LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Paul Plasse
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Interview conducted by Bonnie Jones
Videotape length 80 minutes

INT: We are with Paul Plasse here in Lexington. Can you introduce yourself, Paul, and let us know some of your background?

PP: Do you want educational background, or…? Well, I was trained as a chemist. I graduated from Colby College in 1952. In 1954 we were living down on the South Shore. In 1954 one of our children was going to start elementary school, and my wife said we have to find the best town with an educational system that we can have the kids educated in.. She did an awful lot of research on this and she came down with Newton and Lexington. We visited both. We liked Lexington better. We said, that's where we want to live. That was in 1954. We bought this house here, and we've been here ever since. We raised four children here. All went through the Lexington schools. Two of them are doctors, and two of them are Bachelor's and Master's in nursing. They were all in a professional field.

INT: Where did you grow up?

PP: I grew up in Whitman, Massachusetts, down on the South Shore. I left Whitman to go in the service when I was seventeen years old. I joined the Navy, and I saw a tremendous amount of action, both in the Atlantic theater and in Europe, and over in the Pacific theater, too. Our ship covered two-thirds of the world, actually. It was a landing ship, and we were in the invasion of Normandy. I was there on the beach on D-Day in Normandy, H-hour. When the sunrise came up we were there on the beaches. It was a tremendous experience. That probably has influenced me more about this Vietnam protest situation than anything else. Because at seventeen you have sort of a fatalistic attitude, and "it's not going to be me." But the

impressions that are created when you see the bodies floating in the water, the bodies on the beach, bits and pieces of people up on wreckage and on burnt-out tanks and on landing craft that were blown apart—you don't realize it at the time, but it makes a tremendous impression on you. When we went back to England after our first trip, we had over five hundred U.S. wounded onboard ship. We took them right off the beach. They put them on our ship, and we had doctors operating on them on our chow tables and everything else. We went back to England and we made sixteen trips to Normandy. On subsequent trips, well, now the airfields over there, they were bringing the wounded back by air. But the German prisoners and the wounded, we brought them back, too. We would bring back hundreds of them at a time. It was peculiar, because we looked upon the Germans who were wounded the same was we did on the Americans who were wounded. They were mostly young people, and it was pathetic to see them, parts of their body missing, and gaping, and open, and all that sort of thing, young men dying and so forth. I guess that a week after Normandy I lost my oldest brother. He was a pilot, and we lost him. That had another effect on me. Then we went down to southern France and made the invasion of southern France, which was not on the scale of Normandy. Nothing could ever be on that scale. But still, the ships getting bombed and the soldiers dying and so forth, and the ship sinking, was still very impressive.

We went from there out to the Pacific and we made behind-the-line landings in some of the Philippines. Then we went up for the last big battle of World War II, the invasion of Okinawa where we had the hundreds of kamikaze attacks. The fighting was right there on the beach, right in the caves. You saw the B-29's coming in and the runway was too short for them that they had captured. Then they would come in and they couldn't stop and they would go into the hillside and would blow up. You know, all of these

things…the sacrifices… And these were just ordinary people. They are not recorded in the annals of history, I am sure, other than just a number. But yet they were individuals, and they all suffered.

I guess what bothered me about the Vietnam protest situation, I didn't mind them protesting. I thought, that's what we went and fought for. That's what all of these people died for, that's what my brother died for, and all that sort of thing. But what I thought was, when they go about breaking the law, deliberately breaking the law, then that is undermining what this whole country was built on and is. It's a country of laws. And if you want to protest, that's fine, but to do it in a legal way was fine. I was really upset by the fact that they chose to break the law deliberately. That bothered me more than anything else in this whole thing. Then of course the protesters, they were made up of a tremendous range of people. There were people who were truly compassionate and nice people, and then there are the people who are haters, real haters. That bothered me because they took the hate out on the military people. The military people were only doing their job in Vietnam like we did our job. We were called upon; we did it. It was a tremendous experience for me. I survived. I was very fortunate. But the ones who didn't survive, and the ones who came back maimed, and the ones who came back disfigured and so forth, the suffering that they did was for freedom and the protection of this, our way of life.

When the Vietnam war protesters—again, protesting was fine, I did not object to that—but when they started showing their vehemence against the military people who were not really at fault for this whole Vietnam thing… In my opinion what happened on the Vietnam War was we had ignorance, we had arrogance, we had deception. One of the things that we didn't have, we did not have any ethnic advocacy. We did not have Vietnamese or Asian influence in our political system to advocate defending their country,

defending their rights, and to interpret what was going on in Vietnam. That is one of the big crimes of that whole era is because our politicians, first of all, were so arrogant that they did not defer to things like in Benedict's book here[1], looking at the psychology, looking at the social anthropology of the Asian people. They are unique people. They are made up of the same spectrum of nice and bad people, as we all are. But they were never represented, and nobody was speaking for them. The only ones that were speaking for them was the elite in Vietnam, and they were corrupt. Ninety percent of the Vietnamese are Buddhist, and what did they have? They had a ten percent coalition of Catholics that were ruling them. So there was a tremendous religious thing behind their motivations for what was going on over there.

The biggest crime, I think, was President Kennedy did not defer to the military leaders on how to go in and win a war. It was a war that was fought without the intention of winning. And to sacrifice lives and so forth, it's criminal. The poor fellow who is dead is dead. He should have at least have died for a just cause.

INT: At the time did you have this kind of understanding about the war that you now have? Or has it developed over time?

PP: I was aware. I read a tremendous amount. I like to read. I read cereal boxes and sides of labels and cans, and so forth [laughter]. But I love to read, and I like to think that I am objective. I try to be objective. My basic training as a research chemist was to get information, garner information, research things, and then make a decision on what is the best move to make. I have done this on Vietnam, I have done it on most things,

[1] The book he is referring to is The Chrysanthemum and the Rose: Patterns of Japanese Culture, written by Ruth Benedict (1887-1948).

the Oklahoma bombing situation now[2]. I have been reading everything about those, and try to understand what causes these things to happen and try to appreciate what we could do to preclude that happening in the future. With any of these situations, we as a country and we as a people pay a tremendous price for that sort of thing. We damned well better learn a lesson from it, and we had damn well better take advantage of what it's cost us to get some of our value back. So we should study and research these things.

I think the Vietnam War is a classic case that the kids in school should study, and so they should understand that there is a political process in this country that allows us to elect honorable leaders, and they should behave in an honorable way. If they don't, then they should be replaced. The thing that bothered me tremendously about the [President] Kennedy situation and [President] Johnson was the deception that they practiced. If you read about Ho Chi Minh [head of North Vietnam], his whole history was of deception. He had an end goal, and that was to rule his country. He lied to everybody in order to achieve that. Now whether or not he was doing that right from the beginning, I don't know. Only he would have probably known that. But there was an opportunity back at the end of World War I where at Versailles he tried to meet with [President] Wilson, and tried to talk to him about the deeds of the Vietnamese people and so forth. And he was rebuffed. That's one of those situations, probably an opportunity, passed, and it changes the course of history.

But if we had understood the philosophy of the Vietnamese people, we would have fared much better in really helping them. Because what we intended to do was honorable. The way we went about it was, I think, dishonorable.

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[2] This refers to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995 by self-styled terroristTimothy McVeigh.

INT: Getting back to your own experience, you said you went into the service when you were seventeen:

PP: Seventeen, right.

INT: Did you have to get your parents to sign for you?

PP: Yes. I had two brothers that were in the service at the time, and I came home from school. I was in high school. This friend of mine was going to be eighteen and he was going to be drafted. He said, "Why don't you go into Boston with me while I take my physical?" So I said, "All right." I went into Boston to the First Naval Federal building there. And this recruiting chief said, "Well why don't you take the physical, too? You are going to have to waste your time and they will just put a bunch of red marks all over, but you will get a beautiful examination. When you get through just tear the papers up and go home." And he said, "Otherwise you are just going to be sitting here all day." So I said, "All right, fine." I went through and got all my marks over me and so forth, and decided, well, I think that's the thing to do is to go in the service. So I took the papers home and my parents, of course they didn't want me to go because they felt I was too young.

I was not happy in school because I was told in school that I could not take college courses because I came from a poor family and I would never go to college. I couldn't take math, I couldn't do any of these things. So they gave me commercial courses and that sort of thing. I was not challenged at all, so I decided I would go in the service. I went in the service, I became a radio operator. I was only one of about five people who were selected to go into…you took all those exams, you know. I had an excellent radio officer onboard ship, and he couldn't believe that I could pass examinations, never having had any math. I could do algebra, trigonometry and so forth. I would read the books and then I did follow their examples of

how you did the problems. He said, "Well, you haven't finished high school." I said, "No." He said, "Why don't we take and sign you up in the University of Chicago expeditionary forces courses, and I will be your tutor?" So I said, "Wonderful." I took all of those courses and got my high school equivalency. Then when I got out of the service, I went to night school at Brockton High School. I went to night school and I got more credits. Then I realized what I wanted to do. I did not have the technical courses that I needed, the math courses. So I went to a private school. In the private school in one year I took algebra 1, algebra 2, trigonometry, and geometry. I took two years of French, and I took physics, I took chemistry, and I took English and history. It was a tough, tough school. And then I went on from there to college. I was going to be a pre-med major and that's how I started out. But then we had our first baby and that changed the course of events. So I switched over to majoring in chemistry and a minor in mathematics.

INT: So education was really important, and you came to Lexington looking for that for your children.

PP: Right.

INT: When you came to Lexington, what was it like when you got here, and what was your involvement in the town?

PP: When I first came to Lexington, that was 1954, I was working for Arthur D. Little. I started right out of college working for Arthur D. Little. One of the Selectman—in fact he became chairman of the Board of Selectmen—was a fellow by the name of Ray James. Ray was one of the influential people getting me to come to Lexington. When I first came here I did not get involved in town affairs because I was working two other jobs at the same time to pay off all our school and medical bills. When I first [got] really involved in the town affairs was Little League baseball. I got

involved with Little League baseball with Barbara Nason and Bob Dodd and the old-timers here in Lexington. I was quite influential in getting them to organize the tryout system so everybody got a fair shot. Prior to that all of the kids would come down to the field and the managers would already have their team picked, and these little kids would go through all these exercises, and it was chaos. There was no system to it. So I got them to organize it, just age groups on certain days would try out and we would put them all through hitting, running, fielding like that, systematically. All had numbers and they would go through the thing, and all of the managers could have numbers and they would rate the young kids. It was a wonderful experience. I had some wonderful boys on the team, and they still are in the town, some of them. I see them occasionally and it's quite pleasing to see how they have grown up.

INT: Did you get involved in the political system at all?

PP: Yes, I was actually involved in politics working on campaigns. I did telephoning and campaigning and working on writing literature, campaign literature and brochures, for people. Then I ran for Town Meeting, and actually we organized the whole town on Town Meeting members, and we worked with every single precinct. I got involved primarily because of the housing situation. They were going to put in a high-density housing over here in Meagherville, over in back of us. I was over in Scotland and I came back from Scotland and my wife says, "You won't believe they had a Town Meeting on this thing, and what is going on?" I said, "Well what *is* going on?" She told me. So I said, well, housing is needed and so forth. Because she said, "You've *got* to get involved." I said, "Before I get involved I want you to go down to the library, and I want you to get me every book that is written on housing."

INT: What year was this?

PP: I would say it was around 1967, 1968, around that period. One of the things I found out was that Meagherville was one of the early land scams in the country. When they used to run, John (Maher) there used to run his train out from Boston, selling property lots to the Italian immigrants, and he would just point from the train: "There is your lot down there," and he had a plot plan. Of course they didn't know it was all swamp. The Tophet Swamp was down there, and they bought all of these lots. They are still over there. They are paper lots and so forth. And I said, "Gee, you can't build housing over there." But then I researched the thing as far as the success of housing projects and I found out there was not a single high-rise housing project in the country that was successful. I probably spent two to three hundred dollars on telephone calls calling housing agencies all over the United States and asking them, what was their success rate, what type of housing, what was the density and so forth. And how did they work out, particularly the mixed income type housing. I didn't find a single one that was successful, except for scattered site, and housing for the elderly. Those were the only two that they could point to that would be successful.

I think it was Rockville, Illinois, which I talked [about] a tremendous amount, because they did have some successful things but they were duplex type units. They were for elderly people, and much like our housing that we have down here. So I said, fine, I will go. I went and spoke at different Town Meetings about the housing situation. Eric Lund and I used to have battles galore. One day he said to me, "Paul," he said, "as long as you are in town I know there is never going to be high density housing in Lexington." And he says, "And as long as I am in town, you are not going to have private high-density housing. I am not interested in housing for an investment or any other reason except for the impact it would have on the town." I said to Eric one day—we had defeated one of the housing things—and I said, "Eric,

if you really want to make housing successful for helping people, then use scattered site. Use some of these lots that we own in town and put up scattered site housing on these, and let the people invest their sweat equity in the house, maintaining the lawns and doing all that sort of thing. Then turn it over to them and let them have the housing. The other thing that you should do, Eric, is to get this damn thing off the books where the elderly people cannot move into housing because of their income status. So what do you have? You have a bottleneck here and the stagnation of the housing because people are living in their "white elephants" and their families are all moved away. They can't afford to go to someplace else. But if they could go into housing, that would free up your housing market. That is a way of stimulating the market situation, similar to what happens in Florida." Florida, most of the people go down there, they are retired, and they are elderly and so forth. But they don't live too long, so there is tremendous mobility and fluidity in the housing market down there. Young people could come in and buy a house fairly reasonably and develop the whole area, support their community, and grow.

INT: Do you have, what are your thoughts about what the divisions were on some of these issues in the town? Like, who was in favor of it, who was opposed to it? Do you have any way to characterize the support?

PP: Well, [laughter I guess it came down to categorizing people as either liberal or conservative. I aligned myself with a conservative group, if you will. But I did not always vote with them. When I found out that there were things that they were doing on articles before the town, I would go to them and say, "If you try to push this article, I will expose you as to what your intentions are, why you are doing this. If you want to stand up before the Town Meeting, say this is why we are doing it, this is why we are supporting it, fine. But if you don't do that, that is a conflict of interest, and I will

expose you." So quite often I stopped legislation that was supposedly conservative legislation because I did a tremendous amount of research on everything. Whenever there was something going on I found out who owned all the property around—why, you know, that whole thing—who benefits? And so you look at those things and you find out, aha, that's why they are doing it.

I was in Town Meeting for quite a few years, and finally I could not keep up with it because I was burning myself out. If you go to every hearing on all of the articles that are coming up before the Town Meeting, if you cover all of the board meetings and so on, you are spending probably forty hours, fifty hours a week just doing that sort of thing. It starts in July and goes right through until the following May, and June sometimes. I found that I was burning myself out on it. But if you don't do that, then you don't know what is going on. I encourage an awful lot of people in town to get involved in politics so that you would get some turnover in the people, and yet you would have your viewpoints represented, and they were a voice that you could depend upon and you knew pretty much what their philosophy was. So that's what divides all of us—the basic philosophies that we have.

INT: Can you talk a little bit about how the town changed over the time when you first moved here in 1954, up through the time of this event?

PP: When I first came to the town it was still a pretty good-sized town, but there was still farms and things around the town that were truck gardens, most of them. They started selling off the property to make housing and so forth, and these developers would come in and started putting up the different houses. By and large I think the town was developed in a very nice way. I think that it's maintained an awful lot of its character. There was a tremendous amount of infusion of the academia in the town. They recognized the value of the school system. My wife was very heavily

involved in the school system, not in the political end of it as far as being in office. But when Maria Hastings was first built as a school, she went over there and she talked to Miss Keith and she said, "We don't have a library here." And she said, "Do you mind if I set up a library?" So through the PTA she got some women together and they would go down to the main library, collect all books and bring them up and set them up in the Maria Hastings and set up a library for the kids. When she grew up, up in Maine—it's a family home we still have up there—her grandfather was one of the early settlers up in that area right after it was opened up in the 1840's. He was in all sorts of politics as far as the town [is concerned], owned a lot of property, and a lot of forestland. But he was very much concerned about education. He started the library, and it was in his house. Some of the books are still there. He started a library system in his own house. And so my wife grew up with always having books around, and reading all the classics and everything else. She was an avid reader, and she recognized the value of young children having books, and exposure to books early on. So she worked with that system and then finally she went down to the high school and was volunteering down there setting up the professional library. They finally asked her if she would take and work full-time. So she did work full-time for quite a few years down there in the library system, the professional library system.

INT: We need to get to the issue of the event in 1971. Can you tell us how you heard about it, what you knew about it before it actually happened?

PP: I knew the protests were going on. I had been at Arthur D. Little and I did a tremendous amount of traveling at the time. I would come home and I would catch up on all these things, and then I would be off and going again. Then I went to work for Polaroid Corporation. One of the things I decided I was not going to do was I was not going to travel. So I wasn't

there a week and I was overseas again, and so I would be traveling quite a bit and coming back and catching up on things as they were going on. But I did cut down on my traveling in the mid-1960's to late '60's.

I knew about the Vietnam situation, I knew about the protests, I knew about Kent State, and I knew about all of these things. It bothered me because I felt that there was a tremendous amount of incitement on the part of the academia and the students. A lot of the things that they were talking about were totally out of ignorance. They did not really know. They were protesting and protesting. I don't believe very many of any of them, if any of them, at that time were people who had been in the service, so they did not understand the serviceman's point of view. And I think t they were politically naive so they didn't understand the politics of the situation, both in Vietnam and in this country. I don't believe, and I didn't realize until I guess the late 1960's what Kennedy had done as far as not advising, or listening to the advice of military people in the Vietnam situation. That infuriated me because I supported Kennedy. I liked John Kennedy. But I felt there was an arrogance there of, oh, we know how to do it better. Rather than deferring to the military people who are professional people on how to win the war, they did not defer to anybody other than their own administration on what we should be doing. This latest thing about [Secretary of Defense] McNamara, that's a farce in my opinion. If he didn't have enough courage to stand up at the time and say it's wrong, now he comes out later on and says it was wrong. How many lives were lost because he didn't have the courage to say that! And you can say everything—under the pressure and all that sort of thing—it was still wrong.

There is one basic principle that we should always operate under, and that is whatever we are doing or trying to do, are we doing it with honorable intentions? And if it's not honorable, we shouldn't do it. If it is honorable,

then we should explain to people why we're doing it. If it's honorable, they will understand why we are doing it. But when you start deceiving people, you know that old saying, "What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive," and that is what happened in the Vietnam situation. We had our own politicians here that were deceiving the people, deceiving their military people, deceiving the enemy. And the enemy was deceiving the same thing. They were deceiving their people, there was deception, deception, deception all the way through. To me, the arrogance of a politician saying, "I know what is best for you military people," is terrible. I think one of the problems that we have today is that we have politicians and we don't have statesmen. One of the definitions of a politician is that he will do everything he can to maintain power and control, even to the sacrifice of his principles. We have too many politicians who do that sort of thing. They do it for their own vested interest. They have their own agenda and they deceive people. If there is anything that is going on in this country today, I think there is an undercurrent of that deception that goes on, that they are not honorable people that are doing these things.

INT: How would you characterize the event in Lexington, and different sides?

PP: The whole Vietnam War protest was made up of a full spectrum of people, like most things. There were people who were really, as I said before, truly compassionate people, purely understanding people. They understood the horrors of war and so on. Then you have a group that were opportunists. Many politicians were opportunistic, get on the bandwagon and so on, compromise their principles, we are going to do it to help get elected to something. Then you had the sociopaths. You had the true haters. This Oklahoma situation is a class case in that where you have a sociopath there. They hate society, unless it's their form of society, which is a weird

thing to begin with. In the Vietnam thing you had this whole spectrum of people. Unfortunately, in any of these affairs, particularly in politics, the ones who are the most vehement, the ones who are the most sociopathic, are the ones that get listened to, because they are out there out front. They are charged up with energy and so forth. The compassionate people go along because, well, they are going along because it's their cause, or they believe in their cause, and they don't just understand the rhetoric, perhaps, and don't appreciate the truthfulness of the rhetoric.

Any social political movement like that is made up of a full spectrum of people—good people and bad people. I think we are very fortunate in this country, in this world, that there are very, very few bad people. Most people are very nice people. Their philosophy might be different than yours, but their perspective is different because they are different. We are all individuals. I would not expect anybody to understand my feelings about the Vietnam War situation because I am coming from my own perspective. My perspective is made up upon my experiences in life. Like I said, when people were saying to the returning veterans that had lost a limb, or were disfigured and so forth, "You deserved it," that to me is so hateful I can't even comprehend people doing that. How anybody could take and send a letter to a Gold Star mother and say, "You deserved it, you got what you deserved." I harken back to my mother, what agony she went through, what suffering she went through to lose one of her children. It was something that never went away, and it was always there, that sadness, that hole in the stomach and so forth. I can't conceive of anybody going to her and saying, you deserved to lose your son because you were against the war.

INT: Did you come in personal contact with people in the anti-war movement who did behave that way?

PP: I did not, no. I did not personally come in contact. The only people I came in contact with the Vietnamese situation was here in Lexington.

INT: What was your view of the Lexington protesters?

PP: I felt that many of them were very nice people and that they were caught up in this whole thing. Some of them were probably academics who understood what was going on in our politics, and therefore were fighting against it. I have no qualms about any of that. When they broke the law, deliberately broke the law, then I said, "You are undermining the very thing that we can't afford to do in this country. You have a system of laws that controls all of us and keeps us all on the straight and narrow and so forth. And we have a right to revoke those laws if we don't like them. We have a right to take and speak out against them if we don't like them. But we have not the right to take, or just willfully intentionally break the law." I can't conceive of that. Once you step over that line you have done something that is unconscionable. So everything that they did—I did not protest against their protesting—I said, okay, that's what we fought for, that is what this country is all built on, the freedom to speak your mind and to act within the law as you please. Some of the people were opportunistic. I think that they got involved in the Vietnam situation for their own political motive.

INT: Are you speaking about people in Lexington, in this particular protest?

PP: No, I am thinking of one—[now U.S. Senator] John Kerry. I thought what he did at the time to get involved in it was wrong, because his ambition was on his sleeve, and he had said that before he ever got involved in the thing that he was going to be running for public office. I thought to trade upon that was wrong. If he wanted to wait until he got out of the service and all that sort of thing, that's fine. If he wanted to run as just an individual, that was fine. You see, when all of this was going on there were

people over there dying. There were people over there getting maimed. If one thing was done to undermine the support of them and the protection of them, I think it was wrong. If they are willing to go and protest against the administration, that was one thing, but to take and deprive the people in Vietnam, the soldiers, the service people, of any support, moral or physical, was wrong, because they were in the trenches, they were on the front line, and they are the ones that are suffering. The guy comes back that has got a leg missing, or an arm missing, or half his head missing and so forth, he has paid a tremendous, tremendous price. What he did that for was not because he was a mean person, because they are all nice people over there. Some of them were bad, to be sure, but most of them were just ordinary, nice people. Unfortunately, most of them came from the lower level of income people, the ghetto people and so on and so forth. And that was wrong, too.

If you had had Kennedy [having] a son involved in that, if you had had Johnson [having] a son involved in that, if you had had any of the administration people [having] sons in that, they would have treated it differently. They would have seen that they got every bit of support that they needed. They would have seen that we would have fought the war to win, or not get into it at all—one or the other. But they were removed from that emotional impact of having a son or a daughter in that, the front lines. And it's peculiar, because here these people were doing their duty, responding to their Commander in Chief, what he said to do, and they are the ones who get vilified and castigated. To me that is, as I said before, beyond my comprehension how people can be so monolithic in their thinking as to blame the soldier for what went on and take out their anger on him. Here he is giving them the umbrella of protection by defending our country's principles and our way of life and so forth, and their ability to protest and everything else. And yet they take it out on him.

INT: What did you think of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War that organized this march and protest? What was your view of them?

PP: I was ambivalent about them because many of them had suffered, many of them were wounded. And they came back and some of them were in very tough shape. I think that [the VVAW] were used to help end the war for political reasons. I think that they were used. I think they had all of the best of intentions; I think most of the war protesters had the best of intentions. Unfortunately, I think their actions created an undermining of the people who were still over there fighting. They had paid their dues. I understand that, and I could sympathize with them. I couldn't empathize with them because I wasn't wounded myself and so forth. But I saw enough of it so that I knew what suffering was. But I don't think that you can answer the question about the Vietnam War in a very simple way. It was a very complicated thing, tremendously complicated, as most situations, and so there are no simple answers. I kept thinking all the time about what is this doing to the poor guy that is over there still in the trench and still facing the guy, the enemy. And the Vietnam War was a crazy type of war.

If you read Benedict's book, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, she wrote this book at the request of the government. Or she did the study at the request of the government. Because here we are, I think it was 1944, they recognized that where the tide had changed and we were going to win the war in the Pacific. And what is going to happen now, because here we have been fighting these fanatics. How are they going to behave and act when we try to get them to surrender? Is it going to be island by island that we are going to have to take and annihilate them? They are going to go to the last man, and all that sort of thing. Is there going to be an overthrow of their government in Japan? She did not have a way of going to Japan and studying it. So what she did is she conducted most of her interviews with

the Nisei, the first generation over here, or the second generation Japanese that were interned. She went and interviewed all of them. She read everything she could on everything that had been written by Japanese authors, and people studying Japan. She came up with a compilation of their philosophy and their ideas, and their concepts. It's a very interesting book because their obligations and so forth is fascinating to read because it is stratified. There is different types of stratification or different layers of that stratification of deference in politics, deference in leaders, deference in the military, deference in your own family. These things are difficult to understand unless you understand their thinking on it. A lot of the people thought that Japanese were harmless because they would walk down the street and somebody would drop down on the street and people would step over them. They weren't doing it because they weren't sympathetic. They were doing it because they understood that if they stopped and helped that person, then they would have an obligation. That person would have gained an obligation to repay them. If it's a stranger, how can you repay a stranger if he helps you and then he goes away? So now you are burdened with this the rest of your life, of this obligation that you cannot divest yourself of. They have these obligations that. It's not a religion but it's like a religion, that they simply have to take and divest themselves of in order to gain a happy life. So if you don't understand the Asian way, then you think it's strange and different, and you think that they are barbaric and so forth. No, the Japanese are very nice people. The Chinese are, the Vietnamese are. If you don't understand people and you don't study them, how can you take and confront them, how can you take and oppose them, how can you do anything with them?

INT: Given that viewpoint, what is your understanding about the bulk of the protesters' attitudes on the Green in Lexington in 1971? Why do you think they were there?

PP: They were, most of them were very really compassionate people. I think that most people of any intelligence whatsoever understand the horrors of war, understand the waste of war. They understand that that's costing something in a country, in a nation, it's costing something in personal things. People did not understand what was going on. They did not have a comprehension of it. They were ignorant of what was going on. It didn't mean they weren't intelligent. They were just ignorant of the facts, ignorant of the things. The story that they did get looked to them like it was a bad thing, so therefore let's take and protest, and try to get us out of it. And that's what they did. Most of the people that I know personally in town here—and I got to know them through the politics of the town—are very nice people.

I had some opponents on my point of view on the Town Meeting floor that personally I liked very much because they were honest people. They represented their viewpoint from an honest, sincere point of view, and I respected them for that. Frank Michelman was one of those guys. I liked Frank. Personally, I liked him very much. I didn't adhere to his philosophy all the time. I didn't adhere to his politics all the time. But I admired him for speaking out on the issues truthfully and honestly. In my opinion he was a very honorable man and I liked discussing things with him, because I had learned things from him, too. I enjoy that sort of experience. There were others that I thought had their own personal agendas and were not looking out for the good of the town. I couldn't admire them because I didn't respect them. I didn't respect them for doing what I considered dishonorable things.

INT: Can you talk a little bit about the aftermath of the arrest and some meetings that took place in the town that you participated in?

PP: I only got involved in a couple of them. As I said, I was traveling at the time. But I felt that I went down and spoke my piece about how I felt about the thing. For whatever good it was, at least it relieved me of the feeling that I had to speak out because I thought what was wrong and so forth, I had to say it was wrong, and I did.

INT: Would you say what was wrong with it?

PP: It was undermining the support of the people who were still there in Vietnam. And it was probably costing, if that protest costs one life, if that protest costs one guy to lose his arm, or his leg, or his mind, or anything else, it was wrong. I thought that [Hollywood actress] Jane Fonda going to [North] Vietnam and cheering when one of the bombers was being shot down—a person has to be either subversive or they have to be demented to do that sort of thing. I, to this day, do not understand what she was doing. She apologized afterwards and all this other thing. But how could you be so stupid, or ignorant, or something, to do that sort of thing? The only reason that she wasn't charged with treason is because it was not a declared war. So it was sort of free game, or freewheeling on all of these protesters. They couldn't be charged with treason because there was no declared war, so therefore you can't charge me.

And that's another thing that I think that was wrong, is Kennedy did not go to Congress and get the support of Congress, get the support of the people. It was another thing of a comedy of errors. One error led to another error, led to another error. And it got out of hand completely.

INT: Do you remember the atmosphere in the meetings that you went to after the event?

PP: During the meetings I felt that there again, there was a dichotomy in the group [laughter], those strongly opposed, and those strongly in favor. Most of the expressions and the reasonings that were given were from

emotions more than from logic. When you have emotions that you are trying to deal with, nothing is reasonable. When you have logic, nobody is emotional, so it diffuses the emotion. People generally tend to be emotional about things like that.

INT: What was the meeting that you attended, and where was it?

PP: Down in Cary Hall. There were two meetings, I believe, that I went to. Now you are testing my memory on meetings, because I went to so damned many meetings that I can't remember which one was which. I thought that the meetings were orderly. There was no getting out of hand. There were emotions expressed on both sides. I would say it was probably fifty-fifty on the split. There seemed to be fair representation from both viewpoints. I thought people expressed themselves well. I don't think it addressed the problem, but I think it allowed them to divest themselves of whatever feelings they had. That's, I guess, a good thing.

INT: Do you remember who called the meeting?

PP: I can't remember who called the meeting. I think it was Paul Revere, wasn't it [laughter]?

INT: [Laughter.] That brings up another issue. What is your feeling about the Lexington Green, and what role that place had in this particular event?

PP: The value of that piece of property down there is its historical value and it gives the people a rallying point, and it gives people an opportunity to think back to those days and what some of those people paid and sacrificed for, what they considered was a good ideal. When you start using that property and more or less using it for political purposes, it damned well better be to overthrow the country, or something like that, rather than to just to put forth a point of view, a political point of view. I do not think it should be used for political purposes. I do not think it should be used for, like

putting up a hot-dog stand on it. I don't think it should be used for that purpose. I don't think it should be exploited for anything other than it was originally intended for. That is a sacred area, sacred in quotes here, but a sort of hallowed ground to remind people of the sacrifices that some of our earlier citizens made. Some of them paid with their lives, some of them paid with their disfigurement, some of them paid with their wounds. But they were willing to stand up and say, enough is enough. That, I think, was the only way that they could do it in those days.

Now we have the freedom of protesting, and I think that's fine. I don't think that we should say that we can't have people protest. That would be a violation of our Constitution. But the Vietnam [veterans] afterwards admitted they would not accept a secondary site. They were going to go onto that Green and regardless, they were going to violate the law to make their point. When you do that willfully then you are violating the law, then you should be punished for violating the law, and you should be castigated for trying to make it a political move. What prevents anybody from just saying, well we are going to not respect the law for whatever reason? That's what leads to anarchy is people just saying, I am going to do the thing I want to do, and nobody else is going to stop me. We have guidelines. Once we crawled out of the cave and became social beings, we had responsibility to our fellow people. That is a tremendous obligation that you have, and a responsibility that you have to fulfill if you are going to remain a social person.

Now if you want to go and live on a deserted island all by yourself, then you can live without laws, live without regulation. But once you accept the responsibility of living in a society, and once you accept the responsibility of living in the United States, which is a government by law, of laws, then you have a responsibility to uphold those laws. If you don't agree with them then

you have a responsibility to get the law changed, and then everybody can violate it then, or the old law.

INT: Can you imagine a situation in which you might be willing to do an act of, say, civil disobedience, go against the law in order to make a point? Or can you not imagine anything like that?

PP: No, I can't. There are a lot of laws that I don't agree with, but we elect people to make these laws, and to pass these laws. We elect them as responsible people to do that. We elect them by a majority vote. If the majority wants to do certain things, they will elect people to do those things. Just because you have a point of view does not mean you have a right to violate the laws that is the majority. That's what we're based upon is majority rule. And no, I can't conceive of that, of saying, oh, that law doesn't apply to me.

INT: What do you think the aftermath of this event has been for Lexington? What impact did it have on the town?

PP: All of these things have impacts on society and communities. I don't think Lexington is any different than any other society in that regard. I think that there was a lesson to be learned from the Vietnamese situation. Hopefully it makes us wiser people. It does change our perspective on things. I think it was something that happened in Lexington, and although I did not adhere to it, of the protests and so forth, I do think lessons have been learned. I think an awful lot of the protesters if you asked them today, have changed their perspective on would they do it again. I think a lot of them would say, under the same circumstances, yes. But knowing now what I know, I probably would not do it. I don't know how many it would be, but I would be willing to bet that every serviceman who felt that he was undermining the support of his buddies and friends and so forth that were still over there, would not do it again.

INT: Do you have anything else that you want to add?

PP: I have rambled on quite a bit here, and as you can see, I can get very involved in my discussions on things like that. Lexington is a wonderful town and there are wonderful people in Lexington. We have a sadness in this town in that we have so many new townspeople who are Asian. And I wonder how many of them disagree silently with the way the town or the government is being run. But because philosophically they cannot speak out and protest that sort of thing, that there is a diminution of the total involvement of the townspeople in our town affairs. The Asian people are, as I said earlier... If we had had an ethnic advocacy in our government, then I think the Vietnam situation would have been different. If our government had appealed to Asian people the situation would have been different because they would have gotten the different input and different insight into what was going on over there, instead of, as I said before, with the arrogant attitude, oh, we know everything, but there is nothing to learn from those people.

The void, if you will, of having studied those people, the social and anthropological viewpoints, is an admission of the fact that they didn't care. We are going to go ahead and do what we want to do, and that's it, not realizing that that's not necessarily what the people there wanted to have done. They by nature are very polite and so forth and they wouldn't say, "No, I am not going to let you do that." I think that we have to be concerned about that in this country today. We have a tremendous amount of Asian people coming into this country, and they are good people. I am not saying this to detract from the value. I am saying that I would hope that they would become more politically active, and they would advocate their points of view. And infuse their philosophy into our way of thinking and our philosophy so that we build a society and build a community in Lexington

that represents all of the people and all of the peoples' viewpoints. There is no one way on anything that is right, and generally we do things because of experience and learning that we have gotten from other people. If we don't get the influence in Lexington of Asian people, we are going to be missing out a big… Any minority group should be represented. But the Asian people by nature are deferential people. They don't speak out on things, and if they say anything they say it… If you ask a Japanese—and I will use that as an example—if you ask a Japanese a question that he doesn't want to answer, he will give you the answer he thinks you want so he won't offend you. But it's not his true feeling. That is their nature, that is their philosophy, is not to offend. I wonder at times what is going to happen here in Lexington if we have people of that philosophy coming in and other people don't understand them. Just because they say "Hi," (it means yes), doesn't mean they mean "Hi." Inside they are saying "No," and outside they are saying, "Hi" to please you, not to offend you, because I have to defer to you, I have to show respect for you. I hope that the people get more involved.

I am thrilled to death to see Fujimori [now the deposed ex-President Fujimori] down in Peru, what he is doing. He is taking charge down there and getting things straightened out, and he is sometimes dictatorial, but he is straightening that government out down there. I hope that we get more of that around here.

INT: I am going to thank you very much and end the formal interview at this point. And see if you have any questions.

INT2: We all feel the pain that you mentioned about not supporting young men who were fighting for us. But how do you think we could have stopped that more as a people?

PP: We should have stopped it?

INT2: How could we?

PP: As I said earlier, the whole thing was based upon deception. And the only thing that you can deal with in life is truth. You cannot deal with a lie. There is no way that you can deal with a lie. There is no way that I can deal with you on a meaningful basis if what you say to me does not represent what you are thinking up here. If you say to me, "Do you like my hat?" And up in here I am saying, "No, I don't like it," but I don't want to hurt your feelings I say, "Oh yes, I like it." That's a lie. Now how do you deal with that? You can't. So I have an affliction, I guess it is, of feeling that I would rather be candid, try to be discreet in my candor, and so forth. But I would rather be candid than lie. I would rather say, well, if you like it, that's good, rather than say, I don't like it. We were dealing with deception, and how do you deal with deception? Unless you know the truth of what you are dealing with, you can't. You get a feeling, and I think that is what the whole Vietnamese situation was, a visceral feeling about it's wrong. We are not doing what we should be doing.

Now why was it wrong? Well, there are a lot of reasons why it was wrong. The politicians decided it was a war that we did not want to win. If they had told the people that at the beginning, the people would have said, stop it right there. But rather than letting it go on, and all these lives, and these people being tortured and killed and destroyed, the country being destroyed, as I said, "Oh what a tangled we be weave when first we practice to deceive." Because nobody can deal with it. And it gets like our town all in an uproar over that sort of thing because we are dealing with things that are not true. Now you speak from mostly from emotional…and you protest a protest from an emotional viewpoint. I don't know. I think everybody has to get to heaven in their own way, and I think as long as what you are doing you are doing with honorable intentions, that is the justification. And if

people protested the war and they were sincere in their protest, and they were honorable about it, that's honorable. You can't condemn them for it. You can suffer, probably, when you think what they are doing is hurting the situation on a personal basis. But you can't condemn them for espousing their feelings.

You know the sad thing about the situation is that there are a lot of people who salve their conscience about protesting and they feel better having done it. But the next challenge to their freedom or their rights, they are willing to send some other poor soul off to die for it. I think that the proof of the pudding is, are you willing to die for your own causes? Are you willing to die for your own country? That is the penultimate in showing love, to be willing to lay down your life for somebody else. I think that some of the protesters would not do that. Many of them would

INT: This has to do with the aftermath of the May protest here in Lexington. Did you notice or perceive any direct impact on things in town shortly thereafter in terms of peoples' issues and the effects on people, and the situation in the town?

PP: Yes, I did. I think the Vietnam protest situation awakened a lot of silent majority. I think that there were an awful lot of people who got involved in politics because they realized that a lot of the people who were in town offices and so forth were of a different stripe. As far as the conservative groups in Lexington—and it's terrible to label people conservative and liberal because everybody is conservative in something, and a liberal in another—but I think that the people who were using Lexington as a bedroom community and not involved in their town affairs, got shaken up a bit by it. They came around, and I think that the town started out as a very conservative town. You have to hand it to the old townspeople for building the town they way they built it. They built the

school system and everything else, they recognized the value, and that's why more people came in. But then more people came in and they said, oh, we don't like this, we are going to start changing it. These people, most of them were farmers, and tradespeople, and so on. I get a void here in my memory. A fellow who was a plumber, he had a plumbing concern, and he was quite livid about the fact—he was on the School Board, I can't remember his name—that what we were doing was training all of our kids to go to college. And not everybody had the inclination to go to college, or the aptitude to go onto college. So he advocated for the regional vocational school. He went around and talked to all of us people, and we got behind it, and we got a regional school involved. At the time I was going around speaking for the American Chemical Society to different high schools, and I was appalled at the number of kids that went on to college from someplace like Waltham that only like twenty percent of their kids went on to college. Here in Lexington there was eighty percent You go around to the different towns and the more urban towns, there was a very low percentage. In the suburban towns there was a high percentage. And you say, there is something out of balance here, there is something that is terrible in our educational system that has this sort of promotion, if you will, of their children and the resources that we have. (I can't think of his name. I'm embarrassed that I can't think of his name. He was a nice man.)

INT2: I can't think of his name, either, but his son is still in the plumbing business.

PP: Yes.

INT2: But what about the fact that Cataldo was voted out of office? How do you account for that?

PP: I am a friend of Bob Cataldo's, and I like Bob. I know him probably differently than a lot of people in town knew him because I worked on some

of his political campaigns. He has worked on some of the other campaigns I have been involved in. I think that one of the things about Bob is that he was one of the old, original families here, the farmland and all that sort of thing. And it's very difficult for people to appreciate he has got all this land. He is a very wealthy man, too, and he helped build the things that a lot of people came into the town for. And then he wants to do certain things and they go after him. He was a businessman, and some people just don't like businesspeople. He did some things probably that irritated a lot of people because he did them and then he said, "Go ahead and sue me then, if you don't like what I've done." I think that unfortunately people didn't understand him as well as they should have. He got voted out, I think, because of some of the things that were said about him. He got voted out because at the time there were not sufficient conservative people in the town to support him. The word had gotten out around the tow or the people of what good things he did do for the town. I guess there was a lot of personality involved, too. He can be fairly irascible when he wants to be [laughter].

INT: Do you think this event had anything to do with his losing the next election?

PP: I think yes, it did, because what it did is it organized a group of people—you will forgive me for saying of the liberal stripe—against him. Early on in Lexington the political process was much different than it was at that time. There was an evolution in the politics of the town. You started off with these conservative homeboys and so forth, and they were running the place, and they were doing what they could to help the town, and help it grow. Many of them were a lot of landowners. Everybody accused them of having vested interests. The town started to grow, and we started to get a lot of people in from New York, New Jersey, and with a different political

philosophy. A lot of academia was moving into town with a different political philosophy. Now you've got the old farm boys, and you've got the intellectual elite and the farm boys only know how to run the town the way they have been running it, and they don't have the political savvy to say, "Hey, we can organize this thing and we can beat anybody if we organize fast enough and good enough"

I think that's what happened is that the people who wanted to get rid of him knew how to organize politically. And they did that, and that is how they got him out of office. But then you know we had Al Busa elected, and he was an old farm family. And we got Al Busa elected because we organized the town politically. We did not go with just anyone. We went around and we spoke to different people, we expressed our viewpoints on things, and we spoke to the coffee klatches and so forth, and got the word out of what he really was. Now Al was never a polished speaker, but he was a nice man, a good man, and a wholesome man. And he was always very much interested in the welfare of the town. We organized the town to help Al, and the town I think has modulated a tremendous amount since the Vietnam situation because there was that upheaval. And then—hey, wait a minute, what is going on here? We've got to take and reorganize if we are going to protect our interests. Our interests are a philosophy more than anything else.

INT2: It was Vernon Page[3].

PP: Yes, that's right, Vernon Page. Wonderful Vernon Page, right.

INT2: He was a great guy.

PP: Yes, he was a wonderful man, and he was the one, he was the instrument for getting the regional vocational school in Lexington. He put an awful lot of energy and time into doing that.

[3] "Vernon Page" refers to the earlier discussion about the local plumber who advocated building a regional vocational school in Lexington in the 1970's.

INT: Well, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW