is he was hoping that the war was going to end and this would become sort of a moot situation. So it took six months, six months, we’re

00:15:00 waiting for this decision to come down.

PS: From the appeals court.

FK: Yeah, but what can you—you can’t do anything like you can’t run out—so there’s this woman that I don’t—I forget her name—who I said gave me a mercy fuck, you know. I mean, she was really kind and sweet and one night she’s, Well, you’re going to be locked up for five years so, you know, you’re not going to get any of this for a while. So there’s all types of things that go on in this crazy world.

So eventually, you know, I find out years later that the clerk to this main judge of the appellate court kept telling him that we should—we had reversible error. But, of course, who was going to, at that point, be the judge who set draft raiders free? That wasn’t going to happen. So he was just waiting, like waiting six months. Once it was like, okay, so we ended up going—you guys did six more months than we did. So when it finally happens.

And so I didn’t realize this until later. We ended up going to Sandstone, Minnesota [Federal Correctional Institution, Sandstone, Sandstone, MN] prison.

PS: You and Mike?

FK: Mike and I, both, starting a five-year sentence. Well, five years, right then, is like that’s a long time, you know.

PS: And this was in calendar time about when did you actually go in?

FK: This would have been ’72, ’73.

DG: Seventy-two.

FK: Yeah, right, ’72, and so, you know, the whole prison thing is a whole other story but so we end up going up to—I ended up going to Sandstone and when I get to Sandstone, I know all these—they put me in solitary. Well, solitary was this nice like Holiday Inn suite, which was a real mind fuck for me at the time, it was like, Yeah, I was expecting something terrible and I get this private room. And I’m one of nine kids where I always slept with two other brothers, right? Had this private room. It was like being back in the monastery and they give us food and all this other stuff.

So I’m there for like two weeks trying to figure out what am I in solitary for, right? So they take me down to this room. It’s called the adjustment committee, which is what they actually says on the door—adjustment committee, really is adjustment. And I walk in this room and there’s these—some of the other guys—

PS: These are prison officials.

FK: Prison officials. Some of them were the associate warden; the people in regular sort of dress, and then there was guards in the guard uniform. And they were talking and saying stuff so at one point, I said, Do you want to know what I think? And dead silence. It was like, oh yeah, they want to know what I think. Like I tried to stand up once and the guy gets in back of me, grabs me by the shoulders and sits me down. It was like, you know, I’ve got to know my place. So this one—I remember this one—I don’t know what his title was—captain—I think he was the captain of the guards. He leans over the table—he’s a big guy and he says, “I know how you think, Kroncke.” I’m thinking, Jesus Christ. What’s going on here? They wanted to know what I was going to do. Was I going to organize, you know, a riot? Was I going to—and I said, “Well, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I’m going to find out what it’s like here.”

And I’m thinking, of course, they didn’t believe me. And so—the reason I found this out is they let—they put me in this dorm, which was the [orientation] dorm and Beneke comes in and Beneke says, “Frank, what did you do? There’s all these rumors flying about, ‘Why is Frank in solitary confinement?’ Well, he was the snitch so they’re protecting him.” Oh no—he’s this everything.

PS: All these rumors.

FK: All these rumors. I said to Beneke, “I’ve—.” So they let me out. People kept wondering, What did they lock you up for, Frank? What did you do? Or. Were you in protective custody or what type of deal? So I mean the whole prison experience turns out to be kind of weird which, if you want to get into, we can [talk about] where I end up teaching in the local elementary school so went the story. And but we start doing five years and the long story or the short story of the long story is that after our sentence, which I didn’t realize at the time, was that we had to serve a year before we went to the draft board.

PS: No, the parole board.

FK: The parole board, right. So what happens during that year is Watergate [Watergate scandal, 1972 to 1974]. So I remember one time I remember walking into the dorm which is—we lived in these dorms. People think prison, you have a cell. You live in this dorm with thirty, sixty other guys. The first dorm is double bunk beds.

PS: It’s like a barracks.

FK: Right, it’s more like a barracks, right. So I walk in one time and, you know, who controls the TV is whoever can get in there and control the TV and tell everybody else to fuck off, right? So they say, Hey, you know, they got this Watergate thing going on, you know, they got these burglars. And I said, “Aw,” and I always tell people, I went out and I played basketball.

So what happens when I go to the parole board after a year, I serve a year, I go to the parole board. They want to know, Are you going to do it again? It was like, I don’t know; I don’t think so. I mean, am I going to go do it again? It’s like—it’s just kind of weird.

PS: The prisoner hadn’t thought of that.

FK: Right, right. So the whole attitude in the country, though, shifted because all of a sudden they’re finding that Nixon’s a crook and the attorney general [John Newton Mitchell (1913-1988)] at the time was being sort of indicted and stuff—

00:20:00 PS: And they were arranging people to break into offices, right?

FK: Right, precisely, so it was sort of like—so I can still see Mike, my partner, Mike Therriault, come across the yard waving this envelope saying “Frank, we’re getting out of here in two months.” I said, “No, that can’t be true,” because you guys had already been in six months before us, right?

PS: And—

FK: Equal time for equal crime—that’s—

PS: We got set off our first hearing instead of, Well, you come back in a while again.

FK: Right, yeah, so the thing is that, you know, “No,” he said we’re getting out and it had a date on it, July something, whatever. And so, you know, Turchick—

PS: Chuck.

FK: Chuck Turchick—he—

PS: He was there with you at that time.

FK: He was there in Sandstone. He jumps on the phone and calls our lawyer and says, “What’s going on here? Frank and Mike got this letter saying they’re getting out.” So ironically, we all get out on the same day—they never go back to the parole board. They just get driven with us to the bus station in Sandstone and we all get on the Greyhound bus and we go back to St. Paul and there’s other stories to tell about what happens when we get back. But that was basically sort of what happened there.

So, you know, the whole thing was like—itself—one of the jokes is that I’m doing some kind of so-called movement event and nobody—

PS: Afterward you mean?

FK: Yeah. Nobody was smoking dope and they were all talking about the men’s movement and the women’s movement—no one was talking about the war. You know, people just, it was like, Aargh! So it was sort of—one of the reasons as you guys know that I left in the summer and went to California was that out in California nobody knows your name. You’re a part of the Minnesota 8? It’s like, What the hell was that? Is that a baseball team? So, you know, so that was part of the reason I left. Well, I’ll tell you the reason I left Minnesota is one of my parole jobs working for Carmichael [now Carmichael Lynch, 110 North Fifth Street, Minneapolis, MN], which became a very popular ad agency, and I was out interviewing a guy who was the president of the company sitting at this big desk in this big room and at the end of the interview, the guy said, I know who you are and I don’t like you. I said, Okay, it’s time for me to leave Minnesota.

So these guys that I knew were going out to California and I sort of went out with them and then I got this job working for the Quakers in prison work and life goes on. I go back to school at Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA] and different things.

PS: Well, I want you to talk more in a little while about what it was like getting out and the contours of what you did after that but you sort of skipped over most of what it was like being inside and I’d like to know what—I know from knowing you something about what that was like for you but that’s the kind of experience that’s different for each of us as individuals. And I want to know what that was like for you. You talked about teaching in the local school and other things, too.

FK: So if you want to get a sharp contrast. If Bill Tilton [Bill Tilton (1947-)] was here—was one of our group and he was in Milan, Michigan. His experience was like, you know, always one-hundred-eighty degrees away from mine. I mean, it—for me, being in prison really did a number on me and turned my world upside down and he sort of looks at it—when he talks about it it’s like, Oh, went to prison—it was like no big deal, you know. I mean, he didn’t become mayor or the governor but, you know, because he had a political career, but when sometimes he hears me talk, maybe you feel the same way. I have no idea, Dave, but when he hears me talk he always says, “Well, you know, that’s Frank’s experience. Mine was different than that.”

So here’s another sort of twist—this is sort of what happens in my life. It’s like when I took the job at the Newman Center, which I thought was like an easy job, and it turned out to be one that was, you know, changed my life. So I get called in by the head of the education department at Sandstone prison; it’s a civilian. And he says, Well, listen. We’re going to send somebody out to work in the local public school with this thing called the Write to Read Program and I want you, Frank, to help me select somebody. So, you know, we went through the whole thing. Well, the mafia guys were naw, we couldn’t do those guys and guys had to be literate, although a lot of these guys never graduated, never even finished high school let alone college.

So, long story short, is I ended up taking Charlie Turchick, one of our group, you know, Charlie is articulate, educated and went to university, Phi Beta Kappa, and I recommend Charlie. Charlie’d be great, you know, going out there and so I walk in and tell this to this guy who was the head of the education department. He says, “No, I want you.” “Me?” Okay, so yeah.

DG: I think that was Mr. Hayes. We used to call him Purple Haze.

FK: That could have been. That’s—I don’t remember his name. Hayes might have been right. So, okay, so I think this is going to be—well, this is nice; something to do. At the time,

00:25:00 we were still doing five years. We didn’t know we were going to get out. And so why not?

Why not do it? So I said okay. So I go and I meet the principal of the local elementary school, in Sandstone; it was Peggy Cahoon at the time and she and I get along really quite well. And I had taught college by that time. I had done a bunch of different things, had a master’s degree. So I start working with the students and everything’s working fine and stuff. And then there becomes a protest against us and then she showed me the John Birch Society [John Birch Society (JBS), 1958-present] news magazine that says “Erstwhile Criminal Frank Kroncke,” and I was doing this and that stuff, you know.

PS: Against us or against you in particular?

FK: Against us, against me particularly, yeah.

PS: Because of your school contact with the kids.

FK: Right, here’s this criminal; they’re letting this guy out who should be locked up forever, put in a dungeon and, you know, be beaten every day, you know, naked or whatever. You know, with spaghetti, I don’t know, you know.

PS: But it was a local Bircher effort or—?

FK: Well, it was the national magazine carried the article but then when the local Birch group got together at a public meeting where they basically came to protest it but they voted me in.

PS: At Sandstone.

FK: Yes, the Sandstone people.

PS: You mean the town of Sandstone.

FK: Yeah, the people said, No, no, this guy Kroncke’s good. Because I was teaching these kids how to write and do different stuff like that but so here’s something that only if you’re a con you understand. Because I’d get up in the morning and I’d put on my khakis, which is what we would wear for a prison uniform, and I’d walk over to where the guards are to put on my civilian clothes to go out to this job. Well, it just depends. I mean, they just, they—if you don’t mind my French, they fucked with me every particular way they could, you know. Let me stand half-naked, waiting to get clothes and stuff like that. And when they came back, you know, because I was out teaching their kids and they’re used to going home and saying. Oh, Dad protects society from these terrible people. Well, Mr. Kroncke teaches us how to write, you know, he’s a really nice man and they go, No, no, no, he’s a terrible person and Dad has to keep him locked up or else—

So I was facing this every day, going back and forth, you know, wearing my prison garb, taking it off, putting on my civilian clothes, going out to the school, coming back in, taking off my civilian clothes, putting on my prison stuff. So it turned out to be much more of a burden in a sense if you want. And sort of a form of punishment.

PS: They made it bad for you instead of—[unclear]

FK: Well, you know, I thought, Well, this is a nice diversion. I have—I like to teach so I mean, I’ll do it and so anyway. So by the time the school year ended is when we started getting the news that we were going to be let free, you know, so years later when I’m on parole, I go back up and visit the school and see some of the kids, you know, who now see me as the civilian and they can’t figure it out. Because, you know, their dad is—told them that I was this terrible person.

PS: What was the name of the principal of the school again?

FK: Peggy Cahoon, C-a-h-o-o-n.

PS: Thanks.

FK: And I’m not sure—she’s long retired by now so. And I’m trying to—I heard that she and her husband moved to Florida, which is not uncommon for people living in Minnesota.

So anyway, that was part of my experience and—

PS: A lot of people liked the idea of being able to be on work release because you’d get outside and, you know, outside the walls and all that but it was—

FK: But, you know, I dealing with the wives of the guards were teachers and the students were their kids or their grandkids so they didn’t like the fact that a convict was being put in the position of being a teacher. It was like, you know, a person of value. So anyway, that was part of that.

So, you know, when we get out of prison, like I said, the mood of the antiwar community had changed dramatically, you know. People were really—wanted to do something else so people get involved in the food movement; they get involved in the feminist movement, you know, they get everything—the antiwar movement sort of just sort of drifts off, you know, with us old guys getting older, you know.

PS: So you weren’t a celebrity anymore.

FK: Not only that, a celebrity, I mean, the government is—like right now when I tell this to young people—so right now, for instance, in most states, not every one, when you sign up for your driver’s license at the bottom of it is you signed up with the Selective Service System. That’s it. They were—they had tried all different types of ways of getting people to recruit people to sort of—so my sons, both have signed up for the Selective Service System. My oldest son was an academic; said I’m never going to get drafted. My other son was a CEO—he had a job; he went to college; got a job and he was like, I’m not going to get drafted. Well, they stopped drafting middle class kids because of the protest and so they put the burden on people who are volunteers, you know, for the military.

00:30:00 So in some senses and, like I said, because of the computerization of files, you can’t even do

draft raids anymore. I mean—

PS: And they’re not drafting anyone to resist.

FK: But if you go to [www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov), you’ll see this huge elaborate stuff about the Selective Service System and maps of the country that they—like they’ve got 95 percent of all—they estimate 95 percent of all kids of draftable age, like let’s say in Maryland, are in the system and stuff. So it’s changed, you know, but it’s there. I mean, it’s active and they’re ready to go if they’re needed.

So, you know, you go back and say like, Well, what was the impact of what you did? Well, in one sense, you can say it was a total failure, you know. We just—we suffered and nothing good happened. But here’s where the Ellsberg story comes in. Ellsberg came to our trial. Brad Beneke and I had, after our trial, had gone back east just to get on a trip and we were in Massachusetts so we had called Ellsberg, who was then living in the Berkeley area and said, Can we use your apartment? And he said, Yes, sure. So we were in his apartment.

PS: So he still had the place in Massachusetts? Yeah.

FK: Yeah, right, in Cambridge [Cambridge, MA] and so anyway, the thing is is that we were watching the news one night and we realized that, you know, this is when this whole thing about Ellsberg having all these files and he was going to go to trial and all of this stuff and it started coming up and we realized that if he had actually said that or that had gotten revealed in our trial, I said, we would have got fifty years in prison. [laughter] You know, people would have said, Oh, you were part of his action, you know, type of thing. So we’ve remained friends over the years, a little less so in the last decade for me. He still lives up in the Berkeley area. I spent time with him when I lived out there. We visited and stuff like that. You know, that’s really the impact we had was getting Ellsberg to that final step where he was willing to release the papers. He will say this. He answered that when he came back for the *Peace Crimes* event in 2008.

PS: Our play?

FK: Yeah, *Peace Crimes* at the University of Minnesota in the History Theater[[1]](#footnote-1) up there. He’ll talk about the impact that we had on his making—I mean, he had been influenced by other people but we were sort of like the final stop on the road. Like I said, he had looked at the, What are you guys living in Minnesota. Guys like, people think it’s part of southern Canada. What do you think you’re doing by doing draft raids? And it was sort of like well, we just have to do something; we have to live with ourselves. And so I guess it’s sort of was one of the things. Because he had been in Vietnam twice, you know, he had been up in the battlefield—

PS: He was a Marine.

FK: He was a Marine officer, you know, so he had a lot to risk and so, you know, here’s a little side humor to his story. So, you know, I’m out having dinner with him in Berkeley and I wonder—

PS: This is years later.

FK: Years later so I say, “Dan, why are we out in public? Somebody could walk up right now and shoot you.” He said, “Yeah, that’s possible,” but he leans over the table; he says to me, “Well, what I know about our nuclear defense is what they’re really worried about that I had.” He was one of the architects of our nuclear defense policy and the government was afraid that he had given like me and other people, copies of stuff and that if anything ever happened to him, we were going to release and reveal this stuff.

So recently President Trump [U.S. President Donald John Trump (1947-)], you know, said Kim Jong-un (1983-)], you know, sort of like, yeah, you know, you think you’re going to attack us. You don’t even know what we have. And the threat was that we had so much stuff that, you know, we’ll blow North Korea right off the map in minutes.

And so Ellsberg was the architect of our nuclear strategy; he was one of the people and he knows all about that. And that’s what—that’s really what they’re concerned about. The stuff that he did with the Pentagon Papers was like a real pain in the ass but it was like nothing like what he knows. So that’s why he’s not dead. So I went, Oh, okay. And it may be one of the reasons I’m not dead for all I know is they may think, Well, if we do anything to these guys that he associated with, they’re going to release this stuff and the government will have egg on its face or something I don’t know.

PS: Like we’ve got these secrets hidden somewhere and—

FK: Right, precisely right.

PS: instructing someone to reveal them if anything happens to us?

FK: Like, you know, my computers—they can go in and find this stuff so I mean, I have no idea. So anyway, so that’s part of the Ellsberg influence. So, you know, in one sense, the Minnesota 8, the Beaver 55 to the Minnesota 8 action to Daniel Ellsberg is sort of the way in which the story unfolds and that the lasting impact of what we did had very little to do with what we did in Minnesota—had more to do with the impact we had on Ellsberg’s life and his decision to do what he did. And so, when they had the mistrial for him—why didn’t they try him again? Right? They didn’t. He was facing one hundred-twenty-five years on that first thing but they had the mistrial because they couldn’t—they didn’t want to get—they didn’t

00:35:00 want to open a can of worms as we would say, you know.

So this is how the story gets—you might say, Well, this is, you guys up in Minnesota, like I said, you foreigners up there in Minnesota, what do you guys think you’re doing? It was like—so I have to admit we didn’t know what we were doing. We didn’t know this guy Ellsberg from a hole in the wall but this is what happens historically. So when the woman from the Minnesota Historical Society, the professor, do you remember her name?

PS: You mean who interviewed you?

FK: Yeah.

PS: Oh, she was a—well, yeah, Kim Heikkila.

FK: Oh, yeah, Kim Heikkila, right. When Kim was here, she thought—she was telling, looking at the past and seeing this continuity and sort of this track of influence and I had to say, “Kim, we didn’t have a fricking sense of Ellsberg at all. Well, you know, he showed up in the middle of our trial and we didn’t—the impact we had was not on the draft system as such, it was really on Ellsberg.” And that’s the way life goes; like in this sort of hit or miss thing and so you know, you end up doing time and he doesn’t do any time but he has to worry about, you know, his own life and he’s in his eighties now.

So the idea is that everything that we did, in a sense, had an impact but not exactly like we thought it was like “A to B” and we’d say, Yeah, we impacted this or whatever. So that’s sort of a humbling thing, too. It’s sort of like, Yeah, well, he did what he did and that’s helped end the war and blah, blah, blah.

PS: Because that did have an impact.

FK: Oh, yeah, definitely. Oh no, definitely, I mean, that is the big—that is the story. I mean the story of the Minnesota 8 is the story of the Pentagon Papers. It’s not the draft raid files. That’s what we went to prison for.

So that’s sort of it in sum, you know. So I mean, the thing is is that Minnesota, which many people fail to realize, had the highest percentile—is this true, David? The highest percentage of draft resisters per population of any place in the country? And there were more actions up there. And, like I said, our—ironically the reason the Beaver 55 action was so impactful is that they centralized forty-five draft boards like in St. Paul, for efficiency.

DG: Ramsey County.

FK: Ramsey County, yeah, and then Hennepin County did the same thing. They centralized them so they put the ball in one place. So here our guys are; they’re, in a sense, in the middle of twenty-five draft boards. We’re up in Little Falls, Minnesota. We’re in this puny little draft office that covers this area around Little Falls, which is very sparsely populated even today.

PS: So it was like the county office or something like that, but a thinly populated county.

FK: So the Beaver action, you know, that’s the one that we, you know, I really feel had its impact on the draft system. So as a hostile witness, Colonel Knight said that—

PS: Robert Knight, state director of Selective Service.

FK: said that we prevented him from drafting for a year.

PS: That’s worth something.

FK: Yeah, but they went somewhere else and got bodies, but, you know, so I met guys who said to me, Well, Frank, you know, you—I had a guy—who’s—Tom? [Tom Trow] Oh damn. It was at the—one of the public radio stations. I have it on my books, I—but when I met him to talk to him, he also showed me this letter that said, Your draft board’s been destroyed. Come down and re-register. And, of course, he still had the letter. He was on his way to register that day when he picked up the Minneapolis paper and saw that the Beaver 55 action had destroyed all these files so he didn’t go down. And then he finds out that he no longer existed as far as the system was concerned. Took them years to find these guys and I’m sure legally—I don’t know if you can reconstitute draft files, whatever, I mean, it was all new stuff. I mean the government didn’t know either.

PS: They were making it up as they went in some ways, too.

FK: So when people ask me, you know, I mean, some people feel sort of judged by us because they’re intellectuals and they look at this and they say, Well, why didn’t I do that? Well, you know, it’s sort of like, well, I’m going to be very honest and tell you that, you know, I mean, we did what we had to do but we had—we didn’t know if it was going to work or not. We didn’t really know if it was going to stop the war or what it was going to do. We sort of had no idea Ellsberg was going to get involved in the deal.

So part of the lesson is that moral things; you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do, regardless of what society says. I mean, my family told me a thousand times, So, Frank, you’re throwing away your whole future as a—you’re not going to be able to get a Ph.D.; you won’t be able to teach and all this other stuff, right? Which proved to be wrong because of what I just said, but, you know, now, like you doing this interview, you and the historical society, other places, people want to preserve what we’ve done. And so I mean, there’s so much that is still unknown about , you know, the lives of, like we have Dave Gutknecht with us and the

00:40:00 Gutknecht decision was very impactful and the witness of the Quaker community eventually.

When we first did draft raids, the Quakers came out against us. I tell this to people. This is again one of those things that people never stop to think about, because they didn’t mind personal witness but they didn’t want people attacking the system, and we actually broke into the offices and we ripped up files. Very, very Catholic I would say. It was like going in and grabbing the host and the sacrament and this stuff.

Anyway, so that’s sort of the story. It’s a very human story. It’s not as easy to tell as you would like it to be. It’s not simple. It’s not a Jesuit—there were a lot of good people that did all types of stuff; supported people; helped people; I [unclear] people did stuff, you know. And that’s the part of the story I always try to tell people is that we did one thing and it was very public and it brought to light a lot of other things that could be done but people did a lot of different things. They helped people escape to Canada; they—a lot of women did stuff, you know, that’s not recorded by anybody.

So, Pete, that’s about it.

PS: Well, at this point, Frank, we can stop or, thinking about the stuff we’ve talked with, is there something that you feel like you skipped over or want to add to? We’ve got plenty of time if you have the inclination, or, you know, like details about your trial, like who some of the other witnesses were. There were some illustrious people and—

FK: Yeah, I’d have to go to my website. Part of my recent affliction is I don’t have recall of certain things.

PS: Okay, well, that’s okay. Anything else that you want to amplify?

FK: No, I think the main thing for me is always this sort of, in a sense, a lot of people feel threatened when you talk about this because they look back and they say, Well, what did I do? Well, that’s exactly how I felt. It’s like, What did I do? And someone said, Well, you raided draft boards. It’s like how stupid is that? And Dave Gutknecht, right? Or people said, Well, I resisted the draft and the war went on, right? We meet all these Vietnam veterans come back and many of them say, Yeah, well, I was over there before I even knew what Vietnam was. Running around, being trained to kill people and do stuff like that. I wouldn’t do it again, they say, you know, but now they’re older. The reason they take people when they’re eighteen years old or nineteen or twenty is that they—their moral conscience many times—they need to have the life experience or the moral development to sort of deal with those issues.

I mean, I was in my mid-twenties when I started doing all this stuff so I was on trial; I was already twenty-six years old. Earlier on, like I said, I was in a ROTC uniform; I could have been—it’s a joke I always tell, I was down in Dinkytown, which is the sort of student area, living area, around the University of Minnesota, talking to the Air Force about signing up and getting this over with.

PS: A recruiter.

FK: Yeah, six months later I’m out raiding draft boards and that’s how I tell it. And I want to humanize the times for people and draft resisters like the guys who fought in Vietnam are just your neighbors or your brothers and sisters and cousins and stuff; they’re not supermen or superwomen. There was people just that, I don’t want to do that. I’m willing to take the consequences. I mean, there’s a certain bravery of saying that but I’m just trying to say it’s something that anybody can do if they’re willing to do it.

PS: Well, do you feel like that’s as much as you have to say at this juncture, Frank? It’s fine with me if you want to come to a close now.

FK: Yeah, I don’t really—I don’t know—unless you have some questions, you guys have been listening, do you have questions?

PS: Well, I might think of something in a little while. We can stop this and maybe come back if we want to add something a little bit later. All right, well, thank you a lot, Frank, this has been real valuable, I think.

FK: Okay.

End of Recording 2

00:44:12

1. *Peace Crimes* was produced by the Minnesota History Theater, and performed at the Rarig Center theater at the University of Minnesota. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)