KH: This is an interview for the Minnesota Historical Society’s Minnesota in the Vietnam Era Oral History Project. It is Friday, October 26, 2018, and I’m here with Carl and Ruth Weiner, who are professors’ emeriti at Carleton College [Carleton College, Northfield, MN], Carl in history and Ruth in theater. Is that right? Okay. My name is Kim Heikkila. Today I’ll be talking to Carl and Ruth about their anti-Vietnam War work while they were faculty at the college in Northfield and elsewhere as we’ve been hearing. So, thank you so much, both of you, for being willing to sit down.

RW: It’s a pleasure to talk about it. This is great.

KH: So, I know I just said it, but if you could start by just stating and spelling your names that would be helpful.

CW: Okay. First name. Capital C–a-r-l; middle initial, D as in Dorian. Last name, I say Weiner or no—

RW: Weiner.

CW: Weiner. My family always said Weiner. They mispronounced their name, W-e-i-n-e-r.

RW: I’m Ruth Weiner. I wasn’t a faculty member in the late sixties; I became one later. R-u-t-h W-e-i-n-e-r.

KH: And where and when were both of you born?

CW: I was born March 26, 1934, in Manhattan, New York City. I think my family lived not far from Henry Street. I have a birth certificate upstairs. And then I think it wasn’t until I was seven years old that my family moved to Brooklyn [Brooklyn, New York City, NY]. My father, let’s see, that would be 1941, my father was drafted and was in the army from 1943, served in the European Theater and he returned in ’45.
I remember that because I was sent away to camp, of course, and when the camp bus pulled in in August of 1945, there was my father, still in uniform. So that is a memory that is indelible. By the time I was fourteen, I believe, this is sort of a bibliographical reference, after the Wallace [Henry Agard Wallace (1888-1965)] campaign was over, like a lot of left families—

**RW:** Henry Wallace.

**CW:** Henry Wallace, yeah—broke up and my mother and father were divorced by the time I was fourteen. But by that time, I was living in Brooklyn. I went to Queens College [Queens College, Flushing, NY] where—and I know this sounds amazing these days—tuition was free. And I had some very great teachers who were all Europeans because they wanted to live in New York City, and they taught at one of the New York City colleges. There was Queens College; there was CCNY [City College of the City University of New York, New York City, NY] that my father had attended; and there was Brooklyn College.

**RW:** City College, Brooklyn College.

**CW:** I attended Stuyvesant High School [Stuyvesant High School, New York City, NY]. I know you had to take an exam, but it was no big deal then.

**KH:** When did you graduate from high school?

**CW:** Huh?

**KH:** When did you graduate from high school?

**CW:** I don’t know.

**KH:** Well, I should do the math here.

**RW:** If you were born in 1934, forty-four—

**CW:** I would have to say in the late—okay, I would have to say in the late forties I was at Queens College and I probably graduated in ’51 or ’52.

**RW:** From Queens College?

**CW:** Yep.

**RW:** And from Stuyvesant four years earlier.

**CW:** Yeah. I have a CV upstairs but I—

**KH:** Yeah, that’s okay.

**RW:** You don’t need it.
CW: But that’s about it.

KH: And Ruth, when were you born?

RW: Nineteen thirty-nine. A little tiny bit of detail is that my parents were very strong in the union. My dad was a labor leader and we moved from Chicago [Chicago, IL] to Evanston [Evanston, IL] and I went to Evanston Township High School, to the University of Wisconsin at Madison and to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. And in Paris [Paris, France] I worked teaching English to actors, common market economists—it was considered a great job, probably the best I’ve ever had.

KH: Really? It sounds awesome.

RW: It was.

KH: And how to you both, or each, identify yourselves racially and/or ethnically? What’s your background?

RW: Jewish. First generation American. Both parents were immigrants.

CW: All right. My father came to this country when he was three years old so am I first or second generation? I can’t—

RW: On your mother’s side you’re second generation. On your father’s side, you’re first generation.

CW: Okay.

RW: So, you’re half generation.

KH: Where had your father come from?

CW: He came—it’s really hard now because you might say it was White Russia—it was called Byelorussia [Belarus]; god knows what it is now. I’m not even sure it is part of Russia now. It could be part of Ukraine. My mother—I remember that—she had said her folks came from Mogilev [now Mogilev, Belarus] on the Dnieper [River], but my mother was born in this country. And basically, I think we’re what you would have to say in both our cases, our parents and grandparents were a part of that great immigration of the Eastern European people, a great many of them Jewish [this is quite true because of the pogrom] that came to this country just at the turn of the century from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. My mother was born I believe in 1912; my father was born in 1906; and they were part of that great influx of Eastern European Jews who fled Europe at that time.

KH: And what did your parents do for work? How did they earn a living?
CW: My father was a mathematician. He went to CCNY, had an M.A. He taught in the New York City school system. My mother—

RW: But then he went to Hofstra [Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY] and taught in the university.

CW: Yeah, he eventually—well, because in the McCarthy [Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1908-1957)] period, he had—he resigned before he was, you know—

RW: fired.

KH: From Hofstra?

RW: No, not from Hofstra.

CW: From the New York system and then luckily or basically because he had friends, he ended up as a professor of mathematics, an assistant professor of mathematics at Hofstra.

My mother’s career was more checkered. She did not get a B.A. at first. She ended up at Queens College, taking courses from my old professors as a matter of fact. Eventually she had a B.A. She was a school clerk in the New York City school system.

RW: Multi-talented woman who wound up just doing, worked—

CW: Very talented woman, very artistic, very much into making clothes.

RW: A beautiful designer; beautiful artist, really, really talented.

KH: Did you have siblings?

CW: Oh, yes. I had a younger brother, born when I was about six years old, 1940, and then eventually from my father’s second marriage, I had a half-sister—

RW: Abby.

CW: Abby, Abigail and a step sister, Nora Murphy. And those were my siblings.

KH: What about you Ruth?

RW: I have two brothers. One’s a lawyer in San Francisco [San Francisco, CA] and one teaches at the Feinberg School at Northwestern [Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL] He’s a research professor there.

KH: And you said that both of your parents were involved in union activities?
RW: My mom never—they were both involved in union activities, but my dad [Abraham “Abe” Feinglass (1910-1981)] was the head of the union, a big union which was a left-wing union, the Fur and Leather Workers Union. He became president of that union when its initial president, Ben Gold [Benjamin Gold (1898–1985)], who is a famous name on the left, was indicted under Taft-Hartley [The Labor Management Relations Act of 1947 29 U.S.C. § 141-197, better known as the Taft–Hartley Act, June 23, 1947]. He put my father in, literally put him in as president. And my father almost immediately brought the union back into the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. It was the Fur and Leather Workers Union, the Amalgamated with the Meat Cutters Union and ultimately with the packinghouse so sort of every part of the animal and he became—when he retired, he was the vice president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, had a big union career. He was quite powerful and a very outspoken antiwar [person] which was very unusual for people in the mainstream labor movement.

KH: Antiwar in what period? All along?

RW: No, anti-Vietnam, publicly, which was very scary for someone—

CW: That incident that was a meeting of the AFL-CIO under George Meany [William George Meany (1894-1980)], right?

RW: He was one of six people who stood up as opposing the war, he was one of them, at this vast convention of all the unions. But, you know, he was a gutsy guy.

KH: Yeah, so that would have been—well, the war—by the time we have ground troops there and it was becoming more—

RW: It’s probably 1970, something like that.

KH: Okay.

RW: Sixty-eight, sixty-nine, seventy, seventy-one, something like that—within that period. There is an antiwar movement that’s substantial by that time but not in the labor movement so much.

KH: And both of you by that time are well into your antiwar activities.

RW: We have been ever since the mid-sixties really.

CW: Yeah, I mean, let’s—I guess we should say we were lefties; we’re certainly lefties at Carleton from ’64 on. I identified myself, perhaps misidentified myself, because—well, I identified myself as a Marxist and I was known as a Marxist professor.

RW: And still are from emails that we’ve gotten in recent years.
**CW:** Though if I was going to be critical of it, I would say I was a bad Marxist simply because I was an ignorant one, not because I did anything else, but because well, it was hard.

**RW:** You finally admit it.

**CW:** Well, it wasn’t hard to admit because basically, although I don’t want a lecture, so I don’t know how far I want to go with this.

**RW:** You want it to be short.

**CW:** Marx [Karl Marx [1818-1883]], himself, never really wrote a great deal about class. As a matter of fact, in *Kapital [Das Kapital, by Karl Marx, 1867]* volume one, chapter eight I believe, there’s one page called Class. That’s it. So it was basically people who were Marxists at the end of the nineteenth century who were writing about class, not Marx. So, I could call myself a Marxist and get away with it basically because he didn’t say much about class. But there were two schools. French historians were heavily Marxist and there was a British school of some very excellent historians who were termed the British Marxist historical school. And these were the people—

**RW:** E.P. Thompson [Edward Palmer Thompson (1924-1993)].

**CW:** E.P. Thompson among others and the guy who did the English civil war who, my god, I can’t remember his name now.

**RW:** Luckily, we have Google.

**CW:** Right, so these were the historians I read when we were in Europe but even before that at Madison.

**KH:** So, Ruth has talked about her family politics. What was your family’s politics?

**CW:** Well I would have to say that my father was openly identified as a Communist—

**RW:** Well, a Marxist anyway. I don’t know—

**CW:** No, he—

**RW:** Did he belong to the Party?

**CW:** I think he did.

**RW:** My dad would never say that he was Communist.

**CW:** I think my father did and right after the war, actually he ran for state representative under the ALP, the American Labor Party, not the Communist Party, American Labor Party.
RW: That’s so—do you have your dad’s—

CW: And he lost.

RW: as a politician.

CW: No, he wasn’t much of a politician; he was a mathematician; he read a lot of philosophy. I still have his books, his works of Hegel [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)] and they’re all annotated in this green ink and I still have them upstairs.

RW: His dad was brilliant. He was a really smart guy.

CW: He was incredibly bright.

RW: And so was his brother—he had a degree in physics from Harvard [Harvard University, Cambridge, MA] and he was really brilliant, too.

KH: So, when you— I’m just going to say “you,” meaning to both of you just for ease of—

RW: Sure, whatever you’d like to know.

KH: So, when you were growing up and— so what, that would be like forties, throughout the forties—were you talking—and I can guess the answer to this but I’m going to put it to you— were you talking about political issues with your family at the dinner table? Were these things that you absorbed as children from your parents?

RW: Yes.

CW: By the time I was in graduate school I wasn’t really talking to my father very much. He was in the second marriage and—

RW: You didn’t talk politics with your mom?

CW: And I did not talk politics with really—I wasn’t ashamed of him in any sense of the word, but basically, I felt I was my own man and basically, I didn’t have too much to do with him. He visited us once or twice, but he didn’t visit—

RW: He visited us a lot and he stayed at Eleanor’s house that time, remember? He and Daddy?

CW: Okay, you say it was a lot. I didn’t think it was a lot.

RW: I’d say it was a lot.

CW: I talked to your father more than I talked to my own father.

RW: My father was a voluble man.
CW: And I know at Madison a bunch of us basically, not all from New York—some were from the West Coast—were leftists and we started a periodical called Studies on the Left, [Studies on the Left, published 1959-1967 in Madison, WI and later in New York, NY] which is still around—no it’s not around—it’s in libraries now. And we were very clear we were on the left, but we weren’t Stalinist in any sense.

RW: It was called New Left at the time.

CW: It was the New Left and we rejected a very—well, we called it that time—and it was a German term, lumpenedken, crude thought. We rejected the whole Stalinist carapace of the left parties from out of the Depression. So, in that sense some people would have called me a bad Marxist, but I thought I was a good Marxist.

KH: A modern Marxist perhaps—

CW: Modern

KH: attracted to—

CW: Well, because the French and the Italian were not so much—the Italian Communist Party was very liberal, very supple, you know, and I was reading them. The French Communist Party was still in a kind of a Stalinist stage, but we knew a lot of leftists in Paris.

RW: We did.

CW: Always—because they were interesting people and we were interesting to them. And the French culture and political system I felt was much more—I was sympathetic much more to them and this was at the time of Eisenhower [US President Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower (1890-1969)] in our country and I mean, if I was to put it in any way, whereas in this country, if you identified openly as being Left in the 1950s, you probably had to worry. To identify as Left in France, they would say, you know, what else is new? It was just assumed that you were.

KH: Yeah, so let’s talk a little bit about the context of post-World War II American culture which has been described by various people as kind of this consensus culture, you know, the United States is enjoying prosperity after the Depression and after World War II. The G.I. Bill is funding all these veterans coming home and going to college and the suburbs are booming and people are buying cars and the consumer economy is thriving, you know. But at the same time there’s also the cracks in the consensus coming through the civil rights movement, through the Cold War. So what was it like for you as leftist, Jewish, first generation, young people growing up in that context? What did it mean to you to be a leftist and/or Jewish and/or first generation?

RW: And a girl.

KH: And female, absolutely.
CW:  Well, I would have to add one thing to that. Growing up leftist, Jewish, but living in New York was not like—

RW:  Living in Evanston.

CW:  Living in Evanston. Yeah, there was McCarthyism. My father suffered from it. Basically, he retired—he left the school system, but his younger brother David was still in it and I think one of the reasons why my father left the school system, but he was still very protective of his younger brother. And McCarthyism—and that’s what we called it—was pretty rampant.

At Queen’s College, well, it’s very funny. A lot of my professors were Europeanists and so they were generally on the left. I think many of them took pains to say they were not Communists; they were Socialists or something like that. But it’s hard for me to really characterize it very clearly. There was a sense of oppression in this country. There was a sense also—and I think of that more right now in terms of what’s going on. I mean, what we were worried about is nowhere near the kind of nastiness that seems to be around now.

But there was a clear sense of being in this thing called the Cold War, of being opposed to the Soviet Union in any way, shape or form, and being a nation now very often associated with pretty bad people in the outside world, particularly in what—once we were in France it was very clear it was the whole colonialism business which the French were still recovering from in, well, in the sixties.

RW:  Yes, of course.

CW:  The Algerian War, and their own horrible—well, not horrible—terribly bad role in Vietnam. After all, they had fought in Vietnam for years and had backed pretty awful people. So my sense of it was Madison was a great place; we were free and everything else, although I think a lot of Wisconsinites then and now would say we were alien at Madison. But Madison was a free and open place in very many ways. You could even identify as a Marxist and people would laugh at you maybe and say that’s old hat, but they wouldn’t do it.

So, I, myself, never suffered any kind of sense of persecution. Nobody ever did anything bad to me at all. I got a free ride in very many ways. And then when I married Ruth and I knew her father, the only thing that happened, only once, and I think that was—your father had problems with young men, you know, coming up, and he once asked me, only once, he said, to not be—to leave Studies on the Left.

RW:  Really?

CW:  Yeah, because I was on the editorial board, right?

RW:  But I never knew that he asked you to leave.

CW:  I never just—
RW: He would never do that. I can’t even imagine that he did that.

CW: No, he did it once—

RW: What did he say?

CW: I think it was a stray thought in his mind. I don’t think he ever really considered it, but he did ask me to do that.

KH: Why do you think he would have done that? What was his concern?

CW: Well, it’s kind of hard for me to tell because there would be no direct evidence involved. I could, when I look back at it now, assume that maybe he had enough on his plate. He didn’t need a son-in-law who was an editor of something called *Studies on the Left*. Right? But he never pursued it and I never pursued it with him. I just ignored it and—

RW: It’s very out of character.

CW: Well, maybe it was part of a character that you as his daughter didn’t see—

RW: Oh, okay.

CW: but me, as his son-in-law, did see. There’s never much—your father never really was anywhere near antagonistic to me in any way. And I think he was on the left himself.

RW: You were his ‘transilator.’

CW: Yeah, he called me his ‘transilator.’

RW: My father—

CW: He would say, ‘Transilate,’ and what I was to tell him what this article was about or something.

RW: But when we went to France, he had connections in France, but he couldn’t speak French. He would do the dialogue. He’d go, *Bonjour, comment ça va? Ça va bien.* (laughter) He would just do the whole thing.

CW: No, but he did take me as his translator when he met the head of the CGT [General Confederation of Labour (French: Confédération générale du travail, CGT)], which at that time was the major mass trades union movement. I never would have got to talk to that guy if it hadn’t been for your father.

KH: So, Ruth, what was it like for you growing up during this time period as a female also?
RW: I felt very persecuted in Evanston because they televised the HUAC [House Un-American Activities Committee] hearings and the McCarthy [Army–McCarthy] hearings. So, my father was subpoenaed. He hears about it; he leaves town. I’m, I think, a sophomore in high school at Evanston Township, which is my first year there because I went to school in Chicago first. And it was on television, you know, every day it said, Missing and his name and the F.B.I. was parked outside of our house and tried to question my brother, who was a middle school kid at the time or grammar school kid at the time. And, because it was on television, a lot of people shunned me, so my main memory of high school is a nightmare.

KH: So how big was Evanston at that time? I mean, was it a smaller community?

RW: Well, it’s a major suburb of Chicago. Evanston Township was an interesting high school because there’s a black population in Evanston so there were a lot of black students, many more white students and none of them wanted to know someone whose dad was a criminal and so nobody—it was a very tough first year for me there, incredibly tough. And he left because he didn’t want to be on the televised hearings in Chicago because he was going to take the fifth. He was not going to testify so he thought, you know, keep it out of Chicago. He finally did it in Washington [Washington, DC] or somewhere else.

KH: Okay.

RW: But it was not easy and at the same time, I was, of course, sympathetic to him and very politicized at that time in my life because—I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I graduated really early at sixteen from high school, so I was pretty young, but I was also very, very hepped on being a good left person.

KH: And is that just from having grown up in this family where, you know—?

RW: All of the people who surrounded my family were all to do with labor or were sympathetic to labor or were political and those are the people I knew. And my mother was even more militant than my father. She was—so, yeah, I guess so. I mean, I never rebelled in that sense. I rebelled in other senses, but not that sense.

KH: And did you have friends who, even if they weren’t at your high school—

RW: Not for that year, no.

KH: So, no friends of your family?

RW: Not that year and that’s probably why I went into theater because I auditioned for a play and got cast and suddenly had a few friends, then more and then it just made my life better.

KH: Okay.

RW: But I spent high school smoking in the bathroom and hating everything and thinking about painless ways to commit suicide which is sad to think of now.
KH: Those are hard years period, much less with all of—

RW: They can be, and I was younger than everybody else.

KH: So what year did you graduate from high school?

RW: Nineteen fifty-six.

KH: Okay, so yeah.

RW: So, I’m sixteen when I graduate.

KH: Okay.

RW: But then I went to Madison and the world turned bright.

KH: So, what about the African-American civil rights movement? Was that touching your lives? Were you—what—?

RW: We have photographs of that, being evicted from our apartment because we lent our apartment to a black couple who were good friends and the neighbor downstairs—and this is in Madison which, you know, is a big university town—They moved into the apartment; we had just lent it to them because we were off to Pittsburgh [Pittsburgh, PA].

CW: That was the year I went to Pittsburgh.

RW: Yes.

CW: We went to Pittsburgh.

RW: Yes, we went to Pittsburgh, so—and I do have photographs of that, lots of them, of our belongings thrown out of our apartment and everything either taken or broken or whatever—and it was literally a riot. And then we had to come back from Pittsburgh and then the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Baltimore, MD, 1917 to present] helped us put our stuff together.

CW: I would have to say that we had moved into a neighborhood within Madison that was pretty far from the university—

RW: At that time.

CW: at that time. The university crowd had not expanded in Madison into that neighborhood. Eventually—

RW: I’m going to show Kim—
CW: What?

RW: I’m going to show Kim pictures of that eviction or whatever it was.

CW: Eventually, that neighborhood, which was around the train station in Madison, would become a part of the whole graduate student milieu but we were one of the first groups or one of the first couples to move into that neighborhood.

RW: [unclear] dollars a month.

CW: Right, we had this nice apartment; people downstairs we thought were great, but they were I guess you would call them blue-collar people.

RW: The guy [unclear]—

CW: Then I—we went off to Pittsburgh where I was teaching for a year, right? Mosse got me a job.

RW: That’s our stuff out on the street.

CW: Oh, my god, you’re right.

KH: Oh geez, and everybody thought all these issues were confined to the South.

RW: Well, no, you move into a neighborhood like that. The landlord, remember the landlord saying, do they put n-i-g-g-e-r blood in you when you have a transfusion? And he was such an asshole, I said, “Oh, yes, absolutely.” (laughter)

KH: So, don’t get sick or injured.

CW: So, yeah, we did—we had to drive back from Pittsburgh.

RW: And those poor people were so frightened of—the wife was from the South and it could have been very violent and terrible. We had no idea such a thing would happen in a place like that—

CW: In the North.

RW: but it wasn’t the university, it was the neighborhood.

KH: So, they got obviously they—

RW: Mifflin Street, which became very famous.

KH: What street?
RW: Mifflin.

CW: Mifflin Street.

KH: Okay.

RW: Oh, it was completely terrifying for them and we felt awful because who would have wanted to subject them to this kind of violent reaction to them?

KH: So what year about would this have been?

RW: When we went to Pittsburgh it’s like 1961, ’60, ’61.

CW: See, this is where I am of no use.

KH: Early sixties.

RW: Yeah, it’s right when we moved—when did you teach at Pittsburgh? Sixty-one, sixty-two? Yeah, ’61, ’62.

CW: Yeah, okay, ’61, ’62 because we came back to Madison in the summer of ’62 and then we went to Paris so ’61, ’62 I taught at the University of Pittsburgh. That was my first teaching experience.

RW: But that happened in a place where you would not expect it to happen, but it was a nightmare. It was horrible.

KH: So, when did you two meet?

RW: In Madison. We married between my junior and senior year. Carl was in graduate school. I think I married you to get out of the dorms.

KH: Better housing.

CW: I married you because you were the prettiest girl I had ever met.

RW: Oh, right.

CW: And you were younger than me.

RW: A lot.

CW: So, you weren’t skeptical of some of the asinine opinions that I had. (laughter)

RW: That’s true.
Because you didn’t know better.

Right, I still don’t obviously. It’s lasted.

Well, I have to say there are a lot of leftie boys that were after you.

Let Kim keep asking questions. (laughter)

Well that’s kind of interesting if there were a lot of leftie boys after you at that point. I mean, was there a transition between your leftist identity being a detriment when you were in high school to being an asset?

I hung out with kids who were political and who maybe changed after college, but at that time were political like Ronnie Radosh and it was a blessing—that’s why I loved Madison so much because I could be whoever I was and there were a lot of people like me. It wasn’t a disadvantage to be Jewish or left or whatever I was, it was suddenly great.

Now when I had posed the question a few minutes ago in general about growing up in this time period and I said, you know, you were Jewish and leftist, you said, and a girl.

Yes.

So how did being female affect your experiences during this time period?

Well, you have to—it’s probably, I mean, it’s unimaginable to you. I hunted for a job in Pittsburgh, you know, when we moved to Pittsburgh. The only thing anyone—and I had a year of graduate school, one year at that point. The only thing anyone asked me was how many words per minute I typed and whether I could take dictation. And my father tried really hard to get me a job and that’s the only thing that anyone cared about. That was it. There was no assumption that I could do anything else and that was horrifying to me. I mean, I had come out of Madison, which was kind of a great place, and had been very successful as an actor and whatever and suddenly none of it counted for anything.

So, to be a girl meant that you were on the sidelines, for me, and the only interest that I can remember from men in Madison was sexual. I mean, I had men friends, actually two gay friends whom I loved, particularly Bob McEllya, but, you know, that was—it was that age, too, maybe. And I was young when I went to college, I was sixteen, so –

Yeah.

You were nineteen when you got married.

Yeah, I was between my junior and senior year. But I also, my family had no background of education so I arrived in Madison with no dorm because no one thought—it why would they?
Don’t they automatically take care of that? I didn’t know—I knew no place to apply because my parents had never gone to college or anything.

KH: Are you the oldest?

RW: I’m the oldest and I was a girl so both my cousins had dropped out of school after their first year and they didn’t care—I mean, they were perfectly happy for me to go to college, but it wasn’t like, Yeah, you know, you have to go. It was, you know, anything that you want.

KH: So, your respective bachelor’s degrees—was it theater for you?

RW: No, it was English.

KH: English, that’s right. Okay. And you came out with a bachelor’s degree in—?

RW: Sociology, no?

CW: Sociology.

KH: Sociology, okay. And then your master’s is in history?

CW: Right.

KH: Okay.

CW: At Columbia [Columbia University, New York City, NY].

RW: And mine is in theater, my master’s, not an M.F.A. degree, not a terminal degree, a master’s degree and I never went on to do a Ph.D.

KH: Okay.

CW: I never went on. I was in a Ph.D. program at Madison.

KH: History?

CW: History. I never finished my doctorate—

RW: He had a terrific major professor who was very kind.

CW: George Mosse [George Lachmann Mosse (1918-1999)] was a good lecturer. He had written a number of books; they were excellent books.

RW: He was great.

CW: I learned a lot from him. I used his lectures and his notes again and again.
CW: Yes, I was his—

RW: Research assistant.

CW: Research assistant for two books and I’m in the dedication of one of them; I forget which, the second one.

RW: He was great, George was.

KH: So, your emphasis, your research expertise is in European history, correct?

CW: Yes.

KH: What specifically in that field?

CW: Well, okay. I was, from the time I did a master’s degree, very much interested in French history. I was very much interested in sixteenth century history of France and the French religious wars. That’s when I went back to Paris I read in those fields. I was interested in Huguenot history, the history of French Protestantism. I was interested in something I called—nobody else called it that and for the life of me, I would say I don’t even know why I called it—I called it Peasant Calvinism. Peasant, I suppose, because it was rural. France was absolutely rural in the sixteenth century. The heartland of Huguenot history and the Huguenot movement came out of Switzerland but was centered primarily in southern France, all right. By 1560—see, I know these dates—in 1560, it had been eradicated from Normandy and Brittany, but it hung on in southern France long after that and a lot of the—and there were eight so-called religious wars. Don’t ask me why they counted them as eight. And this was the stuff I was going to write on. And I actually did write a couple of chapters which I never coalesced into a doctorate.

KH: So, you got to an ABD [All But Dissertation] status in graduate school.

CW: Oh, yes, I took the doctoral exams. I had those out, but I never wrote, I never completed my Ph.D. doctoral thesis.

KH: So, let’s—and I’m going to come back to your studies of French history maybe, but I want to start talking more specifically about the war in Vietnam. So, when do you become aware of attuning to what is going on particularly—well, and maybe not—I was going to say particularly with the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, but given your interest in French history, maybe it predates the American, the more obvious American involvement in Vietnam. When is Vietnam on your radar?

CW: Well, by ’60, ’61, when we were first in Paris, right? Okay. The French had experienced two great colonial wars, post-World War II, Algeria and even before that, Vietnam.
RW: Algeria was still going on.

CW: Algeria was still going on.

RW: Yeah, it was—

CW: There was a lot of literature in France, a lot of people were writing about it and I read in that literature so that I was fairly cognizant, aware of what the French had done in Vietnam; what had led up to the, you know, the tragedy of Điện Biên Phủ [The battle of Điện Biên Phủ, Vietnam, March 1954] and even the role of the Americans because by the end of it, the French were dependent upon American arms to keep them fighting in Vietnam. So, I knew that stuff and then, yes, when we came home and then Tonkin Bay, ’64 [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, August 10, 1964], and stuff like that, from the very beginning I could talk—

RW: What was the year of Tonkin Bay? I’ll have to look it up.

KH: Sixty-four.

CW: fairly consistently about what the French had done and I also could talk about—and this is where my American leftist came in, about what Eisenhower’s America and then Kennedy’s [US President John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy (1917-1963) America and then Johnson’s [US President Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973)] America was getting involved in these colonial wars and backing bad guys. So, from that point on I did talk about it, mainly in, I think, the campus atmosphere. I can’t remember when I began to talk about it publicly outside of the campus.

RW: I think as the antiwar movement, which really was—many people were not involved. I mean, it was sort of a science fiction war, it was way distant and the names were exotic, but as the war becomes more intense and worse, there’s an antiwar movement and you were very much in demand as a speaker because you had the background and so you—I mean, you spoke at the “U,” you spoke up in the Cities all the time. I do remember that, and I remember feeling very proud of you because you were, you know, lucid and clear about it and you knew the background and that was really important to me. So, I think it was helpful and I think all your students, many of his students who became activist against the war—Carleton students marched on the federal building and a lot of them were arrested.

CW: Yeah, that’s that picture.

RW: I don’t have a picture of that.

CW: Well, because that picture was—okay, I remember one time, and don’t ask me the date because I can’t remember—when I talked at the “U” in one of the big—was it something called the Coffman Memorial [Coffman Memorial Union, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN]—

RW: The Union, yeah.
CW: with what’s her name?

RW: A hint, just give me a hint.

CW: Maxine.

RW: Maxine, oh god, what was her name?

CW: What was her name?

RW: I’ve blocked it out.

CW: I know, because she was—she spoke after me, but she was there, and she spoke, and I think that was about the biggest audience I think I ever had.

RW: Do you know who Maxine Klein [Maxine Manther Klein [(1934- )] was?

KH: No.

RW: She’s still alive as far as I know. She taught theater at the university and for my sins, I hired her to do a play at Carleton. She is really a difficult person.

CW: Okay, but that was, I think, one of the biggest audiences I ever had.

KH: At the “U?”

CW: And that was at the “U.” You know, it was that big audience at the “U,” and it was against the war.

KH: I’m not asking you to recall a specific date, but do you remember was it a general antiwar comment? Were you responding to any particular event that you can remember?

RW: I think this was at the height of the antiwar movement in like ’68, ’69.

CW: Yeah.

RW: I think it’s right around there.

KH: So, during like the election cycle or the moratoriums, all that kind of stuff.

CW: It was a general critique of Johnson’s war.

KH: Okay.
CW: And of how the Americans, despite their saying, Oh, we would do better than the French, you know, and they would fight better than the French, had committed and were committing the same mistakes that the French had done and backing the wrong people.

KH: So—and I’m going to ask this explicitly because I may be able to guess at your reasons, but I would like you to articulate them. What was it about the war in Vietnam that you found—?

RW: Reprehensible.

KH: Yes. Why oppose it?

CW: Okay. It seemed to me, from reading all that I had read about what the French had done, that the so-called west, and in particular the way the Americans had bought into the Cold War anti-Communism had—not just in Vietnam, but that they had done it before that in any number of other countries—but had basically backed, in the sense of what was going on in Vietnam, the royalist, South Vietnam anti-Communist, anti-Democratic—

RW: Self-aggrandizing—he had really—

CW: a bunch of generals who had been materially involved in the French failure and the Americans were doing the same thing and the whole—and this is just a general stance I had—this would mark me as a leftist, I’m sure of it. Basically, we were interfering in country after country in the name of freedom, defending the world against something called Communism. I think by that time, I wasn’t a Communist at all and generally, I was echoing, because I was reading a number of things and this is not something I came up with independently. The Nation [The Nation, published by The Nation Company, 1865-present] The New Republic [The New Republic, published by Rachel Rosenfelt, 1914-present], these were my basic sources. And for the life of me, I can’t remember the names of these people, but they were very well known, who were analyzing America’s role in Vietnam in precisely that way. And so, I was echoing them. I mean, these were the people I was reading. And I combined that with what I had read and knew about the French role in their Vietnamese War.

And it was this whole basic Cold War stance, not even against the Soviet Union, because, you know, even the Soviet Union, Stalinism, I wasn’t a part of that and by that time the American Left had long since left that anyway. But in the wider world, if you said you were an anti-Communist, America would just shower money, arms, whatever you want, on you. And there were a lot of people in the American Left, not Communist at all, who were by, I think, the late sixties—

RW: Big antiwar population.

CW: were really antiwar and began to analyze it successfully in these times.

RW: What year is Kent State [Kent State University, Kent, OH]?

KH: Seventy.
CW: Seventy, oh by ’70, well that was—

RW: By ’70, it was much, much broader.

KH: So, what about you, Ruth, on what grounds were you opposing the war?

RW: Personal grounds because I had two brothers, one of whom didn’t get drafted but could have been drafted. The other one was of age when the lottery came in and he had a good number in the lottery, so I had a personal feeling that, you know, I wanted to protect my family. And living with Carl, I was reading the same things and talking to a lot of the same people and the war seemed like a bullying, terrible war to me, that we were using Agent Orange, bombing, killing people who really just wanted independence. I knew about Dien Bien Phu; I knew that I didn’t think that America should have anything to do with it, that it was this ugly, stupid misbegotten war and we were losing a lot of people. I mean, think about the power of the wall [Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, DC] now that—there’s a certain amount of regret in people looking at it because it’s a brilliant monument, I think, the most brilliant war monument, because the names are there and it individualizes those losses, each one of which is horrendous and we don’t, of course, know the losses on the Vietnam side.

KH: Did either of you know anybody who did serve in Vietnam?

CW: I would have to say that if you were teaching in college, by the late sixties, if you genuinely as a teacher, as an instructor, gave a young man a C, or a B-minus or a B—

RW: A B would be okay, but not a C or not a D.

CW: I mean, you could be materially engaged in having that kid being drafted and sent over there. And—

RW: Well, they’d have to not be in college. At least there was the college deferment.

CW: No, no, no, no. You could be in college but if you flunked out and stuff like that—

RW: Oh, yeah, but you don’t flunk out with a B.

CW: No, not with a “B,” but you could flunk out with a C, or a D or something like that. And when you look—and I can’t remember the names—but I knew the names on that wall, and they were some of the names of Carleton students.

RW: Well, Toni Dorfman. Remember Toni Dorfman? Her brother was killed very early in the war, in 1967, and she was a kid I knew well and went to Yale [Yale University, New Haven, CT] at some point to teach but her brother was one of the first people I ever had any personal connection with who was killed in the war. Because I didn’t know a lot of people who were soldiers. I had no idea.
On the other hand, when the antiwar movement was really full, the most moving part of it were the soldiers, the people like John Kerry [John Forbes Kerry (1943-)] who really turned the tide, I think, a lot of the tide, against the war because they had been there.

**KH:** I’ve been talking to people from other campuses who were active, and it seems like at some campuses, such as Mankato State, [now Mankato State University, Mankato, MN] there was a pretty recognizable student veteran population who became antiwar. There was a pretty recognizable VVAW [Vietnam Veterans Against the War] chapter active at Mankato State. Was there any of that kind of activism that you noticed at Carleton?

**CW:** Not at Carleton.

**RW:** I don’t think so because they’re younger and they’re, you know—those four years. They went off to graduate school. Those who wanted to avoid the war continued and went to graduate school. But there’s no—I don’t—we knew one person who was a veteran, the guy who released the doors. What was his name?

**CW:** Oh, god, I can’t remember.

**RW:** I can’t either.

**CW:** Ah—

**RW:** But he wasn’t in the Vietnam War, he was much too young, but—

**CW:** No, he wasn’t in the Vietnam War.

**RW:** Carleton doesn’t abound in vets.

**CW:** I can’t remember their names but there were a couple, not very many. Carleton kids, you know, were successful—

**RW:** And young.

**CW:** and young and—

**RW:** Yeah, but that wasn’t a factor at Carleton.

**CW:** Very comfortable, usually came from very comfortable backgrounds.

**KH:** Right, right, so I mean Mankato State as a state college is drawing a different student population that Carleton.

**CW:** Mankato State with—
**RW:** And any place that has a graduate school probably, too, but then Carleton, of course, doesn’t.

**CW:** There were some people, kids from St. Olaf [St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN] and I knew about them. And St. Olaf faculty were pretty radically against the war.

**RW:** I know it. I don’t think you could find a college, at least in this state, where there wasn’t a significant antiwar thing. Maybe in the west or the south.

**CW:** Yeah, by the late sixties this is true.

**KH:** So I’m want to ask one question. You arrive at Carleton in 1964 because you’re going to teach. What are you [Ruth] doing?

**RW:** I’m contemplating getting a job at the pizza parlor—no, what I’m doing is translation for the “U.” I translated technical documents, law documents and engineering documents, best pay I’ve ever had. It paid really good. And I’m also thinking about, you know, dinner parties and what are you supposed to do as a faculty wife? And I was trying to figure that out. It lasted about a month because what do you do if you’re a faculty wife? There were a lot of women’s things—Elizabeth Nason [Elizabeth Nason, (?-1988)] was the wife of the president then. Fabulous person and she took me under her wing in a way that was so great with her expectation of, you know, that I would be a successful faculty wife which I don’t think I ever was.

**CW:** You were pretty successful.

**RW:** We did cook out of *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* [*The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, by Alice B. Toklas, 1954] one time.

**CW:** In the garage.

**RW:** We injected a lamb roast with gin. (laughter)

**CW:** Disaster.

**RW:** But I started teaching acting for nothing at Carleton just because kids wanted it. We used to meet sometimes at six thirty in the morning, I mean, I can’t believe it, but we did. That got old very fast. And then they hired me to do it and I did it at a normal time and then somebody said, Direct a play so I directed a play—all of this not paid, of course, but it was like, Why not? I’m just busy being a faculty wife. And then finally, I think it was [Dean] Willis Weatherford [Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., (1916-1996)] in ’67, ’68, I—they gave me an actual job, so they paid me for the two productions I directed, maybe not for the—So, my job is regularized until the mid-seventies.

**KH:** And there was no theater department or program.
RW: No, the guy who did theater at Carleton—there was always theater—but the guy who did it was in the English department full time and the guy they hired was in the English department full time and he—a wonderful man, who’s still living in Northfield, just a wonderful guy—directed and—since 1970, I started directing all the time, play after play after play and they paid me per play and then I was teaching and finally they tenured me into the English department so I was in English. And, you know, Carl has a chair at Carleton and so do I. This happened quite a bit later.

KH: Okay, and part of the reason I asked that question is when I was getting ready for this interview, I saw an article—I wish I had gotten the student’s name. It was one of your students who wrote about your impending retirement at the time and they were talking about, you know, you’re coming to Carleton as a faculty wife. And they—I can’t even remember if it was a male or a female student—wrote something about how, anyone who knows Ruth knows that she wouldn’t have been content to just be a faculty wife in the traditional sense.

RW: That was my total objective was to be a good faculty wife, it was. It didn’t last but, I mean, I had no idea. I was a fifties girl.

KH: Yeah, okay. So, how would you describe—at the time you get there in 1964—and you’ve already alluded to and made reference to the fact that, you know, antiwar sentiment on the campus grew—

RW: It changed dramatically.

KH: So, when you got there in ’64, what was the tenor of the campus conversation about the war if there was any?

RW: Can I answer? It’s a really interesting time. We got there in ’64 and there’s still a kind of an old school way of being in a college. I think there were class differences so—I can remember the wonderful Elizabeth Nason saying, “Don’t buy your liquor at the local liquor store. We don’t want that to be visible to the town.” So, there’s a town/gown split and it’s on the cusp of the big change and I think the antiwar movement is one of the driving factors in that change. You can disagree with me, but—

CW: No, I wouldn’t disagree with you.

RW: I mean, it was just going right from very conservative, well-behaved, good works, good people, not quite hat and gloves but almost—to a different ethos and the agent of change is the antiwar movement, I think, which builds from that point. It’s not there in ’64 particularly, do you think?

CW: I’m trying to think back to ’64 and—

RW: Well, we didn’t think we would stay at Carleton.

CW: No, first of all, yes. There was no sense that we were going to stay.
RW: No, because, for one thing, you were fired almost immediately. (laughter)

CW: That’s true. See, you know, now that you bring that up.

KH: You were fired? How come?

RW: He wasn’t the right sort.

CW: I was not the right sort for a Carleton professor at that time. There was a feeling that I was a very strange individual.

RW: You were out of control; you were unruly; you used bad language.

CW: That’s true. I was all these things and—

RW: I wasn’t bad. I was good.

CW: No, you weren’t bad but that first year, ’64 to ’65, I was out of my skin. I mean, I—

RW: We had just come back from France.

CW: And I didn’t know what I was doing there. I didn’t know why George Mosse had put me there.

RW: He was so smart about that, so smart.

CW: And, yes, I was, I—I must have been loud; I must have been talking a lot.

RW: You’re still loud, yes.

CW: Because by—was it December or early in ’65, I got a letter from the dean saying that I was not going to be rehired.

RW: And we were relieved, I have to tell you.

CW: Well, I said, “Okay,” I knew it was going to happen so that was it.

RW: And there were other jobs at that time, too. This was not like now.

CW: Yeah, well, basically, as somebody born in 1934, and it’s hard to believe that there weren’t very many people like me around. So I wasn’t really worried about not getting another job. And then basically I think in the spring term of ’65, a funny thing happened. There was another young man, who was hired the same time I was, who was much more—I mean, he maybe was trying to be, but he was much more straight arrow than I was. And they fired him, not
me. And so, before the spring term was over, I get another letter saying, well, we’ve rethought it and maybe you should stay.

KH: That was quick.

CW: And I sort of shrugged and said, “Okay, I’ll stay.” But that first year at Carleton, when I look back on it, I would have to say either I was going to change or that school was going to change and there was no way—you will excuse the term—that a pissant young, assistant professor, was going to change that place except because of the war and the students. And it was quite clear, I think, by I guess, the spring of ’65, that the students were on my side, not on the dean’s side.

KH: So when I was looking through all these old issues of The Carletonian [The Carletonian, Carleton College, Northfield, MN, 1877-present], there were a couple of articles from the spring of 1965, just as you were getting fired and rehired, where they’re talking about some antiwar stuff happening on campus. There was a teach-in; there was that action party that sponsored a talk by you and another colleague on the war. So, [Carl,] you were, early on, your first year there, you’re already speaking against the war on campus.

RW: Absolutely. Yes.

KH: And are you [Ruth] going to these events? Are you vocal about it?

RW: I’m going, but remember I’m a faculty wife so I’m going and I’m talking informally with people that we like and know, but even people who became really actively antiwar later on, a little later on, were not at that point so you’re pretty isolated right then.

CW: Yeah.

RW: I mean, people who became, you know, grew beards, did everything to be everything anti—

CW: That’s very funny. When I came on campus, I was the only bearded faculty member.

RW: Well, it was all men; there were no women except, you know, in physical education and music; economics and English and everyone else was a man and everybody wore jackets and ties.

CW: Oh, yeah. Well, I wore a jacket and tie, too, but I had a beard.

RW: But he had the beard. So, it was a completely different—it’s that on-the-cusp thing that I hope you get in the archives that you do—the sense that that war is a catalyst for enormous change that just goes right down into—
**CW:** The funny thing about that beard thing. It’s true and now it’s kind of absolutely hard to understand it but beards had a weird significance in the sixties. If you were bearded, you were lefty.

**RW:** Or weird.

**CW:** Or weird. But if you had a beard, it was an open sign of discontent with the status quo.

**KH:** Well, and style is politicized, right? So how you look, what you wear becomes kind of an outward expression of your politics.

**CW:** Right.

**RW:** So, you’re dealing with a period of enormous change in that sense, too, the ethos of dress, food, so many things are subject—

**KH:** Music.

**RW:** Oh, music, of course.

**KH:** It was the sixties.

**RW:** Of course, so that sixties culture is, political is maybe the spearhead of it, but it [was] just massive cultural change.

**KH:** So, what were the demographics of both the student body and the faculty at Carleton in terms of race early on when you were there?

**RW:** White male faculty.

**CW:** Yeah, very white.

**RW:** Except for—there was a very distinguished historian, Katie Boyd [Catherine Evangeline “Katie” Boyd], who became my friend, who I liked very much.

**CW:** And she became my protector, too.

**RW:** Yeah, and Harriet Sheridan [Harriet W. Sheridan (1925-1992), who was a vital force in the English department but who went—afterwards she went to Brown [Brown University, Providence, RI] and I think was a dean at Brown.

**CW:** Yeah. Carlton Qualey [Carlton C. Qualey (1904-1988)] was the chair of the history department. And he was a local boy. His father—

**RW:** He named him after Carleton.
CW: He had gotten a New York degree, I remember so—

RW: He was married to E.E. Cummings’ [Edward Estlin "E. E." Cummings (1894-1962)] sister; Elizabeth Qualey [Elizabeth Cummings Qualey (1901-1980)] was E.E. Cummings’ sister.

CW: And I think Carlton protected me, too.

RW: I don’t know. I was so relieved when you were fired that we could get out of there.

CW: Yeah, I know.

KH: And then rehired just—

RW: Rehired and it was like a signifier of what’s going on. That this change, that the old style is going and suddenly there’s a new openness to a different style.

CW: I had—

RW: You weren’t the only one. There were a lot of new faculty who were trouble makers—

CW: But I have this visual; I have this image. I can remember this. It was in Great Hall. I believe it was in spring of ’65. You’re sitting there—

RW: Oh, yeah. No, I know, I know.

CW: and Elizabeth was on one side of you and was John Nason [John William Nason (1905-2001)] on the other side of you?

RW: I was sitting between them.

CW: And I’m speaking, haranguing and Ruthie is sitting there between the president and the president’s wife.

RW: Well, I liked them both, especially Elizabeth. I really liked her.

CW: That must have been pretty early on; must have been ’65.

RW: It was the end of ’65. It was the spring.

CW: Oh, the end of ’65.

RW: It was in the spring. You were the senior class’s choice as its speaker.

CW: Oh, yes, that was why I was speaking.

RW: Yes, that was why you were speaking.
CW: “The Professor as Dancing Bear.”

RW: Yes, I think—

CW: That was the title.

RW: I think so.

KH: So, this is your first year there and the students choose you to—

RW: He’s been rehired.

KH: Okay.

RW: I mean, he has another year, but he was told that he, you know—

CW: You stay another year but we’re not going to hire you.

KH: Okay.

CW: And then they—

RW: No, after.

KH: So, what is your relationship with the students? I mean, you’re kind of describing this period of transition where—from this kind of staid, traditional, formal campus to one that becomes not that so much.

RW: It’s politicizing little by little.

KH: And is it—I mean, clearly, it’s that politicization is coming from some faculty. What about the students? What are they bringing in here?

RW: Well, here’s what happened in that, which you might not remember, is that traditionally the senior class chose the speaker from the faculty. That was always held in the chapel, always. With Carl, they thought, Keep him out of the chapel; put it in Great Hall. So the students had a thing to protest about.

CW: Oh, they left.

RW: Yes, they all left, except you yelled at them to come back because I was there, and I could not leave between Elizabeth and John Nason (laughter). So you yelled at them. You said, “Would you come back, you little bastards,” or something.

CW: No, I didn’t say bastards.
You did, Carl.

I did?

You did. And they all turn around and they come back.

Okay.

And I’m sitting there like death and John and Elizabeth Nason are incredibly well-bred, lovely people, who are not acknowledging that there is anything weird going on. So, the students come back. Carl does his talk on dancing bears or whatever.

“Professor as Dancing Bear.”

“You did. And they all turn around and they come back.”

Yeah, okay. The thing at Carleton and it must be true of student bodies all over, is that they became intensely mobilized. *The Carletonian* was their—

Well, she’s seen those *Carletonians* from that period.

*The Carletonian* was the center of their status and their power. And by the spring of ’65—and I can even remember this. His name was Dick Sadler [Richard “Dick” Sadler].

Of course, you remember Dick Sadler. He was your student.

Right.

And he’s a mature gentleman now.

But these guys, you know, there would be a teach-in or something like this and, you know, Bald Spot, which was the place there. I didn’t have to do anything. They’d get me out there, in front of there. There was the mic, there was the loud speaker system. They would organize the whole thing. They were right on top of things. They were in control in this sense. So, in that sense, it was a student movement. It was not a faculty movement; it was a student movement.

It was driven by students. Actually, Jane Pinsky [Pinsky, Jane] would be a fabulous person for you to talk to. She’s at Politico [Politico Media, VA] now; she’s in North Carolina, poor thing, but she’s a lobbyist and a very important one. And she was very much—she was very close to us; she took care of my son Nick who is now fifty, almost fifty-one years old, when he was little, and she was so personally involved in all of this and she knows it all and she knew all the kids; all the people; she’d be a great person to talk to and I’ll give you her phone number.

That would be great. And so, she was a student?
RW: She was a student and very close to Carl and very close to me.

CW: Janey P. That was it, yeah. By ’65—

KH: Which is interesting to me that students already, and I mean, I know this is happening across the country; it’s not just here; it’s not just at Carleton, but that’s pretty early on in the war, right? We only send the marines in March of ’65 and almost immediately there are these sit-ins; there are teach-ins; there are all these things happening, you know, organized by students, and, of course, it blossoms as the war goes on but—

RW: I wonder, I mean, I said that the first death I knew about in Vietnam was [the brother of] this student, Toni Dorfman, and I wonder how many of those personal things galvanized groups, which then spread. Those things can happen very quickly in a student population, especially a live-in college like Carleton which, you know, was all dorms and—

CW: He was—Dick Sadler’s friend—he died. He worked, graduated, and went to work for The Nation, and I can’t remember his name. He was a lovely kid; very nice kid.

RW: Was he at your birthday party? That big birthday party?

CW: I can’t remember. He died very early on.

RW: Yes, and I remember him, too, and I can’t remember his name and that was—we were both very upset about it.

CW: Terrible. I’m blanking on his name.

RW: We’re old so we forget everything.

CW: But he and Dick Sadler were buddies—they were buddies. And they ran things. So, the student body was galvanized.

KH: Now one of the differences between talking to people who are faculty and people who were students on a campus like this is that students are there for four years and you’re there much longer than that, so you have a longer view.

RW: But students have this long-term relationship with Carleton. It was amazing; they marry each other, and their kids go to Carleton or their moms went. I mean, it is a very focal place for—not everyone—but for a lot of the Carleton people.

CW: When I get to Carleton, I’d just been—I’m thirty and essentially, I don’t feel that much age difference from the students.

RW: And I’m twenty-four.
CW: And she is—

RW: Not much older than—

CW: Not much older than the students and so I was closer to the students than I think I was to a great many of the faculty who were much older than me and very well established and very, you know—

RW: They’re a product, the ones who were there then, are the product of a different generation of faculty which had class implications; where they went to graduate school, what, you know—

CW: Well, some of them. Who’s the guy in the English department? I liked him; we liked him. He liked us and he had the G.I. Bill. That’s how he got his education. What was his name? Very handsome, young—not that old, I mean, we were thinking sort of middle-aged then, but he wasn’t—he couldn’t have been more than forty or something.

RW: I can’t remember, and my memory is just—

CW: And a lot of those guys, a lot of the faculty, by ’60, had gotten their education under the G.I. Bill, right? Had fought or been part of the armed services in World War II and for them, what we were saying and doing, I mean, they were uneasy—at least uneasy about it because it seemed we were being treasonous. And they had a great deal more trouble than we did adjusting to the fact that this was a different world and a different America. So I think in that sense, in terms of life expectations or the way we looked at the world, we were closer to the students than we were to the faculty.

RW: Yeah, I think that’s definitely true and the faculty all seemed like grownups.

CW: Yeah, they seemed like grownups and we seemed like little snots.

RW: Well—

CW: Well, they, when you looked at it. I mean, what was I? Why was I saying these things?

RW: But, you know, lots of them became very close friends.

CW: Oh, later on.

RW: As time went on—

CW: Well, they changed.

RW: like Bard Smith [Bardwell Leith Smith (1925- )]. Have you talked about him at all?

KH: Un-huh.
RW: He taught religion at Carleton and I remember fighting with him because he was not antiwar when we first started but he becomes antiwar and he’s still around.

KH: What was his first name?

RW: Bardwell Smith. And he became a very good friend, but he went through that evolution of political whatever.

CW: All right. I remember this. Okay, we went to New York in ’65 in the summer.

RW: Yeah, right.

CW: We were in New York, right?

RW: Yeah.

CW: And we come back to campus in the fall of ’65 and guess what? Everybody has a beard. (laughter)

RW: Fast change.

KH: That is fast. Really.

CW: All the faculty have beards—

RW: I think the equivalent now—

CW: or a lot of them have beards and that’s when I knew we had won. (laughter)

RW: It’s pretty early to say that, but yeah.

CW: No, it was true. We went away and everybody was clean shaven. We came back in September and everybody had a beard.

RW: I know, and the ties sort of went.

CW: Yeah, the ties went away, and the shirts were half buttoned, and half unbuttoned and—

RW: It was really—it was funny.

KH: So, what are—I’m going to just give you a big benchmark here because, just because. So, from, let’s say that first year, from ’64 to ’65 to 1968, which is, of course, this year getting a lot of attention because it’s the fiftieth anniversary of all of those tumultuous events of 1968, but how has campus, how has the antiwar movement at Carleton, changed in those years, from your first year to ’68?
CW: From ’65 to ’68?

KH: Um-hm.

RW: Well, it’s the most important thing there is at this point. Students march on the federal building; they get arrested—which Jane would tell you about because she was one of the ones who was arrested. Thank god, she doesn’t have a record, but she was. The militancy is much more—I mean, the war doesn’t seem to be stopping and look at how long it goes on.

CW: I’m trying to think of the year I got that phone call from Washington. Reed Whittemore [Edward Reed Whittemore, Jr. (1919-2012)]—used to live on the other side of the street.

RW: Yeah, he’s now dead, but he was poet laureate for a while.

CW: Okay, Johnson is still president I know that, and I get this—I do get a phone call. Guy doesn’t even give me a name and it must be when Johnson was contemplating running again so it’s got to be his second—no, it’s after his second term or something like that.

RW: Well, ’68 is his second—that’s the term he resigns from—because ’64 is Goldwater [Barry Morris Goldwater (1909-1998)]/Johnson.

CW: But the phone call is from somebody that identifies himself as calling from Washington and he says, “What do I think about Johnson running again?” And I unload on him. “That son of a bitch?” I’m ashamed of it now because Johnson looks pretty good these days.

RW: Compared to a lot of other people, you know. But he—

CW: But I unloaded and said, “I’ll never vote for him. He’ll never run.” You know, so by that time things have changed so much that for some reason—and I still believe it was Reed Whittemore gave somebody my name because I didn’t know anybody from Washington and Reed was in Washington—that I could sort of unabashedly say, Well, of course, somebody’s going to call me about Johnson running again and I’m going to tell him just exactly what I think. So, things had changed completely. It wasn’t—the student body versus the antiwar movement was, by that time, so what else is new? I mean, of course. The war is horribly unpopular. Errors have been made—

RW: In our world. I mean, there were probably worlds where it was popular, but not in our world.

KH: The Tet Offensive that year starts changing even in those other worlds where—

RW: And that’s Nixon [US President Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994)]

KH: Well, the Tet Offensive, right, is in January of ’68, so just before Johnson decides he’s not going to run after McCarthy [Eugene Joseph McCarthy (1916-2005)] makes a showing in New Hampshire. Were you involved at all with—Minnesota is kind of an interesting place to be
during that ’68 election, because we had, you know, once Johnson bows out, we have Humphrey [Hubert Horatio Humphrey Jr. (1911-1978)] and McCarthy, both Minnesotans running for the nomination?

**RW:** We were anti-Humphrey because he was pro-war, we thought, and we loved Gene McCarthy, because he’s antiwar plus the convention in ’68 in Chicago—

**CW:** You know was very rough.

**RW:** My mother got maced at that convention. My little old mother who was out there demonstrating. Awful. So, I mean, maybe it’s unjust, I mean, we never acknowledge the good things that Johnson did, the civil rights things. We never did, but that all seemed to pale in terms of what he did in the war. And the documentary that we saw—I don’t remember who did it. There was a documentary about the cover-up during the war, with Johnson really (unclear) and spouting false news. I don’t think it was Ken Burns [Kenneth Lauren Burns (1953- )]; it must have been someone else.

**CW:** No, it was—

**RW:** Was it Burns?

**CW:** I don’t think it was Burns. I’m not sure.

**RW:** Anyway, it was fascinating to watch because Johnson was doing good stuff outside of the war.

**KH:** And I think he really wanted to focus on those domestic programs—

**RW:** I know, and he could have done it, a Texas southerner. He could have done it. It’s like a huge waste.

**KH:** It’s very tragic in many ways, I mean, for him.

**CW:** Yeah, but that was his whole—I mean, well, are we going to lose Vietnam the way we had quote, unquote lost China? I mean, these are the kind of things. The dominant thing is still sort of World War II, the way we had fought; the way we had won—

**RW:** And then the anti-Communist thing happens in the fifties.

**CW:** Right. And—

**RW:** In the forties and the fifties.

**CW:** Yeah, presidents could lose China, I mean, this is—the whole outlook and the people I was reading—and again, I’d say, echoing, were the people who said, The world is a different world. This is not the world of World War II. It’s over; that’s over, right? And to a certain extent,
it was really. I think Ruth is right, the beard or whatever it was, it was a generational thing. It was one generation that basically had lost its way and there was a new generation that rightly and wrongly—

RW: Offered answers. I think that—

CW: thought it knew all the answers.

RW: So, this period that you’re dealing with is at the peak but underneath that is all this change that’s going on. It’s ethically changing; it’s changing in every possible way and we were somewhat conscious of it when we’re living through it, but in retrospect, I think it was an absolutely volcanic change that’s going on in the country and sort of like what’s happening now which is horrible.

CW: Then there was ’70 and ’71, the whole—

RW: Yeah, that whole period.

CW: Right.

RW: Going from about ’66, ’67 until the war is over in ’75.

CW: Yeah, you know, the last—

RW: I mean, think of it. The war goes on for—

CW: the last—

RW: ten years?

CW: What was the thing? What was going to be the new horrible thing that was going to— what was the term that was used? I’m blanking on it.

RW: I don’t know what you mean.

CW: The new scandal, screw-up we would nowadays call it coming out of Washington. Johnson didn’t seem to know what to do, obviously didn’t know what to do. And—

RW: You mean the surrender and the loss of Saigon and leaving all those people behind and—?

CW: Right.

RW: There’s a phenomenal description of it in this novel that I just read—Viet Thanh Nguyen’s book.
CW: Yeah, the photograph –

RW: Wasn’t that good?

CW: The photograph of that helicopter being pushed off the aircraft carrier’s deck.

RW: Unbelievable. But that—I just finished that book and it is—

CW: Which book?

RW: Well, I’ll show you.


RW: Yes, *The Sympathizer—

KH: The big novel? I know he has a couple out.

RW: Yep.

KH: Oh yeah, yep.

CW: What book is that?

RW: Well, the beginning description—

CW: Oh, yeah, I haven’t read this book.

RW: Well, you can read it.

KH: It’s a good one.

RW: It’s really good. And the character is amazing.

KH: I read that. So, you know, as you’re talking about all these kind of sea changes that are happening across the country during this time period, one of them is also the women’s movement. So how is that—well, let me ask this. What was the role and/or presence of women in the antiwar movement at Carleton?

RW: As strong as you could possibly imagine. And that’s a reason to talk to Jane, who’s—I’ll actually give you the number because a lot of women were, you know, tremendously involved. And there is, you know, there’s this consciousness raising group that, of course, I’m a part of, but a lot of it was about, He leaves his socks on the floor all the time, I mean, it was—

KH: Personal politics, right?
RW: And men, I think, were very threatened by—we’d all go out drinking after women’s meetings—it was truly laughable about it but it’s the inception of something that becomes very strong and powerful.

CW: Is this before or after Harriet Sheridan becomes dean?

RW: I don’t remember when Harriet Sheridan becomes dean. I think it’s before. This is 1969 that I’m talking about.

CW: Okay, I was probably retrograde.

RW: Oh my god, I mean, it’s not just you, but I think the whole idea that seemed so preposterous and we—

CW: Harriet Sheridan was a force, I mean—

RW: Yes, she was.

CW: She was a force—

RW: But it took—

CW: And she probably was a good president but then she went—

RW: with Howard Swearer to Brown.

CW: Yeah.

RW: But I remember Toni Sostek [Antoinette “Toni” Sostek (1937-1996)], the wife of my colleague who taught dance at Carleton was a wonderful woman who died very young. We finished our first meeting—He leaves his socks on the floor—what? I mean—and she goes, “This is a load of shit,” and we all start laughing because it is so true. On the other hand, it was really important, too. A lot of the women in that group went back to school, got degrees, got much more serious about career questions.

KH: So were these women from Northfield in general—

RW: Oh, gosh, all kinds—not all faculty wives; there were women who worked in the library. There were—any woman who wanted to be in it could be in it and we met every week.

KH: So maybe talking about socks was the entry point?

RW: Well, the dumb stuff that really annoys you at first and then it gets much more profound. Sherry, the wife of the rabbi, Sherry Woocher, and I both fanaticized about work at that point. I mean, it was really important.
CW: This is an inglorious chapter in my life, how I—my first real sense that I really didn’t know what the hell I was doing. I was chair, Eleanor—

RW: Oh my god, Carl, you were awful. How could you do that?

CW: Can I finish?

RW: Go ahead.

CW: Okay, Eleanor Zelliot [Eleanor Zelliot (1926-2016)]

RW: Who’s a very—was—she’s dead now.

CW: Very, very well respected scholar of Southeast Asian Indian history.

RW: She wrote on untouchables; she’s had books and—

CW: All right. She’s coming up for tenure. I’m chair and I have a meeting with her in which I want to reassure her, and I actually said, “Eleanor, you have nothing to worry about. You’re the only woman in the department and you’re going to get tenure.”

RW: Can you believe this?

CW: And it was only—she just went away, right? And when you heard about it, you ripped me from one side to the other.

RW: And then Eleanor did, too.

CW: And Eleanor did, too. What an idiot I had been by saying—

RW: You thought you were being reassuring—

CW: As it happened it was true. She had nothing to worry about.

RW: Carl, enough!

CW: There was no way they weren’t going to give her tenure.

RW: But that’s partly because she was a really brilliant scholar and a great teacher.

CW: Yes. And I should have said that and not said anything about her being the only woman in the department. So, I’m not proud of that, you know, but that was how retrograde I was.

KH: Well, and part of, a lot of the history that’s been written about the women’s movement focuses on the fact that a lot of the women, these feminists, who come out of the movement as a
whole, whether it’s the civil rights movement or the antiwar movement, in part because they say, Look, even among our progressive brothers—

**RW:** Yes.

**KH:** we’re making the coffee in the kitchen; we’re not doing the public speaking; we’re still relegated to these kinds of support roles.

**RW:** And your voice isn’t heard. I mean a woman’s voice—now I think it’s recently become louder but boy, then, trying to talk in a meeting. I mean, I was a faculty member, a full faculty member by this time, but still, many decisions got made in the men’s locker room at the gym. I mean, I don’t think it was—

**CW:** Well, wait a—all right. I’m going to be skeptical. You know, I wasn’t in a men’s locker room at the gym that much myself. 

**RW:** No, you weren’t but there were a lot of guys who were, who were making departmental decisions; were making, you know—

**CW:** Not in the history department. 

**RW:** Oh, Carl, please. This isn’t a good time for a private argument. (laughter)

**CW:** Okay.

**KH:** I have a sister-in-law who’s a civil engineer and I mean, she’s been doing it for a long time, but she even more recently would talk about the golf course because all of these guys would go play golf and they’re just—and again, it’s not intentional, it’s a culture where—

**RW:** Intentional or deliberate.

**KH:** Right.

**RW:** It’s deliberate.

**CW:** I don’t play golf either.

**RW:** A lot of guys were in the changing room at the—everyone did their athletics at lunch time and a lot of things got decided there, including things about Paul Wellstone [Paul David Wellstone (1944-2002)] like the bus. That was Ed’s idea.

**CW:** Yes, it was Ed’s idea.

**RW:** I know, but—

**CW:** I drove him around.
RW: I know you did.

CW: Paul’s first political venture—well, in the Democratic Party—

RW: Was running for state auditor.

CW: was running for state auditor. That was the campaign in which at one point, he admitted that he didn’t know how to multiply. And who was the guy, the Republican?

RW: I can’t—he became governor at some point. [Arne Carlson (1934 - ), governor of Minnesota, 1991-1999]

CW: You’re right, but I drove Paul because Paul had a Datsun. That was the only car he had, a Japanese car. I had an Oldsmobile.

RW: And a truck.

CW: And a truck. So, I drove Paul—and I wanted—that summer I said to him, because I didn’t know anything about the state—I knew Carleton; I knew the Twin Cities. I didn’t know anything about the rest of the state so for me, I said, “Well, the only way to do it is I’m going to drive Paul around the state,” and I did. And I was—Well, he said I was the worst advance man he had ever had and—

RW: You graded papers while he was speaking.

CW: Well, I was either correcting papers or preparing my lectures and so I was not a good—I was a good driver.

RW: Remember “Look interested?”

CW: What?

RW: Remember “Look interested?”

CW: I couldn’t even do that.

RW: No, I know it.

CW: So, I was the worst advance man he had ever had. But the poor guy didn’t have any money so he had to take what he could get. And I did have the nice big red Oldsmobile, so we drove around in that.

RW: On the anniversary of Paul’s death one—
CW: And the funny thing is I would remember, guys would come up to me—they would do this—they would volunteer this and these were guys from the 1930s who had, you know, been fighting trade unionists, 1930, when I was barely born for god’s sakes, and they would say Paul is talking their language and stuff like that. And I would agree with that.

RW: I think it really changed the world, I do.

CW: Yeah, but that was my experience. Paul and I would teach in adjoining classrooms and Paul got very mad with me because he said, “His kids were not learning about American politics, they were learning about the French Revolution because I talked so loud.” And so, I said, and from then on, I’d stay near the windows and I’d talk out the windows so that Paul wouldn’t get upset.

RW: I don’t know what else we can say.

KH: So, tell me about Paris.

CW: What?

KH: Tell me about Paris in ’68. You were in Paris in ’68.

RW: We had a lot of friends who were activists in—Monique Stalens at that time and other people—we lived in Paris, so we knew a lot of people and a lot of left people. One of our very close friends was a reporter for Humanité [L’Humanité, 1904-present]—

CW: Vidal.

RW: Raymond Vidal. That was his journalist’s name; I don’t think it was his real name. So, there was a tremendous amount of political agitation in Paris and May/June of ’68 had just happened and we knew a lot of people within that.

CW: And they would organize themselves and they would have these—and that came straight out of the French Revolution—États-Généraux—Estates General of Theater, of Music and stuff like that.

RW: Remember Jean-Louis Barrault [Jean-Louis Barrault (1911-1994)] was evicted from the Odeon [Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, Paris]? I mean, there was a lot of overt change. I don’t know if there was that much internal change but there was a lot of demonstrated change.

It was really exciting to be in Paris at that time although the really violent stuff had happened already. We get there in September.

CW: Yeah, we’re there in September.

RW: On a Fulbright [Fulbright Scholar Program].
CW: And they hadn’t burned the archives down thank god so I could work there.

RW: You could work there.

CW: And then we were in Rome [Rome, Italy].

RW: For six months.

KH: So how long were you in Europe?

RW: A year.

KH: Okay, a full year. Between Paris and Rome?

RW: Yes. Carl had a Fulbright. We had a baby. We had a two-year-old; one-year old; one-and-a-half-year-old. I guess he was nine months old when we went to Paris.

CW: Well, we ended up—

RW: And we hired Isabella. Remember Isabella?

CW: Yeah, and we ended up in Prague [Prague, Czech Republic].

RW: No, not then. In ’70.

CW: And Nicky was, by that time that was with Jane Pinsky. He was a little toddler with his head out the window.

RW: So, Paris in ’68 was still—I guess you could say in recovery, but—I mean, there was a lot of militancy but there weren’t the same objectives that I think there had been before. It was a place that attracted a lot of people who were sort of revolutionary and wanted—

CW: And the old establishment—and in a funny way I was just thinking about this because I just read the Times [New York Times, New York, NY, “#MeToo Brought Down 201 Powerful Men. Nearly Half of Their Replacements Are Women,” October 29, 2018] thing about the two hundred guys who have been kicked out because of the Me Too movement and a hundred of them, and to a much less extent, I think Paris in ’68—a lot of the old establishment had been—well, either voluntarily removed themselves or had been pushed out and so there was a lot of fresh blood there. And there again, was this real sense of auto-organization, or people just organizing themselves right away, knowing how to do that, running the whole damn thing.

RW: A lot of people emerged out of that.

CW: Right.
RW: You know what made me think of that? This girl who was in the [Parkland] shooting in Florida, what’s her name? Do you know who I mean? [Emma Gonzalez]

KH: Yes. I can’t think of her name, but I know who—

RW: She makes me, you know, think of Danny the Red [Daniel Marc Cohn-Bendit (1945-)], who was like a student figure who emerged out of that whole conflict. Hers is, of course, different, but it’s just that conflict throws up people who—

CW: Danny the Red, yeah.

RW: Danny the Red, yeah.

KH: So, when you’re in Paris in ’68, what are you hearing there from the French people, Parisians, about the war in Vietnam? What is their take on it?

RW: They’re distracted. I think they’re distracted. They’re all, I think, very anti-American and against the war but I can’t remember a lot of talk about the war. There was les événements which really usurped everyone’s attention and we were Americans, but we were forgiven for being Americans by our friends.

CW: Well, I would usually preface any public remarks I was saying that I come—I live in the mouth of the beast. But there was a sense, I think, that the American left, or the younger Americans, had shown that they were not—

RW: But they liked Jane Fonda [Jane Seymour Fonda (1937-)] a lot.

CW: Yeah, they liked Jane Fonda a lot.

RW: Our friends were mostly left and political.

CW: Yeah, they were.

RW: And a lot were in theater, like Monique [Stalens] and [Jean-Marie] Binoche [parents of Juliette Binoche] and lots of those people were. And by the time we were there in ’68, we just had Nick. We didn’t have any other kids.

CW: No, we didn’t. I can’t remember anything very distinctive about it except that all the old guys were gone or were leaving. There was a lot of movement, a lot of speeches, but I could work in the libraries. I could work in the archives. There was no problem with that.

RW: And I felt completely at home, especially where we lived. It was not—

CW: Wasn’t that the guy who used to run the Odeon?
RW: Yes, Jean-Louis Barrault was a great figure in French theater who was booted from the Odeon and he did one of the great productions I’ve ever seen in my life, that adaption of the Rabelais.

CW: We went to that.

RW: I went to it several times.

CW: I remember that.

RW: Wasn’t it great? He used the strippers from the Crazy Horse.

CW: Yeah, the Crazy Horse strippers.

RW: But it was so good—he did it in a wrestling arena because he’s booted from the Odeon and he uses a lot of kabuki moves on these—the ways into the wrestling ring. It was just a fabulous production. And I remember it in detail because I saw it maybe three, four times. And I took you once.

CW: And in Rome we went to something because there was a—Danny the Red was there.

RW: I don’t remember.

CW: Well, there was a great big crowd with—were we in Milan [Milan, Italy]?

RW: No, we went to the Bread and Puppet [Bread and Puppet Theater, New York, NY] in Rome.

CW: In Rome.

RW: The Bread and Puppet Theater came to Rome.

CW: And the crowd was screaming “C-I-A, C-I-A,” because they thought—some Americans thought the CIA was behind the—

RW: The Bread and Puppet?

CW: repression.

RW: I don’t—I think the Bread and Puppet was exempt from suspicion.

KH: So, you were saying earlier that it was in 1968 you went to Paris and you had your broken leg.

RW: No, not—
CW: No, no, not—

RW: That’s later.

KH: Oh, that’s right, because—

RW: He broke his leg in 1970.

KH: The broken leg, that’s right—that’s when the photos are from 1970. Photos in the *Carletonian* of you at some of these protests on campus that crop up after the incursion into Cambodia and the shootings at Kent and Jackson State [Jackson State College, Jackson, MS].

RW: So ’68 is very different. In ’68, you know, give precedence to the *évènements* in Paris, the, you know, what’s going on there, although the antiwar movement is growing and growing and growing in the states.

KH: Right. So, you come home then in ’69, the fall of ’69?

RW: Yes.

KH: And you’re back on campus at Carleton. The fall of ’69, of course, is when there are the big moratorium events in—well, across the country.

RW: There’s teach-ins, I mean, there’s a lot of—and it’s before Kent State and Kent State was a very big deal of course.

CW: April, wasn’t it April of ’70.

RW: I think it’s in April of ’70.

CW: Kent State.

KH: The shooting happened on May fourth, but the Cambodia thing was April thirtieth, so—

RW: And May fourth, the four students are killed. That was horrendous.

KH: Yeah, so tell me about the reaction on campus to that.

RW: To Kent State?

KH: Um-hm.

RW: Everyone was in mourning.

CW: Horrendous.
RW: I mean, that would touch them because in some sense they’re safe in their activism, you know, they can get in trouble with the police; they can get in trouble with their parents, which is what happened some of the time, but to be killed in a demonstration, that’s horrifying.

CW: That was the first blood of American students.

RW: Yeah, or that we know about.

CW: That we knew about where the repression had become absolutely open and absolutely murderous. Those students had been killed like this was something.

RW: And we had—and everyone was in grief, too, for those people because our own students seemed to be in harm’s way because of what happened. Were you born at that time?

KH: I was born in ’68.

RW: She was born right then at that moment.

KH: In May of ’68.

CW: That’s when we marched—there was a big march on the State Capitol.

RW: Jane [Pinsky] knows all about that because she was arrested at one of these and she’s—

CW: Was that the photo that I can’t find of me being pushed in a wheelchair.

RW: That’s got to be ’70 because that’s when you had your broken leg.

CW: Yeah, because I was still in a cast.

RW: You know, talking to you makes me realize what a long, long time it was because we’re—Carl and I are against the war in like ’65, ’66. We’re not—not everybody is, but we are, and it doesn’t end for another like ten years?

CW: Well, no, it ends after ’71.

RW: Well, ’75 is when we leave Saigon that’s so amazingly described in this thing, leaving all those people.

KH: So, was there a student strike on campus after Kent State do you remember? I know there were at campuses across the country.

CW: I think there was.

RW: I think there was, too, but I don’t remember.
CW: I don’t remember much of it.

KH: Now one thing, and again, you may or may not remember, but in looking at all these Carletonians, I think by—and this is happening in Minnesota at campuses across Minnesota and across the country. In 1970, there’s Kent State; there’s student strikes all over and then it goes relatively quiet for a while, a little bit until 1972 when Nixon renews the bombing and mines the harbors in Haiphong [Haiphong, Vietnam]. And so, April of 1972, about two years after Kent State, things really erupt again, including at the University of Minnesota and Mankato State and at both of those places, the protests on campus in 1972 are much more tense; there’s more conflict between law enforcement and the students. You know, the students at Mankato State are occupying the highway; they’re shutting down the bridge. Up at the University of Minnesota there are barricades—there’s tear gas. It’s much more tense than in 1970.

It doesn’t seem to me, from what I looked at from the Carletonians, that that was quite the case at Carleton. Is that—do you remember anything about that?

RW: I don’t remember.

CW: I have no memory.

RW: I mean, I remember, as you recite it, what happened in that period, but I don’t remember an intensification in the protests or a change in the protest but that may be my memory. I mean, I just don’t remember.

CW: I can’t remember. Did I—did the Carletonian publish anything I wrote then?

KH: I didn’t see anything that you wrote but they have a quote from you. So in April of 1972, there’s an article in The Carletonian that is describing a quiet, kind of disappointing rally—

RW: And who wrote it?

KH: Oh, I don’t remember the name. I have it and I can certainly send it to you. But they quote you at this rally—but I think this is before the mining of the harbor so there might be a really quick change here—but they quote you, Carl, as saying at this event, “I am a defeated man.” Do you remember having any sense of feeling like that? In fact, let me—

CW: Man, I’m blanking.

RW: I can’t remember it either. I think it had been going on for so long that there’s a dissolving together of different phases in the whole thing so that remembering it all these years later, a long time ago, fifty years ago, we, I think, have just run things together in a way.

CW: Okay. I remember something now. I remember—okay, defeated. I remember listening on the radio and it’s Nixon’s speech. Nixon is speaking and I remember that sense of—I never knew I said it—I remember the feeling of defeat that after all that turmoil, we had still done that. Okay, I do remember that. I remember standing in front of the radio—I forget which house it was.
KH: (Shows Carl and Ruth image of article on laptop) Do you see that headline? “Rally Draws a Quiet Crowd.”

RW: So people I think are really sad.

KH: It just seems with the tenor of these articles about what was happening on campus by 1972, is just energy has waned; there’s a sense of frustration that the whole—

RW: There’s another whole generation of students.

KH: And there was a comment about that—that there was this class of students who are now gone, and I think another article in later 1972, describes this change from radical students on campus to merely liberal students on campus and there’s just a sense that things are not quite as energetic as they used to be but then elsewhere—

RW: But that’s also a nostalgia for something on the part of the people who are writing.

CW: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Man, this is bringing it back to me.

RW: Who wrote the article?

CW: Huh?

RW: Who wrote the article?


RW: Yeah, he was a student of Carl’s and is a faculty member now at—

CW: Robin, Robin Bates wrote it, okay.

RW: Where does Robin teach? [The University of Maryland.]

CW: Yeah. Okay, yeah, so now I know where the defeated man comes from.

RW: In 1971, Robin Bates was on a seminar that Carl led.

CW: And they’re quoting Mike Casper [Barry Michael Casper, known as "Mike," (1929-2007)].

RW: Yeah.

CW: Description of the bombing.

RW: Who’s now dead but who was a very—
CW: His quote, “Now we kill by proxy and remote control.”

RW: He was very close to Paul Wellstone.

CW: Okay, I remember that now. I remember that feeling.

RW: This conversation is bringing back a lot of moments that I wouldn’t have thought of, I guess.


RW: I know. You said that.

CW: Yeah, it’s Robin.

RW: I know.

KH: So, also just down the page here is another thing I was going to ask you about. There are also articles about, you know, various people at Carleton buying shares of Honeywell stock to protest Honeywell because it was making cluster bombs. Were you—either of you involved in any of that Honeywell Project stuff?

RW: We were supportive of it. Marv Davidov [Marv Davidov, 1931-2012] we knew, and he came and taught at Carleton for a bit. Our neighbor, his brother was one of the Minnesota 8, Bill Tilton [Bill Tilton (1947-)]

KH: I’ve talked to Bill.

RW: Did you talk to Bill? But he knew Marv Davidov really well and, you know, there’s—how did—it’s all involved with stuff that’s happening right now. There were four nuns.

KH: Yes, the McDonald sisters [Rita, Brigid, Kate and Jane McDonald].

RW: The McDonald sisters. And a playwright named Doris Baizley, a really terrific playwright, who was very involved in politics at that time has written a play about them which is going to be done here at The History Center and Doris and Bill are friends and my neighbor is Bill’s brother.

KH: Oh, okay, yeah, very St. Paul.

RW: It’s a very St. Paul family.

CW: Kind of blacked that out.

RW: Well, how can you remember, I can’t.
CW: I remember feelings. I remember feeling that. I remember standing in front of the radio.

RW: But it seemed never to be ending. I mean—

CW: There’s that damn bug (referring to box elder bug in the room).

RW: It’s on the screen. Don’t do anything to it.

CW: It went away.

RW: The house is going to be just full. I killed about eight of them today.

CW: I killed twenty, thirty.

RW: When it goes away, do not kill it on the tablecloth because I’d never get it out.

CW: It makes a stain, or it’s scarred.

KH: So, what do you remember? And, really, you know, I think the purpose of an oral history interview, anyway, is more to get at the feelings than it is the recall of dates and specific facts. That we can confirm—

RW: We can’t remember anything.

KH: No, and that’s not the goal. But it’s more interesting, I think, to find out what you felt and remember feeling and experiencing about these things. So, what did you—what do you remember feeling or thinking about the end of the war when it did finally come?

RW: I don’t remember. I think it had gone on for so damn long that there must have been a relief but there’s also something anti-climactic because all the passionate feelings about the war—

CW: Had gone.

RW: Had happened earlier and they hadn’t affected anything and so by the time it ended, it was as though it had just exhausted itself. It wasn’t like, we won; they won. Nothing like that. It was like—

CW: Dems had lost; Nixon was in.

RW: Oh, god. So, it wasn’t a sense of, Yay, it’s over. It was like, Why did it have to go on for so long and why was so much damage done to a country, to a people, to our own soldiers? The most moving thing for me at the end period of the war were the [Vietnam] Veterans Against the War which, you know, just—it was heartbreaking.
KH: And that really was happening in 1971, when other parts of the antiwar movement may have been a little bit more quiet, but that’s when they have—they’re throwing their medals back over the fence in Washington, DC, and—

RW: Now that you say it, I remember it. And seeing the veterans in various demonstrations was heartrending. To have done that and then to feel so strongly against it. So, it sort of goes students to the population in general, and then the moving thing, for me at least, were the veterans.

CW: I don’t have anything to add to what she said, I mean, I think it was true in ’75.

RW: Seventy-five is when the war ends. Seventy-five. It’s been going on for ten years.

CW: Sixty-five to seventy-five. Sixty-four to seventy-five.

KH: And Nixon had been—

CW: Nixon is president.

KH: Well, he’s gone by ’75.

CW: What?

KH: He’s gone by ’75.

CW: Nixon?

RW: Who? When does it change?

KH: Seventy-four he’s, you know, the Watergate thing.

RW: Watergate is ’74. Thank you, I can—so Ford [US President Gerald Rudolph Ford Jr. (1913-2006)] is president. He’s sort of a nonentity president. I mean, he wasn’t really, but you didn’t feel the hate for him that you felt for Nixon.

CW: I’m trying to figure out what I felt when Ford was president and I can’t think of anything.

RW: Yeah, nothing, nothing, because he’s, you know, he’s a nebbish in—he’s perfectly—he really isn’t a noteworthy president in the way that Nixon was a criminal, horrible president.

CW: Yeah.

RW: And really evil.

CW: Yeah, I think with Nixon there was a sense that we had failed, yeah.
RW: It was a really fascinating period. I think there’s been a lot written about it, but I haven’t read anything except this. You should read this. You’d like it, I think.

KH: So, granted, much life happens in the years after the war ends, from 1975 that’s, what? Forty some years. But if you’re looking back now, where do these war years, your experiences in the antiwar movement while you’re at Carleton, where do they figure into your lives?

RW: That’s a very tough question actually because it was a vital part of our life when it was happening but, because we had no one involved in the war personally, we were happy when it ended but we didn’t have that sense of bitterness or relief or that families who had kids in the war or parents or had more direct experience of it. It’s so ironic that Toni’s brother’s death that happens very early in ’67, has more resonance for me than stuff that happened later in the war. I had no personal connection. I’m very proud of Carl. I’m proud of my father who defied—really endangered his job and himself by openly opposing the war. Carl, you didn’t endanger your job by doing it, but you were very articulate and very smart about it.

CW: I got away free.

RW: Yep, you got away free because you were too old to be drafted. We had no kid who was the right age. My brothers were fine so, I mean, the war—

CW: By ’75, by Ford, basically, my political self voted Democratic.

RW: Yeah, and that had not been true before that. I mean, McCarthy, yes, but it was very hard. Hubert Humphrey?

CW: Well, with Paul, that was the last time—

RW: We did fundraisers.

CW: we did fundraisers. It’s the last time I felt politically operational.

RW: One of our sons worked for Paul in his office for a while; I have a fabulous photograph of my son Danny, who is six-one next to Paul who was like five-one.

CW: But that was—I think Paul came to Carleton. It must have been in the seventies.

RW: I’m pretty sure because that’s when I talked to them about having Danny in Paul’s office in Minnesota, to both Paul and Sheila [Sheila Ison Wellstone (1944-2002)] and they were so lovely. They said, oh, great, we can’t wait to have him.

CW: I think, certainly by the end of the seventies, I was not the only radical on campus. I was not the only radical in the faculty at all so my days of being a bearded radical—

RW: A singular person are over, now that you’re just a part of the mob.
CW: And I became the not-so-thin chair of the department, doing stupid things.

RW: So, we both are established, were established at Carleton.

CW: By this time, we’re the—I’m the establishment, as weird as that sounds.

RW: I have a job that I loved; I have a chair; I have—

CW: Faculty has history faculty, has younger people than me by that time.

RW: Oh, yeah.

CW: Tetsuo is there with me, Najita.

RW: No, that was when we first were hired.

CW: He left for Chicago.

RW: Yes, immediately. He’s not there. You’re thinking of someone else; I know who you’re thinking of.

CW: Oh, yeah, he’s a Korean.

RW: He’s not Korean, he’s from Singapore.

CW: Chung Tai.

RW: Chung Tai.

CW: Chung Tai, okay.

RW: God, we are so bad.

CW: So, the department is different, and I am a, as it were, well established—

RW: Elder statesman.

CW: Not quite but getting there. And well, with Johnson gone, Kennedy gone, Nixon gone—

RW: We were in France when Kennedy is killed.

CW: Yeah, votre président est mort. I remember that.

RW: So, it all changes.

CW: I become the so-called expert on the French Revolution.
RW: I mean—

CW: I’m writing letters to get my students into graduate school and I’m going to AHA [American Historical Association, Washington, DC] meetings and making like a member of the establishment.

RW: Yeah, it really changes.

CW: And you’re well established now. You’re getting established.

RW: So, the focus changes completely and part of it is our age. We were young, I mean, all through the period of the war. In 1975, I’m thirty-five, so thirty-five when the war ends; that’s pretty young.

KH: Yeah.

RW: So, I don’t know.

KH: So, what do you think that people, other Minnesotans, let’s say specifically since this is for the Minnesota Historical Society, what do you think it is important for them to know about Minnesota and the antiwar movement during that time period?

RW: What a fabulous question. I can give an easy, an immediate answer, not easy, but I think that Minnesotans should understand how much passion and a sense of violation that students, that people are feeling in especially, I guess, the sixties, ’68, ’69, ’70, the bombing of Cambodia, that there is true anger and passion behind what isn’t a mass movement but is a significant group movement. I mean, I think there were more people who sat it out than were in it. I also think that the whole notion of the generational division between parents and students is maximized in that time. There are a lot of parents that go along with the antiwar movement, but there are a lot who don’t, and there’s a rebellion on the part of people who now hopefully are opposing Trump [US President Donald John Trump (1946-)] some place. I mean, I have no idea but yeah.

CW: I don’t know. When I read the papers today, I think basically part of that lesson has not been internalized. I see a lot of—to me, just look at the papers—the veterans this, the veterans that. I think—

RW: The veterans aren’t the enemy.

CW: I think at first when people came, when guys came home from the Vietnam War, there was a very distinct minority I would say that looked upon the veterans as, if not war criminals, anyways, failed soldiers and stuff like that.

RW: Oh Carl, oh.
CW: And now, maybe it’s because we have a Republican administration, I don’t know. If you look at the papers, there’s a celebration of our veterans—

RW: Well, you know, the veterans—it’s not their fault. They’re drafted into this fucking army.

CW: Yeah, but still, there’s a worship of the military now that rubs me the wrong way.

RW: Possibly because of the bone spur guy who’s president who avoided the military.

CW: Well, that would be true, too, but still, there’s a sense of something that has really been lost, a skepticism. At the same time, in a way it’s funny. It’s a kind of skepticism and it’s at the same time, a kind of release, that okay, we’re not going to get involved in wars like that anymore, except we do. And there’s a sense of, you know, sort of reknitting the society together but incorporating a kind of worship of our veterans, right? Our soldiers, right? That really pisses me off.

RW: It doesn’t me.

CW: No, it really pisses me off.

RW: I was in Washington a few weeks ago, a couple weeks ago, and a parade of veterans came through. Now they weren’t Vietnam War veterans; they were Korean War veterans; they were old guys in wheelchairs. The whole airport, everybody was cheering and applauding, including me because they survived, you know. It’s not their fault that they’re sent out to do this and especially Vietnam War veterans. There’s no draft now. There was a draft then.

CW: Yeah, because the army has learned that the draft is not something that they can do.

RW: They can and have done it and will probably do it again at some point, but not—now there’s no draft.

CW: In a sense all that remains is that we have readjusted our military colonial ventures in a way to avoid the kinds of things that happened in May/June of ’68 and in the anti-Vietnam without a sense of abandoning, because we haven’t abandoned the option that we are—and we consistently say this again and again, we are the most powerful nation in the world.

RW: Yeah, but we have—and now the trashiest government—

CW: And I don’t dispute the fact that we may be the most powerful nation in the world except now we have our new rivals. But I come back to something that my old mentor, not my mentor but, William Appleman Williams [William Appleman "Bill" Williams (1921-1990] who taught diplomatic history at—

RW: Madison?
CW: At the University of Wisconsin, right, that foreign relations, diplomatic history, is always basically a reflection of internal history, of what’s going on in the country. And basically, the chapter of the Vietnamese War has been put in a cubbyhole and we say, Okay, this was what was bad about it; this was good about it. But the military roles of our country should be kept pristine and as something that we acknowledge is a good. I’m a European historian. Our role in World War II was absolutely key that’s true. But there is a sense of—we fight only good wars except the Vietnamese War, which is maybe not so good, but that’s okay and our military is still something to be revered. And, look, I was in the draft. I’m a, god help me, I’m a veteran in a way. I joined—I volunteered and basically, I volunteered because they had this system where you went in for six months of active duty and you remain in the active reserve. But the active reserve that I was in never did anything, never got called up, anything else. So, my timing was pretty good.

RW: It is six o’clock and do you know that it’s six o’clock? We have to release this lady.

CW: Oh, okay, I’m sorry.

RW: I want to give you names so—

KH: Yes, that would be great.

CW: I’m going to end on that down point then?

RW: Yes. End on that.

KH: Thanks, but oh well—

CW: The hell with it. (laughter)

KH: I so much appreciate the time that both of you have taken.

RW: Absolutely enjoyed talking to you.

CW: Three hours.

RW: I know. I think that you’re doing something really amazing if you can get it together it’s so broad that we want to keep up with you and know what you’re doing.

KH: Yes, I would love to do that.

End of interview