LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
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Interview conducted by Eugenia Kaledin
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INT2: I was just curious about how you got to be a politically involved person.

NMN: Formally it began when I first moved to Lexington. The minister of the First Parish Church then was Floyd Taylor. I think we had a discussion about this one night. For some reason—I had never been involved even with a church before—I thought, oh, that might be fun. He somehow roped me into something which at that time was—it sounds peculiar now—but it was driving local migrant workers to some sort of weekly regular get together that was held for them out in Concord, and then helping drive them back. This was some church sponsored activity because they were lonely. They came up here, they just sat around, they had nothing to do, and then they were shipped back. Many of them didn't speak English. So I picked them up from what is now Lexington Street, and back to where there is now that elderly development—I forget what it's called, it has some fancy name—near the Jewish synagogue, Temple Emunah, on the hill there. One thing led to another and before I knew it, after doing that for a while, I got involved with other things. I got involved in the League of Women Voters. And I guess I got a little frustrated there. They weren't…things weren't really happening. There were so many issues, so many things going on. I guess I somehow or other I ended up branching out into other things.

Around that time I remember my father talking about who he was going to vote for. He was torn between Eugene McCarthy and George Wallace—it was just unbelievable, the inconsistencies. But his thinking came of living in New York City and having a European socialistic view of

the world and a prejudice based on observed behavior that you see around you in New York City and that he regarded as totally irrelevant with regard to individuals—which makes this view even more confusing. It has nothing to do with individual people, but it had everything to do, in his view, with people that you worked with who didn't do what you thought they should do, or behaved in such a way that you thought was improper. He never got so far as to see it as a class thing. He saw this as a racial thing, an ethnic thing, or whatever. And being Austrian, of course, the Czechoslovakians were the pits, the Polish were the pits, the Russians, ignorant people, the French, tricky. And so it went, right down the line. Everybody (Europe) had a certain sense of "place." The Spanish had this or that quality, the Portuguese, Italians, oh my God! It was very complicated, but there was a hierarchy. My father was a headwaiter, had charge of a floor, at the Waldorf Astoria. Before that he had all kinds of adventures with the Bolsheviks before World War II. And then he went off to Rio de Janeiro and spent years in Brazil. And, you know, had a very interesting life. Then he came to New York and…

INT2: Had a family?

NMN: Became ordinary, yes. Except, of course, all of his prejudices were fulfilled, because he was in charge of the private party floor and in those days that was where everybody famous came at one time or another. He saw all of these people when they were being what they do not show to the public. There were various kings, people like Winston Churchill, and presidents and the whole slew of them. Of course, they were all a bunch of hypocrites. Obviously this all follows from all of the other things.

INT: It's interesting that you were a second generation American. That certainly made you more sensitive about what it meant to be an American.

NMN: I don't know. I lived in New York City. I didn't live in "America." That was the other part of it. No, seriously, I had never had anything so low as an American hamburger or a hot dog, or peanut butter as

a little kid. This was disdained. But that was what you had in "America," like the Midwest—which was supposed to be everything else. We were just very New York. And I wanted very much to live in "America." For instance, Vermont, to me, was "America." But I only lived there in the summertime.

INT2: But you picked Lexington.

NMN: How did I come to Lexington? I came to Lexington in the very early sixties. I think Route 128 had just been built. Hard to believe that it wasn't always there. I came here mostly because it seemed like a very nice kind of town, not particularly urban. My husband at that time was from Arlington which is right next door, so it seemed a very logical place to come to. I hadn't thought about the educational system, which at that time was reputedly excellent. It just seemed like a nice, friendly, warm place. It wasn't too large. It wasn't too crowded. Having come originally from New York City, I didn't want to be any place that seemed like New York City. It was a place where I thought one could get involved, get to know people, get involved with the life of the town. And it ended up being that way—I did get involved with the life of the town.

INT: So you were the first politically involved person in your family?

NMN: I suppose. Only I never really felt very political. I just got involved in a couple of local—well, I thought local—and statewide organizations. But they were fairly safe ones. One was the Unitarian Church, another one was the League of Women Voters, and one thing led to another. The issues being what they were in those days—the Vietnam War, Civil Rights—there were a lot of very powerful issues around. One couldn't help—but first of all perhaps take sides—and secondly, one couldn't help but get involved, at least to some extent.

INT: We were impressed by the sense of camaraderie that you had with the other women who we were talking to originally. Did that draw you in, do you think?

NMN: I think so. What makes a difference—probably would make a difference even today in what one chooses to do, if one isn't working full-time—is the age of one's children, and what stage of life you're in. I, and a lot of other people who became my friends, all had young children around the age of my children, which was six and eight, almost six and almost eight. We were all united by childcare and interest in what was going on in the world. I suppose we gravitated to many of the same organizations because we cared for the same things. And we were friends, so it was a very natural kind of thing to do.

INT2: On the point of women, the young children—because one of the things we notice, even today, is that there seem to be more women involved in trying to make this moment of history come back to life. Even though it was the Vietnam veterans who were involved, it was the women who somehow sustained it, kept it going, or it seems that way.

NMN: One significant difference between the 1970's and now is that so few of us were committed to full-time jobs at the time—the women weren't. So it was women who had the opportunity and the interest to be very involved in volunteer activities, which of course all of these things really were. That's one of the things that I think we're probably losing to some extent now. Sure, people are still involved, but they have to squeeze it in. It's just another thing. It's sort of "sub-professional" somehow. But then we had a lot of time and energy and we could really be more thoughtful in what we did. It helped us keep our sanity, too, when we had small children and weren't working full-time. I think that's what also drew us together. Since we were all in pretty much the same boat that way, we needed each other for support. It was a whole bunch of things at the same time. It was a support group, which people so rarely have nowadays. It was a chance to get children together. If we met, we had to do something with the children, so they all became friends. In many cases, they are still friends to this day. They played together while mothers plotted and

planned and talked about higher-level issues that sometimes included children, too.

INT: Did any of you go on to have more political careers after the sixties and your children got older?

NMN: I think some of us did, but then times changed and those kinds of jobs weren't always there. For a while—a very short while—I worked in the Dukakis administration in his first term as Governor. It was a very short time, thank goodness. It wasn't a very pleasant experience. Other people did things that related to social issues and other things they cared about. Many of those jobs that people took grew out of what they did then. In fact we were in a way developing those ideas then. Now people have to hurry more and make up their minds about this sort of thing much sooner after school. But we had lots of time to think about this and work on what we wanted to do. Of course, at the time, we felt it was too much time. We had some anxiety about that—at least I did.

INT: So your voluntary work really did lead to careers?

NMN: Yes, but not so that I could see. Not on any well charted course. Everything seemed to be accidental at the time.

INT: Let's get back to the veterans now and talk about what you did to prepare for this event.

NMN: I did very little, actually, to prepare for the event. The event overtook me. What first happened, the first notice of anything that could possibly be happening on that weekend came to me via a telephone call from the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I think it was their office in Cambridge that called. At the time they described only what they were thinking of doing: a march that was to recreate, backwards, the ride of Paul Revere, coming back from Concord and going into town, rather than coming out from Boston to Concord. They were going to bivouac along the way. I didn't think very much about why they were going to do this. They were going to use this method to "bring the war home" to local

people. What they wanted from the group that I was head of at the time—Citizens for Participation Politics, it was called, a very unwieldy title—they wanted to see if they could get citizens of Lexington to get organized to feed them this spaghetti dinner. To me this whole plan was no more than a spaghetti dinner in the beginning. I very naively thought it would stay a spaghetti dinner. I spread the word and got people, quite willingly, in line to help in some way. I still had no idea this was going to become a very big issue. There were some logistics involved. In order to feed them spaghetti, we had to have a place where they were going to have it. We had to hear about or know about where they were going to stay that night, where they were going to be at that time. What surprised me was the willingness of people to help for such a mundane thing as churning out spaghetti. It's funny—I know now from looking back that there were a lot of people. The old newspapers say there were two hundred veterans. But I really don't remember having such an awesome number of people that we were going to feed spaghetti to. It strikes me now that at the time I can't have been that organized, but I must have been. *Somebody* must have been organized. I must have had a lot of helpers because I can't remember any anxiety about being able to do this. It seemed as if it would just work out somehow.

INT: It's what you did everyday.

NMN: I don't know, it didn't seem to be a big problem. But what I was really surprised about was people's willingness to help. I thought that was really wonderful. That showed that they had a lot of support for what they were going to do. I didn't see any real issues coming down, because this seemed a very simple thing that they wanted to do. I didn't foresee any complications. Now what happened in the following days, what I remember of what happened, made a simple event become much more complicated. I remember my first real shock of what was involved was, one day when I had to visit with one of the Selectmen. I can't remember

absolutely which Selectman it was. It was, I think, to do with something like picking up a permit for the veterans. And I was met with an awful lot of hostility and anger about what was happening. I was very surprised. I may have been very naive, but it was beyond me—why? At this point, it had become feeding veterans, I believed, on the Battle Green, and then they would go on. It wasn't clear then what was going to happen that night, at least not in my memory. I didn't see why this was going to be such a complicated issue or could cause that kind of anger. But I wasn't so naive that I didn't realize there were a lot of feelings around about the Vietnam War.

It also seemed to coincide with a lot of other feelings that were around, that I had been dimly aware of. Those were feelings about new elements coming to town, elements that were different from the people who had held town offices before. These "elements" were a lot of us guys—people who were organizing things like the Civil Rights Committee—which were to some homeowners here, some people who lived here, somewhat threatening. "Being against the government" was the way it was seen, if you opposed the war. So groups like Citizens for Participation Politics and the like were also seen by some people as threatening.

Now I knew that. I was at least dimly aware of it. But I didn't really *know* it, in that I understood it. And I had never seen any hostility. The town was still a warm, friendly town to me. It wasn't really until the day the veterans actually began their march, when they came in the morning from Concord—I don't know if it was in the morning, but it was fairly early in the day although it could have been after the arrests—but I had a number of very angry anonymous phone calls, that really shocked me more than anything else. I don't think it would shock me to have something like that happen now, but it really did at the time. Because I thought what it would have been like if one of my children had answered the phone—what would they have made of it? I had no idea. Everything that I had been

involved in was something that all of their friends' mothers and fathers were involved in. It was a very benign thing. It had never been something that caused anyone to feel anger.

INT: But you were the only one who got the calls, because you were the actually head of it?

NMN: Probably. I don't know anyone else who got angry phone calls. I don't know who started it or where it came from or whether it was one person or many. But they came one after the other for a couple of hours, one morning. And it was very, very unpleasant.

INT: Did you attend any of the meetings the afternoon of the arrest?

NMN: I seemed to be very tied up with something or other that day. I think it was just being wherever the veterans were. My memory of exactly what I did that day is a little bit fuzzy. I remember being at a place called Fiske Hill, a park just at the edge of town that the veterans would be coming through on their way down Massachusetts Avenue to the Center. I remember being there, and I think there was a minister there from one of the churches. We had a meeting with some of the veterans about what was about to happen. I seem to have been on the Green almost all day.

The interesting thing was that my parents from New York City were visiting that weekend. They had only dim ideas about organizations I was involved in, what kind of political activity I was involved in. Fortunately, they were there to babysit the children. Much of that day the children spent with their friends at the house or at nearby neighbors' houses. Since I lived on Massachusetts Avenue at the time the march was to go right in front of the house. I had a kind of a wistful feeling that when my parents—I was in my thirties at the time and the children were aged six and eight—but I had a feeling, at the time, old as I was, that when I walked down the street (my daughters and some of their friends had made a sign, a peace sign, a poster they held by the side of the road and they waved at the veterans as they came marching by) and all of us who supported them also marched by with

them, as did other friends and other people who believed in that, and they joined the march—it had become quite a goodly march of people, walking down Massachusetts Avenue, in front of my house, down to the town center—I thought that my parents would be so delighted and so impressed with this wonderful thing that was happening that was so important to the country and to ourselves, and for the expression of free speech, that they would join.

Of course, they didn't. They babysat the children all day. I only found out afterward that they were worried sick about what was happening, about what was going on. Especially—and I'm jumping far ahead of the story here—especially that night, when I was still on the Green. I honestly don't think I ever left. I remember my husband went back to get sleeping bags, to get blankets, to get sweaters, late at night, when it was long since dark. But I didn't go back. I knew everybody was all right. I kept getting messages, but I stayed there the whole time. Around the time the buses came to arrest us the bells started ringing in the church near the Green. It was a very beautiful sound. It was a very dramatic moment. I will just never forget it. It was probably the most exciting thing of the day. It was a very emotional moment for everybody who was involved because everybody felt that the battle was joined and the bells were on our side. And that was very—it was very moving. But of course, at that moment, my parents, sitting at home within earshot of the bells, thought, oh my goodness, what's happening? Kent State, as I remember, had already happened[1]. A lot of awful things had gone on because of the war. And I think they thought probably somebody was going to be shot, something awful was to happen. I knew in Lexington nothing awful was ever going to happen. Even then I was thinking—this isn't really an awful thing. The police were arresting us. They aren't enjoying themselves. They don't

[1] At Kent State University on May 4, 1970 National Guard troops fired on an anti-war demonstration killing four students and wounding several others.

really want to do this. It was done in a very friendly kind of way. Which is not to say the people who ordered it to be done were friendly. But there was nothing in the air that we felt was personally hostile to what we were doing at that point. But I couldn't tell them [my parents] that. I couldn't tell them that until the next day. And the next day, when it was all over, that is, all over but the shouting, they packed up and went home very disappointed, very unhappy.

And I felt so happy and so exhilarated by what had happened. Because I don't think ever had I seen such a mass of people coming together as we had come together in the march which was joined by others and then joined by still others. Then by the people who came to the Green later on in the evening. People brought friends. People went home and got sleeping bags and came back. They didn't stay away. They didn't go back home to be safe in their comfortable beds. They didn't go home just to take care of their children and then stay there. They went home and made arrangements for their children, or they asked their children to join them. And the group got bigger and bigger. It stayed on the Green for hours and hours, through the middle of the night. People were prepared to camp out there as long as it was necessary. That was an amazing thing. I don't think I've been to an event, been part of an event, or been at the core of an event since then that promoted that same kind of feeling. When you talk about camaraderie, I mean, it was a very powerful thing. And it grew naturally.

There were things then we called phone trees where, when something happened, you had a list of people that you had to call to a meeting to deal with this or that legislative issue, or some kind of minor action item. Everything just happened like that. Everybody seemed to know that they needed to call and let other people know what was going on. It had a life of its own.

INT: You said earlier that you felt it was one of the rare times you had experienced democracy. Is that really what you were describing now?

NMN: I didn't think of it that way. I didn't think that I was experiencing democracy or anything, really, until later. I think that a lot of that was in hindsight. It was just a natural emotional outpouring of feeling and support, because an injustice was being done. I think it was on that gut level.

I thought seriously about the Vietnam War, of course. I had read all sorts of books about it. I had very logical reasons why we were doing an awful thing there. But I wasn't very strong on taking the kind of actions that were going on—in other words, demonstrating or protesting by walking back and forth in front of a building because I've always thought logically, it would be much more effective to do A, B, or C. In that way, I was very political in a more traditional kind of way. That's what I felt would logically accomplish things. On the other hand sometimes something happens that you have to get out there and act. You have to put your body out there somehow. You've got to stand up and say, this is not right. In this case, I was sort of thrust there. I had a job to do, and I found myself innocently thinking of spaghetti. I found myself in the midst of this very emotional issue. It was emotional because it was so shocking that in a town that so many of us really—I don't know if I could say "loved"—liked, enjoyed, felt happy in, felt comfortable in, probably as good as any town in the country—better than some, worse than others. In a town like this, where we all had our very middle class chores and jobs and values and everything else, that so many of us could naturally be caught up and recognize an injustice so immediately.

The injustice was, on one level, the injustice of a war that we were trying to make a statement about. But the statement was very simple; it was—notice! Notice the veterans that are coming here, and see what they have to tell you. It was as simple as that. It wasn't a more complicated message at the time. Or at least it wasn't planned to be. But it became an injustice when it seemed that issues like being on a Green, a Battle Green,

which for heaven's sakes commemorates a battle where blood was shed, where a piece of grass that was horribly messed up in the 1700's was going to be walked on, and at worst, slept on, by lots of people for a few hours—that that could be an issue that would cause you to actually arrest people… And arrest is a very strong step, a very strong statement, when you consider that probably 99.9% of the people present on the Green had probably never gotten more than parking tickets their whole lives. That was a very shocking thing. You talk of arrest and you think of the middle class parents who were there and what they would tell their children. We were there for a very good cause, but then police came and arrested us. This is very shocking stuff. People don't do that to one another in what was then, and is now to some extent, a small town. Your elected officials are there to perform their civic duty on some important—but let's face it—not world-class issues. They are there to see that zoning is enforced. They are there to make decisions about housing, about traffic, and maybe a few slightly more spiritual than that. But that's what they are there to do. That they would play a role that would so deeply affect the lives of the people because of their anger at what it represented—I think not at what was happening, but their anger at what it represented—and the fact that I would be caught in something like this is a little symbolic of how it could affect anybody who had to play a role in it.

I didn't really seek it out, I was just there. Each step that I took was really dependent on the one before. It seems we should feed the veterans a spaghetti dinner. We should treat them honorably since they did fight in the war for us, and some who were present were crippled and in wheelchairs. Should we not, at least, listen to what they have to say? If they are to bivouac on the Green, that is part of their, shall we say, theater. That's the way they wanted to demonstrate something. Can we not let them do that? What harm is there in that?

The issue of precedent really never came up. Although it could have come up. If we had let them sleep on the Green and demonstrate their theater—whatever you want to call it—couldn't other groups do the same? Then we would have to weigh which ones we will allow and which ones we will not. It's interesting. That would have been a good issue for us to debate. I would have welcomed that sort of debate, but it never happened. It was a foregone conclusion that these people were not somehow the right people to be on the Green, and so it just couldn't be.

INT: Did you get to know any of them during the arrest?

NMN: Interestingly, as much as I was somewhere in the core of this event, I remember only a couple of vets. I remember the leader [now U.S. Senator] John Kerry who was always at least twenty feet away from me. I don't remember speaking to him. I remember speaking to one or two of the other vets. But really I felt they were there to do their thing, and we were only there for support. So I did not have a major role. The negotiations were being handled by other people. I didn't feel that I had a role. I suppose I could have grabbed one, but that wasn't something I was interested in.

The people I got to know that night were people I only got to know that night and never again. All around me there were people I didn't know. Some were from town. Some were friends of other people. I wasn't sure who they all were. But other than the two or three acquaintances who were with me or near me there were people who had somehow produced guitars or harmonicas as well as candles and other little things. And they were singing. I remember a group around me was singing some incredibly sad Irish songs for it seemed hours on end, which was very lovely, very romantic, and quite irrelevant. But it made for a lovely mood. I think people found themselves in little clusters like this all through the Battle Green. It made it a different event to everyone in every little cluster. Everybody would remember it in a different way. It was just more of the

spirit of this being somehow a very special experience that we all shared by putting ourselves on the line in a way.

In my heart I knew it was—we were—safe. I couldn't believe that it was otherwise. The arrests, yes, were shocking, but I still felt safe with all of the people I knew around me. Safe enough to be able to enjoy being there.

INT: Do you remember anything special about the trial?

NMN: I remember riding to Concord in a school bus. It was a very funny experience being in a school bus. When you stop to think about it, how often is one ever in a school bus with people aged twenty-five, thirty, forty, fifty, and sixty? So we felt a little bit like we were being bused around like children. It was an ironic feeling. It wasn't unhappy, it was kind of funny. When we got to Concord though, we were very surprised by people in Concord. By now this was the daytime, in the morning of the next day, I'm not sure just when. I remember people applauding and yelling things as we got out of the bus—support. It was the first time that I had been exposed since this happened to what you could call the outside world. I was very surprised. At this point I had no idea that it had been in the news, on television last night, on the radio. I hadn't any idea that it had made the Boston papers. I don't think, at that moment, I had read anything about it yet.

INT: Then did you go to the Town Meeting that followed the night after?

NMN: The day after the arrests I remember spending a very surrealistic day with friends who had also been involved. We were all so tired, exhausted. But we spent the whole day marveling about what had happened, being sort of shocked, amazed. We thought of things that were funny, that were awful. We compared experiences because each of us had seen things in a different way. We hadn't all been together that day, although I think our paths had intersected a lot. All of us had had different

experiences and heard different things. Our husbands had heard different things, talked to different people. So we literally re-ran all of the events in our minds. Then, of course, we heard from other people. I don't remember whether we had seen the news or read papers then. Probably, we had. And we were sort of amazed.

A story came out in the *Boston Globe* later on. I remember because [a reporter from the *Globe*] called me to ask me some questions about it. One of the questions they asked was, as I recall, "What did this change for you and for your feelings about the town?" My answer was something like, "For the first time I had a feeling that in the town there was a group called 'us' and there was a group called ''them.'"

Now we speak much more about "us" and "them" in all kinds of areas. But then it was a new concept for me. Because I had never been an "us," and I had never been a "them" against an issue, at least not to any great extent. This had kind of drawn a clear line that there were people who had some real grievances with one another. And they weren't completely rational, but they sure were strong.

INT: Did you go to that Town Meeting afterwards where people hashed over the events?

NMN: Yes, I did. I believe we had to call up to let the Selectmen know that we wanted to say something. This was an open meeting held about a week after, I think. At that time, anyone who had a strong feeling in any direction, of any kind, could be put on a list. I don't know if the list was to be limited. It ended up being a pretty long list. You could be put on that list and would be allowed to speak for some period of time. It was limited, but I don't remember exactly to what. A lot of people spoke. The meeting was as crowded a Cary Hall meeting as I had ever seen.

I remember that one of the young people who was a teenager from the high school, head of a student group, who had been very much involved in all of these activities too, had asked me before that meeting about what kind

of things we were expected to say. I suggested to him, well, you can look at my speech and get some idea. I had taken some pains to write out my version of the Gettysburg Address, short but sweet. I was about fifth or sixth or seventh on the list. It turned out this other young person was maybe fourth or fifth. As evidence that no side is all good or all bad there is this—he plagiarized my speech. I was very shocked. Rather than use it as inspiration he had copied it word for word. I used to see him often, but interestingly, after that day, we never crossed paths ever again, so I wasn't ever able to talk to him about it. But yes, he plagiarized my speech. In a room that's crowded to the rafters with emotions running high, where you're so busy concentrating on sound and fury, it's very hard to suddenly invent something new. I don't know what I did, but I got by. I hadn't much experience in public speaking at the time but it is amazing how your mind can respond when it has to. I came up with something and made some little announcement that was new information. So it sounded as if I hadn't just come completely ill prepared. I think I repeated some of his (my) words. But it was interesting. Lest we give too much credit to ourselves who are on the right side! All of our sides do have weaknesses and that was one of them.

INT: Were you involved in the pardon petition that took place after?

NMN: I don't remember being involved in the pardon petition. For for me it wasn't really a big issue. I didn't care if I was pardoned or not. It didn't seem like much of a crime and I wasn't fully convinced about what a pardon would achieve. The mark was on record of this having happened. Having a formal agreement that this was an incorrect mark I didn't really think was going to accomplish anything. That's what I remember thinking. I might well have been a part of it, just because it seemed like an all right idea. I don't even now see it as a bad idea, but I think it wasn't compelling at the time. If I was involved in it, it was in a very peripheral kind of way.

INT: Ideologically, did you see anything at stake at the time, in terms of what the various parties got out of this?

NMN: I certainly learned from this a better sense of the depths of feeling that people had about this issue that I think I had been naive about. Although I would have learned that sooner or later anyway. Because I think it's a mistake to make assumptions about what people believe and how ready they will be to act on those beliefs. The unanimity that all of us felt on the Battle Green—if we were to make a stand on a very different kind of issue now, we probably wouldn't be the same group either. We would also have splintered.

Issues seem to me to have been a little simpler then. I say that now, because so many issues were just coming into my consciousness. The issue of women's liberation was just a small issue then. It was becoming important. Civil rights were fairly simple—everybody should have them. There was such a thing as prejudice and bias that infiltrated all of our lives. It was part of all of our lives. It was a part of why Lexington was mostly white. We hadn't even really expanded on that yet. Affirmative action was—I don't think it even really existed yet, as a program, not at all. A sort of splintering of rights-to-be—rights for all kinds of different people, all kinds of different groups—hadn't happened yet. Our views were simpler. That doesn't mean they were easier to deal with. They weren't easier to deal with, but they seemed to come in bigger chunks than they do now.

INT: What you're saying is that you see things more complexly today. You wouldn't see it exactly as you saw it then.

NMN: That's right. I do see things in a more complex way. It's so easy to say they are more complex now. I'm not sure that's really true. It was probably just as difficult to think about the issues involved in the Vietnam War as it is to think about our actions now in other parts of the

world. I don't think the issues are really that more complicated. But in retrospect they often seem a lot simpler than possibly they really were.

INT: Would you do it again?

NMN: I certainly hope so. I was saying earlier about how little time we seem to have and how much time we had in those days, women particularly, to volunteer and commit ourselves to certain kinds of volunteer activities, any kind of volunteer activity. That kind of time seems so much harder to get a hold of now. I don't know how it would be possible for someone who was working full-time and had two children, like I did then, to take a whole day of a precious weekend and spend it on the Battle Green, to spend half of that night too, and then to spend much of the other day talking about it all and getting into more events the following week. I don't know how possible it would be. I think that's a loss that many of us can't do that anymore.

INT: You've said something very important there about middle class dissent in a way. Sometimes middle class people question the fact that working class people don't join them. And that clarifies much of why they don't.

NMN: Mm hmm.

INT: Did these particular events change the town?

NMN: I think it did in the short-term. Events did change the town in the short-term. But I don't think it had any really lasting affect. I think people all over town, the majority of people, recognized that they didn't want this sort of behavior in town. By “this sort of behavior,” I mean not people walking on the Green or making a protest, I don't think they wanted to be treated this way by their elected officials. And I don't think people like to have issues of trampling on the Green and violating curfews and bogus charges like that to deal with when they were there for what they felt was much more important, much higher level reasons. People resented that,

even many people who had not participated. It did create that feeling of "us" versus "them," that lasted probably for quite a few years.

Now, if on any issue you once again came out with an "us" and "them," we would have an entirely different group of people. I'm not sure exactly how it would all turn out. It wasn't strictly liberals versus conservatives. It wasn't just Democrats versus Republicans. All of those things were factors. Another issue that was going on at the time was building low-income housing. A lot of people had economic concerns or concerns that new people in town who cared about all of these issues were going to change the town and make it a kind of place they thought was no longer theirs. I think that was a threat. And that continued for some time. To some extent there may be people who still have some of those residual feelings.

But the town has changed a lot since then, and will continue to change. So I can't say I really feel that that event set a tone for the future. But I do think that as long as an event like this is remembered, it's that much more unlikely that elected officials will behave in a similar way toward people of the town. I think in the mirror they would see reflected the way the Selectmen behaved in 1971, and I think they would not be proud to behave the same way.

INT: That was going to be the last question: Why do you think we should remember this?

NMN: The fact that I really do think that as long as a memory like this is alive people will think twice. They may do something awful some other way that we can't now imagine. But I cannot see something like this happening.

INT: Underestimating the power of democracy again, as they did in Russia.

NMN: Well, you know, that's…

INT2: The power of the people.

NMN: That's right.

INT: Yes, the power of the people is something that we don't really understand.

NMN: The whole change in Eastern Europe was brought about by people doing fairly innocent things in a lot of ways.

INT2: Climbs over walls and…

INT: Sitting on the Green…

NMN: That's a kind of a civil disturbance, and I do think we tend to underestimate public opinion in that way.

INT2: I was thinking about how making a public statement of civil disobedience and where that was in our lives. In retrospect I'd been doing that for a while. Had you been doing some demonstrating? You went to Washington before this thing.

NMN: I didn't go to *the* march on Washington. But I did go to *a* march on Washington. The civil rights march with Martin Luther King—I was not there. I wasn't living in Lexington at the time, but I wished I had gone to that.

INT2: In 1969 you went down on the bus?

NMN: Yes, that's right.

INT2: Which was different from doing it in your own town.

NMN: Yes, I felt somehow that you if you marched on Washington, you got counted even if it meant there were, well, 400,000 people as opposed to 399,999. I made it 400,000. I had the feeling that even though you were just a little blip you were somehow vaguely counted if you went. But on the Green, people had marched for some time, walking around the flag on the Battle Green.

INT2: Right, every Friday at noon.

NMN: And I didn't go. I don't think I went even once. What I felt was—and this is really very self-serving because it was easier not to go—I felt that was almost a sign of weakness because they were such a small group. And it always remained a small group. It was like a vigil, I

understand, where you only need to have one person. It's a vigil and it's a reminder. But I guess I felt gee, what are we showing to them? That there are a few people who are so—how shall I say?—foolish as to walk around here every Friday. What does it prove? Where is that getting us? I never spent a great deal of time thinking about it. I didn't do it because it felt futile.. And I didn't want to join a futile effort. Maybe other people felt that way too. Maybe that's why it was a futile effort. I don't know.

INT: Do you think the actual arrest had any impact on the war?

NMN: The arrest of essentially middle class people on Lexington Green had a little bit larger effect, because it was middle class people with families who were on the Green. It was beyond being just a few drops in the bucket. It was like pouring a cupful in the bucket with a lot more to go. It was one more event that I think made a tiny bit of a difference in the long run.

Knowing that this can happen made other people who read about it or heard about it think, oh, that seems like something I could imagine myself doing. Or—it must be sort of okay if people like that demonstrate; they are not all wild, longhaired college students. That's not a very big point to make, but it is a solid, small point to be made.

INT2: In the consciousness of the citizen at large, the mass of citizenry of the country, I would think that evidence of normal people, middle class people standing up would be a watershed point—actually, in public, people giving themselves permission to think that way

NMN: I think it's true that having ordinary people, middle class people, establishment people and the like, put themselves on the line for something does have, overall, a tremendous impact. But people were already doing that. At the march in Washington, there were—I remember some very famous faces in the crowd.

In the early stages of protest against the Vietnam War, for the first time, I remember—and I was probably in my upper twenties then—I remember

being aware that actors I saw on the stage or movie stars who had never been anything other than movie stars—they had hardly been people, as far as I was concerned, they were just images—some of these people had beliefs. They actually had beliefs. I was amazed. Some of these beliefs were pro-war and some were anti-war. I only got that because the Vietnam War was one of the issues that separated people into groups: a very large group against, a very large group—well, a fairly large group, at least in the beginning—that was either for or thought it was sort of okay. But I had never seen splits like that.

Going back a little further, when it came to voting for John F. Kennedy or not voting for John F. Kennedy (that is, voting for Nixon) I saw among people that I knew the same split. My goodness, people were either in this camp or that. And there were certain reasons and associations with each of those views, that fresh out of college as I was, surprised me. I realized there are people who went one way or another. And they went that way connected with a whole lot of other ideas and beliefs.

INT2: The veterans were, first of all, mavericks in the sense that they had been soldiers and they were back saying, what we did, we don't support. That is a radical thing. And they were coming in visibly, with their uniform types of clothing, with some thoughts about guerilla theater…So the design of what their action was, was not the design of something that you would have designed, for example. But the fact that that population and the environment in which they were doing it rose to their support so dramatically—associating yourself. You are middle class, average. And then you're holding hands with this very dramatic image. That is a certain kind of association that is a very strong image to the people who view it from the outside. It's different from the march on Washington, where it was church groups and all kinds of groups, community groups.

NMN: Yes, I think allying one's self with the veterans was really a very powerful thing. There was a feeling that I can still remember a little bit of,

having talked to a Vietnam veteran who was someone who had been to hell. Actually talking to somebody who had been in Vietnam. Those early people who came back from Vietnam and joined groups like Vietnam Veterans Against the War were, by and large, very articulate spokespeople about their experience. A lot of them had gone early enough in the war so they hadn't had much of a chance to think about it yet. They were in a way innocent when they went. And they came back anything but innocent. Some of the stories that all Vietnam veterans told were pretty shocking.

A really shocking event had just occurred in April of that year, in a march on Washington when Vietnam veterans, this particular group, the nationwide group [VVAW], had thrown down its medals. I still remember that happening with shock. And I think people who watched that on the news watched it with shock. Those were medals they had earned in blood. And that was a very, very shocking event. Later on, one or two years after this event of May 1971, I was practice-teaching history, as it happened, at the Lexington High School. I had to teach about current events, and that meant Vietnam. I invited guest speakers who were Vietnam veterans. Finding articulate veterans then who could talk about their experiences the way some of the earlier veterans did was hard. The veterans who came to speak to the high school class, the ones who were available to do that at that time, were veterans who had gone over later. It had taken them longer then to realize what it was they were into. The country was already having some very negative feelings about the war, even when they first went. You have to remember that a lot of very articulate, intelligent, college material type people were also fairly smart about how to get out of serving in Vietnam because they knew this was not a good war, they did not believe in the cause. Which meant that a lot of those who did go, who were sent, just simply hadn't had good advice, didn't know what the alternatives were, didn't know how they could get out of serving. So they got kind of scooped up. A couple of those, one in particular I remember who came to

talk to the class, had had some awful experiences, and this guy was still a little disturbed emotionally by what had happened to him. He hadn't had a chance yet to work it out. Maybe he hadn't had people to talk to, either before or after, the way some of the earlier Vietnam veterans had. And he scared the kids, I remember. He scared them. What they asked afterward was, why was he so bitter? Why was he so angry? Because he couldn't really explain it. I don't think he even understood it himself. That was a very scary thing.

The Vietnam veterans involved that I remember speaking to in 1971 were angry. But for the most part, they weren't bitter. Because they understood, and they were doing something. More or less they felt in charge of their lives. This guy who talked to the high school class a couple of years later felt he had been used. And that wasn't a very nice feeling.

END OF INTERVIEW