LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Ted Polumbaum
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Interview conducted by Lenore Fenn
Videotape length 67 minutes

INT: Would you tell us a little bit about yourself, your background, the work you do and where you live?

TP: Ted Polumbaum. I'm a photographer. During the period of the Vietnam War I was photographing demonstrations. And I was covering aspects of the scene in the United States.

INT: For whom?

TP: For various publications, for *Life, Time, The New York Times*, *Newsweek*—and myself.

INT: Was your father a veteran?

TP: He was a veteran of World War I. I was a veteran of World War II.

INT: Tell us a little about your experience, then. in World War II.

TP: I was a G.I., was drafted. I was in college for a term, and then I was drafted. I went to Texas where I trained with an experimental outfit called the Tank Destroyers. Then my outfit went to North Africa and got chewed up with eighty-five percent casualties. I was lucky. I went under the Army Specialized Training Program to study Spanish Language and Area studies at Ohio State University for three or four months. We thought we were going to parachute into Spain and liberate it from Franco and the Nazis at the time. Anyway, we ended up reassigned to different units. I was assigned to the Signal Corps and I took basic training again in Missouri. Then we were shipped out to New Guinea. We ended up in the Philippines. Then we were bombed a couple of times. But that's the only combat I saw. I was in communications, Signal Corps. Then I came home, went back to college, and became a journalist, writer. Wasn't very good at

that. Began hobnobbing with photographers in Boston and became a photographer, freelance photographer. That's my life.

INT: How did you come to be covering war demonstrations for the magazines you mentioned?

TP: Well, they were big. The war was important. I was covering a lot of demonstrations on my own. When did Ted Kennedy and Lodge run for Senate? What year was that—1962? Anyway, in the early sixties, I covered that campaign. One of the candidates who was running was a peace candidate named H. Stuart Hughes. I covered that campaign. I also wanted to get as much H. Stuart Hughes coverage as possible because I thought he was my candidate; he was the peace candidate.

This was a time in the early sixties when it was very difficult to be a peace candidate, and there were a lot of attacks on demonstrations. But H. Stuart Hughes was such an upstanding Yankee—it was 1961—and had such great credentials—I think his grandfather was the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and so on—that it was very hard to attack him. So the press treated him somewhat respectfully, although he was considered to be a hopeless case, but a very intelligent and hopeless case. I liked him, and tried to help in the campaign. And he got some coverage. But there were demonstrations at the time which were mostly broken up by jingoistic patriotic groups. It was very unpopular to be against the Vietnam War and to be in favor of ending the Cold War.

INT: In the early sixties?

TP: In the early sixties. That's right.

INT: Tell us more about what the climate was like.

TP: I should mention one other thing. We decided to explore India. So my wife Nynah and I and our two young children, daughters age eight and eleven, went to India, 1961. I was in close contact with the *Life* Bureau, because I'd been working for them regularly. While I was in India

I did stories for *Life* and *Time*, including coverage of Ambassador Kenneth Galbraith's tour of duty. *Time* sent me to Vietnam and Cambodia in 1961. At that time in Vietnam we had twelve, fifteen hundred advisors. The *Time* crew, *Time* correspondent and I were escorted by Colonel S____ of the American Advisory Commission throughout the area. It looked to me at that time that we were going to lose the war, that it was a losing proposition.

One of the places we visited was a South Vietnamese prison camp to weed out suspected Communists. The camp had eight hundred prisoners, mostly young people in their teens or twenties and some in their thirties, including some women and their babies. They looked to be the cream of the youth of Vietnam. What they would do, they'd take batches of a couple of hundred or so and they would arrange them in rows, and then lecture them eight hours a day. We saw this. With a microphone, they had people lecturing them eight hours a day on the evils of Communism. There was a lot of laughter among the prisoners when they saw us, because they felt the whole thing was a farce. The idea was to find out who were the subversives. We were told also by the American military advisors that in the daytime the VC, the Viet Cong, controlled fifty-five or sixty percent of the population. But at nighttime, they said, those figures are classified; we can't even begin to tell you how bad it is. This was 1961. So I came back sort of a peacenik.

INT: What role was AID [Agency for International Development] playing there?

TP: I don't know. I think AID traditionally has played the role of economic programs. From a cynical point of view you could say this was an attempt to set up propaganda for how wonderful America is. But the other role of AID was to train police and security people, and provide them with communications, surveillance equipment. They've also been accused

of working with—of being cover for—the CIA and helping interrogation and torture. But I don't know. I don't know of that first hand, so I can't say.

INT: What did it mean when people wore black in Vietnam at that time?

TP: That was the peasant custom. That's what it meant. The country people wore black. In the city, of course, it was many-colored. In Vietnam in 1961, Saigon in 1961 was a beautiful, peaceful, wonderful city. But from the rooftop of our hotel in Saigon, we could see explosions. We could hear firing. There was some activity going on against the foreign…there was a war going on some miles away, and we could see the explosions.

INT: Tell us about the growth of the peace movement here, why it evolved as it did, from the early sixties when it was very unpopular, how it grew. And how police responded to the demonstrations.

TP: This is my own theory, and I'm not a political scientist or historian. But what you said is true. I think there was very little peace movement. I think there were a handful of courageous people throughout the country in the early fifties—religious people, Catholic Workers movement, pacifists and a handful of sort of left-wing-oriented people. It was very unpopular. I remember there was violence against peaceniks until the Tet [Vietnamese holiday] Offensive in the first part of 1968. That changed everything, because the Kennedy "dream team" had been telling us that there was light at the end of the tunnel. I think people tend to forget that it was President John F. Kennedy who popularized counter-insurgency and was the originator of the Green Berets and so on. It was his team after his death that carried on the war and made these optimistic assumptions, optimistic predictions that there was light at the end of the tunnel. The Tet Offensive destroyed that because there were simultaneous attacks by the Viet Cong in

thirty-seven or forty different places. Even though they suffered tremendous casualties, and our military people from a casualty point of view suffered a defeat, [yet] it was a victory—nevertheless, it changed the mood of the entire country. Most importantly it changed the mood of people in very high places. For example, I knew the people at Arthur D. Little, and I knew the president James Gavin, who was a World War II paratroop general hero. He told me that this war is going to be brought to an end by Nelson Rockefeller and his friends because it was not a good war, and we had to cut our losses and leave. Also the newspapers then began to change. The newspapers—which had been mostly behind the war, including *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*—changed.

Congressmen and senators and Senator Fulbright changed after the Tet Offensive. A real debate occurred. The real debate occurred not because there was a popular revulsion against it, but because there was a revulsion at the top, among our political, economic and media leaders. That may be a cynical point of view, but I think that Americans are just as susceptible to becoming implicated in war crimes as any other population, including the Germans, the Japanese, you name them. Sorry to say.

INT: This seems to be going back a little, but because you were engaged in the Second World War, I'm interested in hearing your comments about the differences between those wars and how your thinking about war evolved.

TP: I thought it was a great war. We were fighting the Nazis, we were fighting the Japanese. I didn't consider the Japanese anything but…you know. A lot of things didn't occur to me until much later. I remember sitting in a movie in the Philippines in August of 1945 when I heard that a bomb of a new kind had been dropped on Hiroshima. And then a bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki. I thought, this is wonderful. We slaughtered all the Japanese. I thought this was terrific; this was a

wonderful thing. We ended the war. Only later did it occur to me that we had committed a crime. So I guess that was the last great war. But it ended on a very bad note. You get older and you begin to reflect on the moral implications of these things. By the time Vietnam came around, I was really very much against what we were doing.

INT: Did you notice a pattern in which of your photos were selected by the media organizations you were working for? Your photographs of demonstrations and so forth?

TP: I can make a general statement, that most of the photographers and reporters I knew at *Life* were in favor of the war. They were hawks. Nevertheless, the pictures they sent back and that were used helped persuade the country that the war was not worth it. I mean, one of the photographers that *Life* hired was a Marine photographer named John Olsen who took the most astonishing pictures, beautiful pictures and devastating pictures of Americans being wounded, of the casualties among the Marines and among U.S. Forces there. Even while *Life* was editorially in favor of the war, nevertheless, these pictures helped sway public opinion against the war.

INT: Why were journalists and photojournalists usually hawks?

TP: Before Vietnam everybody believed that our government was great, and our government told the truth, our causes were just. Vietnam changed that. There was an entire cultural revolution, as can be seen by these pictures of the Vietnam Vets Against the War. People changed the way they dressed, changed the way they ate, changed the way they smoked, changed the way they talked, changed their sexual habits. All this came about, I think, because of the disillusionment with authority. I was brought up in Westchester County in the fifties to believe in the family and the government and our country and authority. And this changed. The Vietnam War—well, I think the Civil Rights movement first, where the government was very slow to react to enforce the Constitutional rights of

minorities and blacks, particularly in the South and later in the North, so the younger generation began to defect from belief in authority—and the Vietnam War was the final blow I think.

INT: How did your family of origin respond to your becoming anti-Vietnam War?

TP: I think my family and a lot of my friends and a lot of my neighbors developed amnesia. They always were in favor of human civil rights. They always were peaceniks. They forget that they were rabid jingoists, or that they were racists.

INT: Were you criticized at the time for your beliefs?

TP: My family? By that time my family had gotten used to my waywardness I think. And of course I was working for respectable publications: *The New York Times*, *Life Magazine*. So they figured that if these corporations tolerated me, they would probably have to.

INT: Would you describe some of the demonstrations that you covered prior to the events in Lexington in 1970, 1971?

TP: In 1969 there was a takeover, an occupation by the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and students at Harvard of the Administration Building at Harvard. There had been demonstrations and so-called sanctuaries where a deserting G.I., an anti-war G.I., would be taken in by various groups—churches, colleges and so on. But when Harvard had its big anti-war occupation, that became a real national story. In fact some of the headlines were, "It has happened at Harvard! Could it happen at Harvard?" The unthinkable has happened! So *Life* sent out photographers and reporters. The main reporter was a correspondent named Colin L—— who was a British citizen. He had just come back from two and a half years in Vietnam, and had been back in this country for two weeks. He came up to Harvard; joined me and another couple of *Life* photographers to cover this incredible event. He was a big hawk. I mean, he could have been any

native-born American patriot, because he was in favor of that war. He felt what we were doing in Vietnam was good, and that we were going to win. He told me that his forthcoming article was on General Creighton Abrams and that it was an optimistic article about how the general and U.S. Forces were going to win that war pretty soon. So he's quite contemptuous of the peace movement at Harvard. And well he might have been, because my understanding was that the SDS group at Harvard had been clamoring all night for an occupation of the administrative offices and they couldn't get the people in the audience to vote to take over that building. Finally, about eleven o'clock at night, late at night when everybody had deserted and there were a handful of SDS members there, they all voted to take over the building. So they took over the building. It was not exactly a great democratic movement. Then of course the Harvard students got very curious, and they began to go into the building. And it became a big deal. There were a lot of spectators.

The President of Harvard, Nathan Pusey, panicked. He called in the cops. He called in the cops from all the surrounding areas—about five different communities—plus the State Police. About five o'clock in the morning the cops descended upon Harvard Yard. Colin and I decided we should put ourselves behind the row of students who were blocking one of the buildings, standing on the steps. It was barely getting to be light; it was very, very dark. The next thing I knew, I was flying off in one direction and he was flying off in another direction. People were being thrown right and left. The police made a very—it must have been the State Police because they were the most efficient—they threw us off the steps. I just gathered myself together and started taking pictures of students being clubbed, arrested, beaten up, policemen running around like crazy looking for Communists and culprits. Then as it began to get lighter the police made their final assault on the administrative building. They arrested

hundreds and hundreds of students and participants. They had piles of yellow school buses. They arrested them. They put them in the buses. And a lot of them were bloodied. I mean, they clubbed a lot of them. There were thousands, literally thousands of onlookers who stood by to cheer the people who were being arrested. They would be making the V sign [peace sign], like this. Just hundreds and thousands of onlookers as the buses pulled out, cheering them on in support. I had my telephoto lens out, and I began to pan across the faces of the supporters. I came across my correspondent. He was standing there giving the V sign with blood running down his forehead. He told me that after he got swept from the steps, he was kneeling down and he was writing, taking notes, when a cop came up to him and clubbed him. And he said, I'm a correspondent from *Life Magazine* and the cop clubbed him again. Anyway, Colin was very indignant. I drove him to the Cambridge Hospital where he had six stitches in his forehead. He became an instant peacenik. He subsequently sent me some of his follow-up stories, which were very favorable to the peace movement in different colleges throughout the country. So that was the most instant conversion I have ever seen.

INT: Were you ever roughed up when you were covering a demonstration?

TP: Yes. There was a demonstration on Moratorium Day in October of 1969—or one of those demonstrations. I can't remember exactly. But it was 1969, and there was a demonstration on the Common, which I covered for *Life*. And then there was sort of a spin-off demonstration of a more radical group who would carry Viet Cong flags and would chant, "Ho-Ho-Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is going to win," and so on. So I thought I would follow them. They were going to have a separate demonstration in Harvard Square. There may have been four or five hundred. I walked along with them. They came to Harvard Square, and they sat down in the

street, chanting, “The streets belong to the people, the streets belong to the people.” I thought, this was nice. Then it got a little darker and there were lots of police around, lots of police, mostly Cambridge cops around. They would stand around tapping their clubs. Pretty soon some of the demonstrators got violent. It was hard—I know that some of them were agents provocateurs. They were people who deliberately incited crowds to violence. Some of them were real police agents. At that time Massachusetts had the Red Squads and the FBI and other people had groups that infiltrated the peace groups and other subversive groups and incited them to violence to make them look bad. But some of them were really crazy kids, and some of them were on dope and marijuana. Anyway, they trashed a few windows at the Harvard Coop and they set some trash baskets on fire. This gave the cops the opportunity to attack and they attacked indiscriminately. They attacked women, children, everybody. I mean, they pursued people. People were fleeing into cafeterias and stores nearby, and the cops would pursue them and beat them up inside. I was photographing some of these people who were being beaten up, when all of a sudden there was a smash. My lighting unit and my lens was cracked by a big club. I told the cop, I said, “Here are my credentials; I'm with the press.” He just smiled and gave me a backhanded whack with a four-foot club that sent me sprawling twenty or thirty feet. I was wearing a jacket, a heavy jacket. He hit me in the shoulder. And I felt that pain for three or four weeks thereafter. He totally knocked me out completely. But I guess he was very skilled, because he could have broken my shoulder, but he didn't. I just sort of quit right there.

I subsequently found out that fourteen photographers had been beaten up by the cops, including one photographer from United Press who was in a telephone booth telephoning his office when the cops pulled him out, took off his helmet—because a lot of the photographers wore helmet liners at the

time, plastic helmets—took off his helmet and hit him in the head. Subsequently the ACLU invited people to call in the atrocities. But the ACLU person…I guess he collected them personally, because he didn't do anything about it; it was very ineffectual. There was no protest. I told *Time* that my strobe unit, my electronic flash unit and my lens had been damaged. *Time* sent back word: "Have your insurance cover it. I assume you're carrying insurance." So I didn't get too much support there. There were reports in the papers, a few paragraphs, about all the photographers who'd been beaten up by the cops. That was the most violent thing that I went through. The scariest time of my life was much earlier than that, covering civil rights in Mississippi. That was dangerous. That was a battle zone. But that's another story. Anyway, one of the *Time* correspondents said he walked into the Cambridge Police Headquarters to find out what was happening and he smelt the liquor on the breath of the sergeant who was at the desk. He said, "I'd like to get a report on how many people were injured," and so on. The Sergeant said to another cop there, "Hey, this guy is from *Time*; he wants to get a report on the injured and the casualties." The *Time* correspondent told me that there was this big cop that he was referring to, behind who with a three-foot club was sort of hammering on his hand, said, "Oh, you'd like to find out something about what's happening?" So the correspondent said, "So I left." It was a not very friendly atmosphere.

INT: Why were the police so violent at these demonstrations?

TP: I asked a State cop at the Harvard demonstration. I said, "What's going on here? Why are they beating up these kids so much? They can just arrest them." He said, "They don't have the same training that we have. We're much better trained." Because I didn't notice the State cops beating up anybody. So it could be bad training, it could be patriotic fervor. It could be that these kids' lifestyles——don't forget, there was a change in

lifestyles. There was a lot of hair, a lot of dope, a lot of fatigues and, you know, disheveled clothing. The whole country was changing its styles. The police of course are very straight, and they just hated these kids. They represented a lack of religion, a lack of patriotism, a lack of morals—you name it. In some cases of course, the cops were correct. I was attacked as sort of a straight older generation person. But that just made me laugh.

INT: You've mentioned the roles of the churches several times. Were you affiliated with any particular groups in the early sixties or at any point during the war?

TP: No. Well, I was living in the protected enclave of Lincoln. We were very much taken with the Unitarian minister, Charlie Styron, who was a Southerner, who spoke with a wonderful Southern accent, an ardent civil rights proponent and an ardent peacenik. He was a wonderful guy who we never joined because we were not religious. I'm Jewish but not a religious Jew. I'm sort of a lapsed Hebrew religion, sort of a cultural thing. But we admired the Unitarian peace movement, the Catholic peace movement. I had experienced the protective warmth of the church in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement, where the churches were the sanctuaries for the people. So I was definitely pro-church of that particular kind.

INT: Would you say most of the anti-war demonstrations were violent?

TP: Absolutely not. Violence was mostly on the part of the people who were trying to disrupt them, and on the part of the police. No, they were mostly peaceful. In some places there was violence. I mean, banks were attacked and burnt and so on. But it was all small stuff. The rioting, the civil rights rioting in the ghettoes were much more violent, where people were so outraged that it was much more violent. But there was a faction of the SDS, the Weathermen, who felt that they were conducting a revolution; who felt that the peace movement was more than a peace movement. It would lead to a revolution and they would be the leaders of it, and they

would burn places down and they would throw bombs and things. But that was small. I think they were trying to match the violence of the United States Forces against the Vietnamese with the violence of this handful of so-called revolutionaries. Certainly by the time it reached Lexington in 1971 it was more or less choreographed. There was a civil understanding between the demonstrators and the police that there would be no violence. I think that there were no provocateurs among the veterans, because it would be very hard; the veterans would recognize them; they knew each other. And if there were provocateurs, they would have been thrown out. So it was totally peaceful, wasn't it?

INT: Before we get into Lexington, is there anything else you'd like to add about the tenor of the times, the background, the quality of demonstrations in this area in general?

TP: Just two things. One is that people in this country, including my friends and neighbors, are quite susceptible to going along with authority and becoming involved in immoral enterprises such as the Vietnam War and the repression of black rights, the rights of African-Americans, until the times changed. I think the syndrome of the so-called “good German” is applicable anywhere in the world, including in the United States. That's one point. The sub-point would be that when people in authority finally wake up and decide that something should be done to redress the situation, it filters down and the population becomes aware of the morality or immorality of what's happening.

The peace movement provided a tremendous spiritual feeling of solidarity among people. People still are talking in Lincoln about how wonderful it was to participate in these great movements. That kind of popular feeling of being involved in a just cause is something that I think is lacking today.

INT: Do you think that the peace demonstrations had an effect on the decision-makers?

TP: Oh, yes.

INT: To pull back from the war?

TP: You'd have to go to the historians who measure these things. But I think so. Nixon when he was running for election for presidency, said he had a secret plan to end the war. I think the repudiation of the Democratic Party and the repudiation of [presidential candidate Hubert] Humphrey indicates that the people, the demonstrations, did have an effect. Even while Nixon was pursuing the war and producing just as many casualties in his tenure as happened before, nevertheless, he had to at least make obeisance to the anti-war movement. No, I think it had a lot to do with it.

INT: Let's move on to Lexington then. How did you first hear about Operation POW, Prisoner of War?

TP: I don't know. There was a lot of peace literature and everything. The war was still going on, so we were all inspired by the fact that these people in uniform who had actually participated in battle and were the cannon fodder for this war were protesting. We thought this was terrific. The peace movement should—we civilians should—latch onto this. So I followed them from Concord to Lexington. I just picked them up on the way from Concord through Lincoln—that was our town. By that time we had a pretty big peace movement. It was like a joyride. It was serious. I mean, we were against the war, but also, it was great fun. The weather was good, and we could meet all these interesting G.I.'s. And John Kerry was a charismatic figure. He seemed to have a great future; maybe he would run for President or at least Senator. He wore very clean-cut looking fatigues. He didn't look like a pot smoking, doped out G.I. He looked like a fine upstanding citizen. And he was the leader of these Vietnam Vets Against the War. They carried their toy guns. And we thought this was wonderful.

It was just outrageous to hear that the Lexington elected officials would not allow them to camp there. So we just accompanied them.

INT: On foot?

TP: On foot, yes. And then we went [to the Green]. Then the arrests began. It was all very gentlemanly. You can see a lot of people were smiling as they were led into the buses by the very polite police. Because this was three years after the country had turned against the war overwhelmingly, and the media had turned against the war. Large segments of our most respectable [people] and people in high positions had turned against the war. I decided that I would just stay and photograph for a while, and then I'd be arrested too. I'd never been arrested before. I had always escaped arrest under the excuse that I was recording the event. So I kept taking pictures. Then around two or three in the morning I said, "Okay, I'm ready to be arrested." There were dozens of people there who said, "Okay, we're ready to be arrested." We went to the police and said, "Okay, arrest us." And the police said, "No, go home; we've had enough." So I never did get arrested. [Laughter.]

INT: How many people were you guess were on the Green when the police stopped arresting people?

TP: Oh, a hundred, fifty, a hundred, I don't know. By that time I was bleary-eyed.

INT: What was your impression of Lexington as a community?

TP: I thought Lexington was always a very liberal community. I was just surprised that the officials did this, particularly since these were Vietnam veterans; they were our boys; they were patriots. So I was a little surprised. But I didn't know Lexington very well.

INT: Why do you think the Selectmen acted as they did?

TP: Because they were living in the past. They hadn't figured out the change in the country yet. And they were…I don't know, this certain

mentality… They just hadn't changed enough. There are still people like that and they're coming back today. "Contract with America," Newt Gingrich—where they're trying to reinstall this respect for authority, and to confuse genuine patriotism with belief in your government no matter how immorally it acts. I don't know what the inner Lexington scene is. But I think sometimes liberals, particularly the so-called liberal elite—remember George Wallace used to call [them] the "pointy-headed intellectuals and bureaucrats"—act arrogant. They're so moral, they're so right. They believe in the rights of man and peace and all that stuff. And they act very snobbishly towards ordinary people who may differ with them. I think this plays a role. We all would like to see a perfect moral political person. Somebody who is not arrogant, somebody who doesn't speak down to people, somebody who listens to the other side, is not self-righteous, doesn't believe he or she knows the absolute truth all the time, but unfortunately, the liberal peace moral movements are infested with flawed people.

INT: Would you describe the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, as you saw them—what kinds of people, personalities were they?

TP: They were like born-again Christians. They had discovered a cause. Their morale was fantastic. They had just seen the light. The light was—the killing has got to stop. Of course they all had this feeling of solidarity for having been part of this horrible war. So they were like an evangelical group. They were really high. Some of them were high spiritually and some of them were high on dope part of the time. They were a great bunch. I think their morale was very good. And at the moment they were a lot of fun. There was intense discussion of the war and politics. They were operating at a hundred percent efficiency.

INT: How were they organized?

TP: I don't know. I have no idea.

INT: Going back to the Lexington Green, the civilians who came out to join and support the vets, what kinds of people came to the Green?

TP: The very respectable people—the people from the suburbs; educated, middle class, upper middle class, people of high moral quality I think. [Laughter]

INT: Any particular age or gender?

TP: I think there were children, there were babies, there were young people, old people. It was a cross section of suburbia.

INT: What was the atmosphere on the Green, the mood?

TP: Festive. I know that some people said they saw cops with clubs and riot masks and so on. And it was scary. But compared to real scary, it was child's play.

INT: You've already described the arrest as being very polite. Any particular images that remain in your mind?

TP: I think the presence of the Vietnam Vets lent it a high symbolic significance. Because they put their hands over their heads like prisoners of war. There were some of them in wheelchairs. The people who stayed out later than midnight and past with their babies—I think it was a spiritual, religious, moral protest. I think it was very impressive. But at the same time, there were the humorous aspects to it.

INT: Did you attend any of the meetings with the vets and the Selectmen and the citizens?

TP: No, I was just looking for the visuals. I was skittering along the surface taking the things that I thought would be the most interesting photographs.

INT: The repercussions in Lexington are continuing. This is something that the town has not been eager to remember. Why do you think it has been so decisive, this particular event?

TP: I'm just guessing. I think we're at a really terrible period now where the country is much more conservative. There's an economic crunch. People are worried about their jobs. They're worried about their health care. They're worried about housing. They're worried about education. They're worried about drugs. I think the country is afflicted with terrible anxieties that don't produce feelings of solidarity. It produces feelings of alienation and cynicism. Starting with the Reagan revolution, the idea of having a throwback to the fifties, that some of our political and other leaders would like to reinstate the old values of belief in authority, and so on. Also the United States is now a tremendous superpower, and we want to justify everything we do overseas, so this is a period of reaction. And there doesn't seem to be a clear kind of protest, popular movement arising that is going to affect every town. But I don't think we can go back to the kind of mentality we had before the war, even though the key thing to me is the lack of participation in the political process, particularly in voting. The fact that over fifty percent of the people are not voting now indicates dreadful cynicism, a feeling of despair, of hopelessness..

INT: Why do you think this particular demonstration attracted so much media attention?

TP: Lexington?

INT: Maybe it didn't attract attention.

TP: I don't recall getting an assignment on it. I think the national… I think by this time we'd been demonstrated out. The war was considered dead. It was just a question of negotiation. Nobody supported the war anymore. The fact that Vietnam vets were in it helped with the media, and the fact that so many were arrested. This was a historic number of people arrested, right? I forget the exact historic value of it. The biggest in the State, the biggest in the country, I don't know, I can't extrapolate further.

INT: Do you think that New England is more or less liberal today?

TP: I think it was more liberal then. But it's more liberal probably than the rest of the country. But there are community things happening in churches, on farms, in small towns across the country which I'm not aware of. There doesn't seem to be a unifying national party or movement that will tell us about all these things. So it's very hard to judge just how… I think apathy and lack of a vehicle for expressing opposition to what's happening is, is the problem.

INT: These two questions may overlap or even be the same. What did you learn from this experience, or how were you changed by these events?

TP: Which ones, in just Lexington?

INT: Whichever you want to talk about…the demonstrations in general.

TP: Well, the demonstrations in general… I'd have to go back to the Civil Rights Movement in the early 60's that really profoundly impressed me. Because I didn't believe that popular movements for liberation and equality amounted to much in the fifties, in the sixties, in the United States, that all these movements were taking place in the Third World or elsewhere in the world. So I was really inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, by SNCC, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and Martin Luther King, and so on. When the peace movement came along—and I think it's really important that Martin Luther King linked human rights with the peace movement—I found that inspiring. The peace movement was inspiring.

I thought after years of jingoism and small peace demonstrations being broken up and the media being rabidly jingoistic in support of the war, the change was certainly welcome. Lexington came sort of late in the game. I thought that was great. I thought what was new about it was the presence of the Vietnam vets. That was terrific. When the soldiers themselves rebel against the killing for no reason, that was inspiring.

INT: What would be an appropriate memorial on the Lexington Green?

TP: I'm not from Lexington. It will be an interesting discussion among the people who were for and against. I couldn't say. The memorial on Vietnam in Washington is very, very moving. People read into that memorial anything they want. What I read into it is tragedy, waste, sacrifice of so many lives, and the killing of the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese. We poured more bombing and ordinance in Vietnam, twice as much as throughout World War II, where we had carpet-bombing of some cities during World War II. It's just unbelievable, the amount of killing. So I look upon that memorial as a historic reminder of waste. But other people see it as homage to people who did their patriotic duty and sacrificed their lives for their country. Maybe something ambiguous like that would be appropriate in Lexington. Where everybody is honored. But the memory is there. History, remembering history, is important.

INT: Do you have any ideas about how we might use this archive of oral histories we're developing?

TP: It should be in schools—high schools, junior high schools, sixth grade, fifth grade. I don't know. When do kids begin to understand things? I think it would be terrific to have this sent out throughout the country as a primary historical source.

INT: How would you phrase the theme, the basic underlying theme?

TP: I don't know. History, 1971? [Laughter]

INT: Are there any thoughts that you would like to add? You had mentioned James Gavin at Arthur D. Little working for Nelson Rockefeller. Did you want to talk a little bit about that?

TP: It just goes back to the theme that I've reiterated ad nauseam, that when people who have real power in this country get into a debate, then you get a real popular debate. It filters down. And when they are of one mind, then you don't get a debate. The press falls in line; everybody falls in line.

INT: Any comments about Senator Kerry?

TP: I wish Senator Kerry were less a political animal and a more Vietnam Vet Against the War, and he would speak out more against U.S. policies today which are negative, like the invasion of Panama and so on. He's a liberal Senator, but I think he's somewhat detoured from his original track. He was a real hero in those days. But maybe it's easier to be a hero when you're just in the ranks than when you're a Senator.

INT2: I was going to ask you, why do you think he has changed?

TP: Because I think he's like our President, Bill Clinton, he plays politics and he goes where the money is, where the power is.

INT2: I thought one thing you might clarify was the meaning of sanctuaries at the time.

TP: Sanctuary—that's really interesting.

INT2: I was going to suggest the best place to do that might be the Boston University sanctuary, which is sort of the clearest example.

TP: In sanctuary—one example would be at Boston University where a group of theology students got together with some sort of organizers, people who were draft advisors and draft resisters, and said, we want to have a spiritual, religious experience of sanctuary as a protest against the war. So they got hold of a deserter who went AWOL from Camp Sheridan, where he was being…he said he went AWOL when they began to be trained for riot and crowd control. He felt this was directed against Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. And he admired Martin Luther King.

He was a Seventh Day Adventist. He left in protest. And he made contact with the…there was a draft resistance movement. The theology students who were graduate students at Boston University took him into the Marsh Chapel and said, we are holding him in sanctuary against the military and government authorities. It was in the church. And people made

speeches. There was a teach-in. They sang. They had an open microphone. All this, in the back of the church were these wonderful woodcarvings looking like El Greco paintings of the apostles. It had a tremendous religious and spiritual symbolism involved. The place was totally infiltrated by government and police agents—because I recognized some of them—who were making diagrams of the layout of the church and so on. Finally after about five days, at the favorite hour, five AM, about a hundred U.S. Marshals under the direction of FBI agents raided the place and took him out and arrested him. That was a sanctuary.

Now in Lincoln—I don't know the year, but it was about 1968 or 1969—the Unitarian church in the center of Lincoln, a group, a peace group within the church, proposed that a member of the community by the name of John Sisson, a young man, be given symbolic sanctuary. Because he was protesting—he was refusing to be drafted, refusing to serve in Vietnam, not for religious reasons, but for moral reasons. Because he had moral objection to the war; it was an unjust war. The Rev. Charlie Styron believed that sanctuary would be a good thing. But it would be a symbolic sanctuary. He would not be held in the church until he was released to police authorities. It would just be a statement by the church. He would be there for a short period. It would be the church voting to make this symbolic protest against the war. Well, the church voted it down. A short time thereafter, Charlie Sisson came up in court, and Judge Wyzanski ruled that moral objection to the war was the equivalent to conscientious objection to the war, and that he could not be prosecuted. So poor Lincoln, my town at that time, came up with egg on its face, because they could have done it, and they could have emerged with sort of a saintly aura about them. Instead they failed. But I must say the people in the church—it was a sizeable portion of the church who believed in sanctuary—and Charlie Styron, of course, was heroic about it. So that's sanctuary.

INT2: So it was a minority that prevails?

TP: No, the majority of the church prevailed. The majority of the congregation voted against sanctuary. It was a minority who proposed the sanctuary. No, it was a democratic vote. The voice of the people.

INT2: Could you say more about Harvard in relation to this, too?

TP: Harvard, oh yes. I think most of the students and the faculty at Harvard wanted nothing to do with the occupation. It was only when the President Nathan Pusey called in the cops, and there was such brutality, that the Harvard faculty and student body met and voted to have a one-day strike in protest against the administrations and the police action. But I think Harvard as a whole did not want to have anything to do with the peace movement, really. They were sort of forced by the outrageous decision. Two years later Pusey was quietly retired with honors, and they had a new president.

Yale, on the other hand—I was at Yale for demonstrations in 1971, which were inflammatory. The government, particularly the FBI, was briefing everybody in sight including reporters, press publications, everybody, that the Black Panthers and the peace movement were gathering arms, and there was going to be an insurrection in New Haven. But the President, Kingman Brewster, and the Police Chief of New Haven, didn't believe this. They conducted their own investigations. And they did not allow a repressive force to attack the demonstrators. As a result, everything went very peacefully. There were obvious provocateurs who were trying to whip up the crowds and produce violence, but they did not succeed. It turned out that the—we found out this later from the *Time* Bureau—that all the reports of the Panthers and the peace movement bringing in arms and dynamite and so on were totally phony. They had been planted by the FBI. They were absolutely propaganda. Total lies, in order to discredit the peace movement and the Black Panthers. The Black Panthers were terrified, they

were afraid that they were going to be set up, and the black community was going to be destroyed because of these rumors. These rumors were serving as an excuse to attack the Black Panthers and the peace movement. So they went out of their way to be extremely peaceful. And they were. And Kingman Brewster was heroic. I mean, the contrast between Kingman Brewster at Yale and Nathan Pusey at Harvard was just dreadful.

INT: And why? Why that difference?

TP: Because Kingman Brewster was smart!

INT2: Did you cover protest movements on the West Coast too?

TP: No.

INT2: Thank you very, very much.

END OF INTERVIEW