

David C. Johnston '66
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[JOSHUA G.]

PEARL: Today is January 18th, 2016. My name is Josh Pearl. I'm interviewing David Johnston for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. This is a phone interview. I'm located at Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College, and Mr. Johnston is located in West Hartford, Connecticut. Is that right, David?

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

PEARL: All right. So can you start off with telling us when and where you were born?

JOHNSTON: February 22nd (which used to be called George Washington's Birthday), 1944, in Elgin, Illinois.

PEARL: All right, great. And can you tell us a bit about your childhood?

JOHNSTON: You know, '50s childhood: innocent, fun, naïve about the world, older siblings pushing me around, lots of friends, a lot of involvement in sports. I played just about everything and started competitive speed skating when I was about five years old and did that on and off for ten years and also played football and basketball and baseball and track, sort of the all-American upbringing.

I had terrific parents, very involved in community stuff. My father was on the [Elgin] City Council for a number of years, and my mother was president of the League of Women Voters and a bunch of other, related stuff. So the idea of community involvement and sort of engagement in policy issues revolved around our dinner table and seemed kind of second nature. So a nice childhood that I remember with great fondness, and I think—and a time that maybe we won't see again.

PEARL: Okay. And can you tell us about the neighborhood you grew up in?

JOHNSTON: I grew up in a family neighborhood, where every- — everybody had their own home. Everybody knew everybody else. Neighbors looked out for their kids. We played out on the streets a fair amount. You know, a typical type of thing. One day in the winter I threw a snowball by mistake—I probably was about ten—across the street and broke a window in the house across the street, and my next-door neighbor, Mrs. Lobar, came out and folded her arms and said, “David, are you gonna tell your mother or am I?—that that happened?” And that was kind of typical of how people looked out for each other, even though sometimes it could be—it could be annoying.

But my neighborhood happened to be almost directly across the street from a big park called Lords Park, which wasn’t a religious name; it was named for the Lord family. And that’s where we did our winter sports. The lagoons froze in the winter. We skated on those. My older siblings had been skaters. And, as I suggested, I started racing with speed skates at age five. Won my first All Elgin race. My older brother was a champion skater. Actually, at 16 was the national, North American champion.

And so it was a great neighborhood all seasons of the year. You know, we went out and played in the park, a big park with a woods, with no parents. You know, we’d go out for hours, playing in the woods, climbing on a steel jungle gyms the likes of which you don’t see anymore. Doing stuff. Nothing ever really terrible, just fun. And at some point, someone would say, “Aw, it’s lunchtime.” This would have been on a Saturday or on a vacation day. “Time to go home for lunch.” And everybody would go home, and we’d show up again with nary an adult anywhere in evidence except for occasionally—probably starting when I was 10 or 11, of illegally sleeping in the park overnight in a sleeping bag and having the old caretaker, “Pop” Campbell, come and try to chase us out, and we would just run to another part of the park.

And years later, I found out that my brother [chuckles] 13 years earlier had done the same thing with the same, not-as-old a guy, so, you know, it was a great neighborhood and a nice community, essentially a working-class community with a lot of industry. So nice community, nice neighborhood.

PEARL: And what was the name of the neighborhood?

JOHNSTON: Well, it didn't really have a name. It was Linden Avenue, and I guess you'd call it the Lords Park district.

PEARL: Okay. And you mentioned industry and working class. Can you tell me more about that?

JOHNSTON: The largest employer in town was the Elgin National Watch [Company] factory, which was the largest watchmaking company in the country for many, many years—many decades, I think. And my father worked there for 27 years as kind of a bookkeeper and sales forecasting and other, related things.

But we had a bunch of other industries. There's a pretty good chance that if you see a street sweeper coming down the streets of Hanover, it probably says, "Elgin Sweeper," and they're made in Elgin. I think they still are. But there were many other companies: tool and die companies, just a lot of industry, and that hasn't changed. Actually, I was out there last summer, and they've grown from 60[,000] to 100,000 people, with lots of new—new industry.

But I call it a working-class community. Less than half of my high school class went to college. A lot of the guys I played football with in high school did not go to college, and I kept it very quiet that I was a good student. That wasn't considered cool.

PEARL: Okay. And could you tell me more about what your parents did?

JOHNSTON: My father, as I mentioned, worked for the watch factory. My mother was a traditional housewife, in some respects, in that she was expected to put three meals a day on the table for her family. When I was in elementary school, I would come home for lunch, and she'd have lunch ready. And my father would come home from work on many days, except when he was traveling, and she'd have lunch ready. I mean, she told me years later, after my father had died, that she grew to resent that, and I think it's because she was a pretty—pretty ahead-of-her-time feminist, although they never used that— that word. So traditional housewife but with yearnings beyond that. I think, like a lot of smart women, they sometimes grated under the expectation of—expectations that had been there for—for wives for a long time.

PEARL: And you mentioned involvement in City Council and community involvement?

JOHNSTON: Yes. They got involved in a bunch of different things. My father was actually on the first City Council the city ever had. They converted from what was called the commissioner form of government, which typically was pretty corrupt and inefficient, to a city manager form of government, where an elected city council, under a mayor, hires a professional city manager. And my father was on the first City Council that was elected I think at about 1954, although I'm not exactly sure that's the right year. And he was on it for I think six years.

So my mother. League of Women Voters and a lot of other causes that she got involved in. She tended to be pretty outspoken, I think. If they had been born, you know, a generation later, it would have been my mother on the City Council and not my father. He was actually a fairly quiet man but with lots of social skills, very pleasant demeanor, a great social host. Specialized in making a drink called a highball. I won't—I can't remember what was in it, but it was some kind of liquor and other stuff. And he enjoyed that kind of entertaining.

And my mother would put the food out, and, you know, we had lots of friends who led similar lives, and my parents often visited with them. I used to go—they were in a card club, where the men played poker, with lots of smoking. I can still remember, almost taste the thick cigarette smoke around the poker table, but I loved watching them play and listening to the clinking chips.

And the women, the wives would be in another room, generally not smoking, playing bridge. And eventually I'd get sent to bed if it was my house, or at somebody else's house to go sleep on a couch, but I'd stay awake, listening to the clinking poker chips.

So a lot of good memories but breathing air that probably wasn't good for me or anybody else, but who knew in those days? You know, eventually my father—my father had started smoking when he was 15, as a boy in Belfast, Northern Ireland, when he finished eighth grade, which was all the schooling he had. And everybody smoked. And he

smoked for more than 30 years and eventually developed emphysema, and that probably led to his—to this death at 69.

But, you know, everybody did that. Almost all the men smoked in those days. I have a picture of my parents on their first date, July 5th, which ironically is my wife's birthday, July 5th, 1927, sitting—leaning against a fence somewhere on a picnic, big smiles on their faces, and he's got a cigarette in one hand. And that was just a normal—normal happening in those days.

PEARL: And you mentioned Ireland. Can you tell me more about your family's background?

JOHNSTON: Sure. My mother was sixth generation American from, you know, great-great-great-whatever grandparents who came from England in, like, 1798, and lived in—mostly in the Midwest. And she was born in a little town that no longer exists in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, called Pentoga, and grew up in Gladstone, which is up on the very top of Lake Michigan, and was one of seven or eight children. I never knew my grandfather, who died before I was born, but knew my grandmother, that grandmother briefly.

My father was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1905 and was one of several children because my grandfather, George Johnston—and my great-grandfather was John [Johnston], and my father was John. It's like they didn't know any other names except John and—John and George.

My grandfather was a kind of a carpenter, who worked in the mill in Belfast but in a—I think about 1910, and I've never gone back and looked at these dates exactly, but I think it's driven by a key date; namely, what happened a year later. Belfast was then the home—actually, I think still is—of the Harland and Wolf [Heavy Industries] shipyard, which was then one of the largest shipyards in the world. And it was building the *Titanic* and its twin—twin ship, the *Britannic*. I don't know if you knew that there was another ship identical to the *Titanic* that was launched six months earlier.

But my grandfather and I think his fellow workers were asked, and maybe—I'm not even sure they had a choice, but I don't know that for a fact. They came and spent I think about a year working on the *Titanic*, and my grandfather was

a wood finisher, and we have a picture of the grand ballroom of the *Titanic*, both when it was launched and leaving on its maiden voyage, and another picture that my brother collected of that same grand ballroom at 11,000 feet in the ocean that was taken by [ocean explorer] Robert—what's his name?—[D.] Ballard's submersible, of the same staircase coming down. But, of course, the wood that my grandfather polished was no longer there.

But anyway, when they finished the *Titanic*, my grandparents and my father and his two younger brothers all stood on the dock, waving *bon voyage* to their pride and joy as it sailed off to—I think to Southampton, England, to pick up passengers for the maiden voyage. And we all know what happened to that.

So anyway, my father did some factory work, but he was growing up the last five years of his life there, during the Irish Revolution, which was a—you know, a big civil war that went on for several years, 1916 to 1922, for most of Ireland to try to free itself from Great Britain, except in Northern Ireland, where my relatives lived—that was the Protestant part—and they were called Orangemen [members of the Orange Order], as you may know, if you know any of that history of that area.

And in 1922, my grandmother, Susan McAllister [Johnston], who was my grandfather's third wife, so my father had a bunch of half-siblings by the previous wives, who had died before her, and then my grandfather died at 47. My grandmother, in 1922, emigrated with my father and his two younger brothers to Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada, as I understood it from family history, because she was afraid that he would be drafted into the British army to fight the Catholics in the revolution because the Protestants in Northern Ireland were on the side of the—of the British, although I think, as, you know, working-class people they probably weren't too keen on fighting in a war.

But she left Ireland, never to return. Well, she did return to visit. Went to Canada, where her oldest child, my Aunt Sadie [Johnston], was already living and working. And so they were in Winnipeg. My father and one brother, Herb [Johnston], stayed for a short period of time. I don't know how long, maybe a year or two, and then they left and moved to Chicago, looking for work. My uncle David

[Johnston], my father's youngest brother, stayed and raised a family there.

And a few years ago, when we were talking about their connection, our family's connection to the *Titanic*, my Uncle David's wife, Barbara Anne, who was Barbara Anne Stuart, said that her grandfather Stuart from Scotland had come to Southampton in 1911, in England, to try to buy a steerage ticket, the cheapest tickets on the *Titanic* but that it was sold out and he couldn't get on. And so we all kind of looked at each other and realized, you know, the fickle finger of fate had intervened, in positive ways, for our respective families.

So anyway, my Uncle David raised children there. I still have relatives there. My wife and I just spent two weeks with our Canadian cousins in Winnipeg, out at their lake house last summer, and we've just had delightful, intermittent connection with those folks.

My father and his brother, Herb, moved to Chicago in about 1925, I think, where my father went to school and studied bookkeeping, kind of night school, and was hired by the Elgin Watch Company. And my mother was there working as I think a secretary. She and her sister were working. They had spent two years at Lawrence College in—is that in Minnesota, I think? Or Wisconsin. I can't remember. I think it's in Minnesota.

But their father, my grandfather on my mother's side, had made them leave college after two years because he said he had three more sons to educate and they needed to go to college more than his daughters. And that was something that my mother always regretted, that she was not able to finish college and I think really drove her to make sure that her children all went to college, and we all did. I was the, you know, fourth of four to go off to college.

So my parents met in Chicago. My father got this job in Elgin, which is about 40 miles northwest of Chicago, and they moved there I think in about 1927 or 1928. My oldest sibling, Joy [Johnston Hodgen], was born in Chicago, and I think my brother, Richard [B. Johnston] was as well. Unfortunately, all three of my siblings are deceased, so I don't know the exact dates.

I was startled to discover a few years ago that I was now the patriarch of my nuclear family of origin, which is kind of a scary place to be, but I've gotten used to it and told my relatives that, "Look, I'm an old guy, but I know a lot of stuff, so listen up."

So that was the quick tour of how my parents got from where they were born to meet each other and end up in—in, you know, the city where I was born and grew up.

PEARL: Great. And what were your parents' names, again?

JOHNSTON: My father was John McAlister Johnston, and my mother was Blanche Hazel Berry (B-e-r-r-y) [Johnston]. And we actually have a book of the Berry family that a distant cousin compiled, tracing their history back to the people who came from England in 1798 and who had 10 or 11 children, and back in those days, you know, healthy women had lots of kids. And this book has all of the descendants, down through my children's generation, and it's 3,200 people who came from those original folks. So she was a Berry, and he was a Johnston. So, of course, she became Blanche—Blanche Johnston.

PEARL: Can you tell me about your siblings?

JOHNSTON: My oldest sister's name was Joy. She was quite a bit older, by—let's see, 19—by 19 years, I guess. She was—I was only five years old when she was married, four years old when she was married in 1948, and she had her first child a year later, and I became an uncle when I was five because I was the youngest. And she started a daycare program in her home in Lake Forest, Illinois, which is on the north shore of Chicago, a very affluent community, although my sister and her husband were not particularly affluent.

They started a daycare program in their little apartment in order for her to make some money and take care of her family. She had three children in about four years. And her husband was athletic director, recreation director or something for the City of Lake Forest, so she lived there and ran that program for 50 years. She died in 1999 of pancreatic cancer. Went from apparently healthy to dying in about five months. Nasty, nasty cancer. Well, I guess they're getting to the point where they can cure some of that now. She had four children. I have a niece who is older than my

oldest daughter, but that's another complicated story that maybe we'll get to. So she was the oldest.

And my brother Richard, known as Dick, came along a couple of years later, and they all grew up in Elgin and went to Elgin High School before mew. And he was a very good student, an athlete. Played football in high school. He said he was 140 pounds soaking wet, but he still played football because everybody—you know, boys—almost everybody played football in those days [chuckles], I think. In the future, there may be no boys playing football, given what's happening right now. But that was, again, another—another era.

My brother was an outstanding writer, and he ended up getting a degree in English from the University of Illinois and then a master's degree in English and journalism, I think. And not long after he graduated from U of I—that's where I would have gone if I hadn't stumbled on Dartmouth, and we'll maybe get to that as another story—he took off traveling and basically went around the world, and think took about two years traveling. Stayed in some places, got some part-time work in places. And he went I think to Europe and eventually made his way to Hong Kong. Claimed he had a job in a bar in Kowloon, which is the city across the harbor from Hong Kong.

And he wrote a whole series of stories about that, and after he got back he won the *Chicago Tribune* first prize for short-story fiction with a story he wrote about the brothels in Hong Kong. And it was like a family joke that, of course, Dick didn't frequent those brothels; he just visited or heard stories and wrote about them. But it was always kind of a wink and a nod about what went on. But, hey, he was a 25-year-old guy, you know, traveling, so who knows? I don't—don't begrudge him—well, whatever. You know what I'm saying.

So he did that whole trip. It drove a lot of his thinking about the world. I remember my brother telling me many, many years ago that China would be the power that eventually challenged the United States for dominance in the world because they were such an ancient society, full of intelligence and wisdom and with so many people eventually with—with power. And, you know, that was probably 30 years ago or more that he said that to me, and it was prophetic, I think, given what's happened in the world.

My brother married a very nice young lady named Merry, M-e-r-r-y. They had three children, so I have two nephews and a niece related to my brother. They moved to New York City, where he got a job in public relations for Mobil Oil, which was one of the big oil companies. And did quite a bit of traveling on the Alaska Pipeline [Trans-Alaska Pipeline System]—and I may have the dates wrong, the chronology a little bit wrong here, but I think the original pipeline was under construction, then he went up to Prudhoe Bay to see what was going on and I guess do some public relations for Mobil on what they were doing up there.

And I remember he had some very funny stories about how they—how these guys would work out on these oil fields for—you know, for days at a time, and then they would come in and, you know, spend all their money drinking and then have all the money gone and then go back out and work.

So he did a lot of writing around that. He ended up writing three or four fiction novels, which—unfortunately, none of them ever got published, which was a sad thing in his life. I read one of them. I thought it was outstanding, but getting a book published is I guess kind of luck if it happens.

My next sibling, Eileen [Johnston], was seven or eight years older than I was, was a very pretty, a very quiet girl, a good student. Eventually went to the University of Illinois Did not finish there. Left and eventually went to Lake Forest College, where her older sister, our older sister lived with her husband, and lived with them and graduated from there.

She did a European trip, and we have some really interesting things that she wrote about it. She was always quite a good writer. And after she came home, she moved to New York City, where she got a job as a social worker, I guess without a master's degree. You could do it in those days. This was in 1963, I guess. Got a job as a social worker and worked on difficult cases in New York City.

And—and this is the hard part of our family history, I guess—on April 11th, 1964, she was murdered by, according to the police, two 16-year-old boys from Harlem. She was on a date with a—with a black man and another integrated couple, and at four in the morning they were standing

outside a nightclub in Harlem. And these kids ran up and stabbed her.

And they were arrested—at least this was all according to police reports, and there was some speculation—it's a complicated story, but I have a daughter who lives in New York and is very involved in Black Lives Matter and some other things, and she raised the question of whether the police report of what happened is true or whether they just were forced into a confession because they were arrested for killing two white shopkeepers, and they had apparently killed about six people in order to get an X in their name. It was like an initiation rite of a group which—my understand was this was the same group that assassinated Malcolm X after he came back from Mecca and declared that not all white people were devils, so there was this weird kind of connection with that.

And needless to say, this was a traumatic event in our family. My brother, who had to go and identify her at the morgue, never really recovered from it, I think emotionally, never could talk about it. My father also couldn't talk about it. My mother, on the other hand, being the kind of person she was—she not long after that—this was during the time when the so-called Civil Rights Act of 1964, which became a landmark decision, was being debated. She wrote a letter to then Senator Paul [H.] Douglas from Illinois, recounting what had happened to her daughter, to my sister, and pleading with him to pass the Civil Rights Act so that things like this did not happen again. And it was our understanding that her letter was read into the Congressional Record and was submitted as testimony as the Civil Rights Act was being enacted.

And so my mother found a way to kind of pivot and move ahead. So it's something that I—I think understand a little bit on that because I basically did the same thing, and that event certainly shaped my entire life and the choices I made and the work that I've done over the last 40 years, really.

And my older sister also became quite a civil rights champion and a community activist in many respects. One of the ironies of that incident in spring of 1964—I had gotten involved in—I think through the—what do you call it on campus? The [William Jewett] Tucker Foundation? That's still there, isn't it? Tucker?

PEARL: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Through the Tucker Foundation, I got involved in some civil rights discussions, and actually the then-dean of the Tucker Foundation was instrumental at the time in my staying in school, because I thought about dropping out that year, and he talked me out of doing that.

But—what was the point I wanted to make about all of that? So this incident sort of sparked my interest in looking at civil rights, and—oh, I know. The thing I forgot was that the following semester—it would have been I guess the fall of 1964—I was supposed to go to Miles College, which is a historically black college in Birmingham, Alabama, and spend a semester. And my family basically said, “David, you are not doing this.” And my brother said, “You’re not gonna—you know, your parents would go nuts if you were in this.” Because by then I think we knew that this was probably dangerous.

And actually I had investigated becoming a so-called Freedom Rider that summer, going south to—you know, to support black people registering to vote. And that’s also the summer, I think, when the three guys, Werner [sic; Michael H. Schwerner], [James E.] Chaney and [Andrew] Goodman were killed in Mississippi, so it was a dangerous—dangerous time. And my family, and my brother in particular, leaned on me and said, “You’re not going to do that.”

But as a result, I ended up helping to form a—I forget what we called it. It was connected to Tucker Foundation, a black college exchange program. And we had a—we had a student from Miles who came up and lived with us in our fraternity, at the Pi Lambda Phi fraternity house.

So that’s a long explanation on my—on my other sister. So that’s the three siblings that—that I had. So I was the youngest of four.

You know, that incident obviously, as I suggested, was both traumatic and galvanizing, in some respects. And, you know, I still lament the loss of that relationship, the loss of kids she might have had—you know, as any family who loses—loses a child understands. Actually, after the Newtown[, Connecticut] incident happened here in in Connecticut two

years ago—I sent a letter to the people there, basically saying you don't ever forget, but you get over it. You get beyond it. And perhaps it gives you motivation to do things that you might not have done otherwise to help other people.

So that—that's it on my sibs.

PEARL: Okay. We'll also get to the Tucker Foundation and Newton [sic] later in the interview, but you mentioned how your—your mother was involved in the Civil Rights Act and those sort of political issues, and your family was involved in City Council and community involvement. Do you remember any other big-ticket issues or big issues in Illinois that your family was involved in?

JOHNSTON: Well, they were very focused on political stuff happening I think both locally—you know, my father's involvement on the City Council but also nationally. I know that they—I'm not sure they campaigned actively. I don't remember at all. I was too young to pay any attention to anything like that. But my parents both voted for Adlai [E.] Stevenson [II] in 1952 and '56, who ran both times against Dwight [D.] Eisenhower and of course lost. You know, was considered a pointy-headed intellectual. He was a very smart man. And they were very disappointed in that.

My mother certainly influence a lot of my interests. The essay that I wrote when I applied to Dartmouth—and I suppose that would have been in the fall of 1961, my senior year in high school—my essay was on Eleanor [A.] Roosevelt, and I suspect that there's probably nobody else who applied that year who wrote their essay about Eleanor Roosevelt. It wasn't the kind of thing that, you know, most 17-year-old boys were thinking much about. I mean, if they'd studied history, they certainly knew about her and her husband and all the related things, and some of that, I must have—must have studied in high school.

So they were focused on lots of political issues. You know, I think my father was instrumental in a lot of things that happened in my hometown, some structural stuff they did. They built a mall downtown. It became an All-American City. I think they were very proud of that.

The irony—and maybe we'll come to this in a little bit—was that I ended up going back to look at those things, and they

ended up becoming sort of the core of the master's thesis that I ended up doing in 1968.

So my parents were very involved locally, very knowledgeable about national and I suppose international events. I joke sometimes that Elgin was and remains a very conservative community, although it is now changing quite significantly because of the change in the demographics of the place. I used to joke that my parents were—when I was growing up, were two of the six Democrats in a city of 50,000 people. Kane County, the county that it's in, was one of the few counties that didn't go majority for Franklin [D.] Roosevelt and was always kind of Republican.

And pretty much it's still that way. A lot of my high school friends that I see when I go out for reunions are rock-solid conservative Republicans, but still just really good people, even though don't agree with a lot of their—a lot of their politics. So my parents were part of a small but pretty vocal group of I guess we could call them liberals in town, although I'm not crazy about those terms, liberal and conservative. They don't seem to mean much anymore.

So I think that's probably enough about—I don't remember anything else really significant. I think, you know, as I discovered in my later years in research that I did, they were more or less oblivious to some of the demographic realities in a place like that. And this was not certainly unique to Elgin, the fact that there was a significant black population and that they all lived on two or three streets in mostly substandard housing, with a few exceptions.

There was an even smaller Mexican-American population, folks that had come as farm workers to—you know, to harvest crops, and some of them had stayed, so there was that population.

So I had several black and a few Latino classmates all the way through school, and one in particular that, depending on how you want to do this chronology, became a very significant factor in my life for a short, very volatile period when I came back and got involved in anti-Vietnam and civil rights activities. So we can get to that when—when you see fit.

PEARL: Of course. And can you tell me about school, going to school in Illinois?

JOHNSTON: You know, we had great teachers, is my recollection. They taught people grammar, diagramming sentences—well, my brother also was an English person and actually taught at Elgin High School, so I sometimes had him looking over my shoulder. But we had outstanding teachers. Everybody walked to school. You know, in the wintertime there was never a snow day, because you just put your boots on your mittens and your hat with the big earflaps, and walked to school and didn't worry much—much about it.

So I went to something called Sheridan [Elementary] School [now Ronald D. O'Neal Elementary School] kindergarten through sixth grade. I had a sixth grade teacher who had had all three of my older siblings as students, and so there was an expectation, and this carried through when I got to high school, that the family I came from—that we were just good students and it was expected that we would do well. And I think that sometimes affected their judgment.

I once got an A-minus in a course in high school, and the teacher wrote in my exam or somewhere, something I got back. It said, "Not a real Johnston A." And my mother looked at that and said, "So in other words, you should have gotten a B, but because of your siblings, you got an A-minus." And I said, "Well, yeah, I think something like that," because I knew it hadn't been my—my best effort.

So a good elementary school, solid teachers, very focused on reading and on grammar, and I think a little bit teaching history. I then went to Ellis Junior High School [now Ellis Middle School], which in those days was structured after six years of elementary you went to three years of junior high school: seven, eight and nine.

And one of the significant things that I remember about going off to junior high school was that that was the first time I got involved in organized sports, with adult coaches and uniforms and teams playing other teams and all that sort of thing. But I already knew how to play baseball, football and basketball, never mind speed skating, that I learned from—you know, from other kids, mostly from older kids who taught younger kids and where we divided up teams and they taught us the rules, and you played. And if you're playing in

a basketball game and somebody said, you know, “Aw, you fouled me” and you’d say, “No, I didn’t,” he’d say, “Yeah, you did.” And you’d say, “Oh, yeah, I guess you’re right. That’s a do-over for you.” You know, without a single adult around.

And that’s something that I lament. I think a lot of people my age see kids now who are put on, you know, soccer teams and sometimes on little football teams or basketball teams when they’re four or five years old, and—some of our kids did some of that here in West Hartford. It was just a different time, when you went outside to play and you learned how to play with other—other kids. And I think there was a shall I call it a set of social skills that everybody developed, most everybody developed of reasonable intelligence, that just came naturally, and once we then got into more organized school, came into play (no pun intended).

So junior high school. Sports. Football, basketball, track. I became the quarterback of a seventh grade football team and continued to be the quarterback in eighth and ninth grade, although our season in ninth grade was cut short because of the—what did we call it then?—the Asian flu, which is still the kind of thing that people get flu shots now to prevent these flus which seem to come out of that part of the world. And this was an early version of that, and everybody got sick, and they ended up I think cancelling the football season, as I—as I recall.

I was a very good student, got basically A’s and did well in all of my—all of my subjects. My parents never had to push me about homework or anything; it just was something that I did and mostly enjoyed and was good at.

And I went off to high school, which in those days was tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade. Again, I went into honors courses. Got basically A’s in everything. I was the quarterback of the sophomore football team and did quite well my first year in high school. Threw a lot of touchdown passes, ran for touchdowns, all that sort of thing. I was not as successful my junior and senior year, but I did certainly play, and senior year was the starting quarterback of the football team.

You know, high school was, you know, a little bit out of *Happy Days* in terms of Friday night at the sock hop—you know, with rock ’n’ roll music and learning how to dance, with

a partner [chuckles], as teenagers used to do. I don't know about you and your friends, whether you do that, but I guess unless you take ballroom dancing, you probably don't.

You know, a lot of friends, a lot of social life. I had a number of girlfriends through high school. I dated one of the most interesting and sort of wildest girls in my high school class when I was a junior. She and I were in a school play together, so I did a little bit of drama as well.

And, you know, one my funniest memories, perhaps embarrassing, but at my age it's hard to get embarrassed anymore: When I took her home on an early date, she introduced me to the French kiss. And I remember she went inside, and I went over and spit in the bushes and told my friends that Cindy had done something really disgusting. And they looked at me and laughed. And you know, we still joke about that when I get together with some of my old friends, that "little did you know what—what you were in store for, coming in the future."

So, you know, again, innocent, a lot of fun. You know, this wasn't true for everybody in my high school class, and know that from going to my—and I've been to I think every one of my five-year reunions. Not everybody had the kind of idyllic high school experience that I had. There were plenty of people who did not enjoy high school, who were not, you know, particularly popular. And I was certainly in the popular, high-profile group.

I don't think I was a snob about it. I think I was known as somebody who mixed with a lot of different groups. The first day at a football practice my senior year, the coach said, "You guys have to stay eligible. You gotta have at least a C average to play in the football team, so I want to make sure everybody studies." He said, "I don't think we have any A students here."

And one of my boyhood friends, Billy, was standing next to me, and he grabbed my arm and said, "Put your hand up." And I refused. And I said, "Just be quiet. You know, just take it easy," because he knew that I was a good student. And I think some of those players were aware of that because we were typically in different classes. You know, I was in—we didn't have AP [advanced placement] classes then, but they had honors classes.

But I didn't make a big deal out of that. I mean, the fact that I was the quarterback and the person who had to remember all the plays probably was something of a marker, but there were certainly other people, you know, who were equally smart, or not, who could have done that, including the one other boy in our school who ended up with—the two of us were two of the top ten in our graduating class. We were the only two boys. There were eight girls and two boys. And he was also a quarterback, but I had beaten him out for three years.

Anyway, so at the end of high school, I got lots of awards and got an award that came with a \$1,000 scholarship for being the most outstanding student in the class, and I'd gotten a whole bunch of other awards. And it was the first—first of what I came to understand with my own kids here in West Hartford, is that sometimes schools are lazy, and they don't want to spend the time to really figure out if there aren't a whole bunch of people who ought to get awards. And, "Oh, yeah, let's just give it to Johnston and the other three people who do well in all of these things." So I ended up getting all these awards.

And I remember my mother saying, "Well, that's terrific, Dave, but, you know, do you think you deserved it?" And I remember feeling a little bit guilty that perhaps I'd garnered more than I—more than I deserved. But—so it was hard to complain too much about that because when good things come to you, you tend to just say thank you and move on. But it took me years later to kind of understand that the dynamics around that were more complicated than they seemed in those—those innocent times.

So just to end the high school description, one day in the fall of 1961—yeah, my senior year—I was in economics class after lunch, and I was asleep in the back row. A really boring class. Right after lunch. And one of my friends sort of kicked me and said, "They want you down in the office." And what I—[Chuckles.] I said, "Oh, geez, I must be in trouble."

But the senior counselor, Mr. Meinke, told me later that—he said this guy came in, and he was from Dartmouth College, and he was actually the freshman football coach, and one of their recruiting strategies in those days was to go around to high schools that were known for good football, and our

school was a big school, and we were known for both good football and basketball.

And he came in, and he basically said—and he had—he was not your typical Dartmouth—he wasn't a Dartmouth graduate. And he says, "You got any football players with good grades?" And Mr. Meinke said, "Go get Johnston out of economics class." And so after I walk up—you know, went bleary-eyed down to the office and got put in a little counseling room with this—with this strange little man—you know, he may have been a very nice person. I don't know. I never really got to know him.

But he—he said, "Didja evah think about goin' to college in the Ivy League?" And I knew nothing about the Ivy League. I was headed to the University of Illinois, like my siblings had done. And I said, "You mean, like Harvard [University]?" Because that's all I could think of. And he said—I don't remember exactly what he said, but he said, "Well, it's a school. It's like Harvard only it's in New Hampshire."

And talked to me a little bit more about it, and I just said, "Well, that sounds interesting." And he said, "Well, we hear you're a pretty good football player, and we'd like you to consider applying." And so I ended up—I started getting letters from [Robert L.] "Bob" Blackman, who was then the coach. I went to a party, reception or whatever they called it, a lunch, I guess, in Chicago with a bunch of high school students from all over the Chicago area who were—who were applying to Dartmouth.

And I ended up doing, you know, the super training routine of—in those days, isometrics was a big thing with weights and other things, and running, and, you know, I was at that point—over the summer after I graduated, I kind of bulked up a little bit. I think I probably was eating some of that goofy protein powder or whatever stuff that one of my sons still takes.

And I was about six foot one [6'-1"], and I got myself up to about 190 pounds, and, you know, I was a good, solid athlete and got all these letters and thought I was, you know, the cat's meow of football players, till I got to Dartmouth and saw 180 guys out for football including 12 quarterbacks, and realized, as I did with academics, that I was average—you know, that I'd been a big fish in a small pond but didn't

understand that until I went far away, where—where everybody was an A student, and a lot of good athletes.

So anyway, that was high school experience. Let me think if there's anything else really significant out of that. I mean, we did a lot of goofy stuff. We did a lot of fairly risky teen stuff. There was a place called the Quarry, which was an old stone quarry that in the summertime was a public swimming place, where they had lifeguards and a little beach and stuff. And my friends and I every once in a while in the summer would go there in the middle of the night and break in and jump off the—there was a ledge that was—you know, it was probably ten feet up, but I—the story we tell now is that it was 30 or 40 feet up, and we'd jump into this dark water, you know, in the dark, which of course was a really stupid thing to do. There could have been a log floating there or something else. But obviously I survived that kind of—you know, that kind of stupid behavior.

My friends and I were not crazy drivers. There were people who were crazy drivers. Almost nobody drank, and there certainly weren't any drugs that I was aware of. There was a rumor that the—that the *Happy Days* guys—you know, like the Fonz [the character Arthur H. Fonzarelli of *Happy Days*], the hoods, the guys that wore the black leather jackets and really greased up their hair, that they drank beer out behind somebody's house occasionally, and they drove cars that were called low riders, where they had made the front end of the car very low, and it had big glass pipes and made a lot of noise and had a loud radio, and you drove around town, you know, trying to act cool.

But my friends and I didn't really engage in that kind of behavior. We were all good students and athletes, and, you know, it was all—it was all pretty innocent. My—I guess by the time I could drive, my friends could drive, probably in junior and senior year, we were allowed to leave at lunchtime, and we would go to the second McDonald's ever opened. And I think that's right, though I've never researched it. We were told that at the time, because the first McDonald's was in west suburban Chicago, and Elgin was just another 20 miles, and they came and opened the second McDonald's.

And we would go, and we would get one of their, you know, terrible hamburgers that was about an eighth of an inch thick

for fifteen cents and a chocolate shake or a strawberry shake for ten cents, and French fries for five cents, so for—what is that? Fifteen, twenty-five, thirty cents we had this, you know, really nutritious lunch, and we'd head off to Lords Park and sit there and eat our—ate our lunch.

But I still remember when the sign up at the top of this really ugly McDonald's said: "Over one million hamburgers sold." And then it got change to two million and then five million, and they did that—McDonald's did that thing all over the country, you know, as they opened thousands of stores. I think eventually they stopped doing it. But, you know, there we were, unbeknownst to us that the second place in the country of this eventual gigantic company was right there in little old Elgin.

Anyway, enough about my high school years.

PEARL: Yeah. And one last question about high school.

JOHNSTON: Yup.

PEARL: What were some of your favorite subjects to study?

JOHNSTON: You know, that's a good question because I was good at everything, and I liked—I mean, I liked history and politics and certainly studied some of that, although not, you know, with the same kind of fervor that I did and had to once I got to college. But I liked math. I was really good at chemistry and physics. I liked all of that.

I guess the one thing I didn't mention is that one of the things I was really interested in starting probably about age 10 or 12 was astronomy, and eventually I had a little commercial telescope, and I tried to make a telescope once by grinding—I don't know if you know anything about telescopes, but a reflecting telescope, you have the light comes through the lens; a reflecting telescopes and all the big telescopes are reflectors. The light is reflected, then, up into an eyepiece. And you used to be able to make these things yourself by grinding at—measuring it precisely.

And I tried to do that. And you had to use melted—some kind of melted wax or something like that, and I nearly burned my parents' house down. The stuff caught fire one night, and I managed to get it out. And I'm not sure my

parents ever knew that, that I had this fire that was—could have gone out of control from trying to make this, you know, stupid mirror for the telescope.

But anyway, so I was known as the astronomy guy, and there was a next-door neighbor named Harold Hanson, who used to come, and we'd look at the stars. And I think people thought—I mean, nobody talked about, you know, gay and lesbian issues in those days. It just wasn't a subject of discussion. But I think people thought it was weird that he and I spent so much time together and sometimes in this big closet I had, where we looked at astronomical things. But, you know, it was totally innocent in those days, and, you know, eventually [chuckles] we came out of the closet and would look through our telescope.

And I used to—by the time I was dating, it became a thing with my friends and me that we would invite the girls we liked and sometimes girls we were dating to go out to a golf course with us and my telescope to look at the stars. And, you know, without going into great detail, I guess we did. [Chuckles.] At some level. But I think it was really a ruse to get people out onto the golf course and, you know, be healthy teenagers or something like that.

But so I was—but I was interested in astronomy, and when I went off to college, my professional aspiration was to become an astronomer. That was until I discovered that 90 percent of astronomy was physics and that 90 percent of physics was calculus, and that mostly what astronomers did were calculations to figure out, you know, where planets and stars were going to be, you know, and that they spent long, cold nights first looking through their telescope and then doing their calculations. In those days, this was pre-computer, so it was pretty tedious. I mean, eventually all of that became computer driven, but—

So that was my big interest. But I was also, you know, involved in all these other courses: social science stuff. I actually got an appointment to—what do you call it?—the [U.S.] Naval Academy my junior year. And I don't quite remember if I actually got the nomination or if I was in line to get it when I decided I didn't want to do that. But I remember there were two brothers who were admirals in the U.S. Navy, who had graduated from Eglin High School many years before, and they came to visit, and my picture was in the

paper with these two admirals because I was thinking about going to the Naval Academy.

And I actually went and did the physical over at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center [sic; Recruit Training Command, Naval Station Great Lakes] over on Lake Michigan, near where my sister lived, and did two days of really arduous physical and passed that with flying colors. And I think this is still the case: You had to go through your congressman to—to get a nomination, and since my father was involved in—you know, in politics, civic life, he knew this congressman. Took me to his home, which was in another community not too far away.

And there was this guy, and I think his name was Elmer [J.] Hoffman, but I'm not sure. And I don't want to bad-mouth anybody, but he just one of the dumbest people I'd ever met. Said that he'd not been very good at school and had left school after eighth grade or something like that. Of course, so had my father. And asked me a bunch of questions and basically said, "Well, you seem to be a good boy, and I see you're a good student, and you're a good athlete, so you'd be a wonderful"—whatever they're called, first shi- —or whatever they're called at the Naval Academy.

I think my mother thought that I was attracted to both playing football there and by the uniforms. I thought I'd look pretty cool in one of those, you know, Naval Academy uniforms. And she basically convinced me at some point, before I had, you know, the exposure to Dartmouth as a possibility—pretty much convinced me that I did not want to go to the Naval Academy. So, you know, and given the year and what was coming historically, I'm just as glad that—you know, that that didn't happen.

PEARL: Well, why were you attracted to the Navy and the Naval Academy?

JOHNSTON: I'm sorry? Was that a question?

PEARL: Yes. You said that your mom—

JOHNSTON: Oh, why was I attracted to it?

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: I don't know. I think it just—you know, I mean, those were high-profile things, the military academies and, you know, the something, being out at sea and getting on a submarine or an aircraft carrier or flying a jet. And I think also the possibility that I could play football at the Naval Academy, because I had these delusions of grandeur about how good I was as a football player, which were delusions that were quickly squelched once I got to Dartmouth, but—so I think it was a combination of a superficial attraction and, you know, an interest perhaps in being, you know, an athlete there. But I don't think it was anything more—more sophisticated or thoughtful than that.

And I think my—my mother recognized that. I suppose my father did, too, but he never said much and basically said, "Dave,"—and in those days I was always "Dave"—"maybe that's not for you."

PEARL: Okay. And were there any other colleges or universities you were interested in?

JOHNSTON: The only—the only other places I was applying to when I applied to Dartmouth were Illinois and the University of Michigan, which was and still is, you know, an excellent school but another big state university. But I got rejected at Michigan because my same high school counselor, the same guy who [chuckles] when I applied to Dartmouth—when I followed through after the football coach was there and said I was going to apply, he said, you know, "Why do you want to go to a school like that? Why don't you stay here in the Midwest, where people have their feet on the ground?"

And when I repeated that story to my mother, she said, "Yeah, and their heads in the ground as well." So he did not get my recommendation on time, the deadline at Michigan, so I ended up getting rejected, never having been considered. And then I did get into the University of Illinois, and since my brother and sister had gone there—my brother graduated from it—I think my brother in particular said, "What's wrong with the U of I?" You know, "Why are you going so far away to college?"

My mother, you know, God bless her, I think understood that this was an opportunity for me. You know, and I ended up getting a full scholarship. So it was just an opportunity that was too good to—to pass up. And I don't know of it's still the

same at Dartmouth, but in those days, they didn't give athletic scholarships, and I think technically that's still the case, but it was pretty clear to me, and I think this is still the case, that a lot of athletes with good grades get in and end up with financial aid, you know. And so I had a full scholarship, which I think was worth—oh, it must have been at least \$2,000. And it sounds ludicrous now, given the cost of Dartmouth and comparable schools. But I suppose \$2,000 in 1962 was the equivalent of—I don't know, \$50,000 now. I'd have to go and do the math.

So, yeah, I probably—if that coach had not come to Elgin High School, I would have gone to the U of I and probably have been quite happy.

PEARL: And how did you feel about going so far away from home, to the East Coast, for school?

JOHNSTON: I was attracted to it. I was ready to get away. You know, I'd lived there all my life. I had actually wanted to go to a summer exchange program the summer before, in Europe, but I couldn't go because I was—the summer between my junior and senior year of high school—because I was spending so much time training for football with—with a—we had a guy who was, like, a quarterback specialist, and I was going to be the quarterback of the football team, and I always regretted that I wasn't able to do that because of sports.

So the opportunity to go far away to college—and they—you know, they really coaxed people the way they promoted it and how attractive it was, and, you know, it was this exotic place and the scholarship and all of that, that it just looked attractive. And I don't remember ever worrying about the fact that it was far away. I think I liked that—liked that idea.

I tell—I mean, I teach—we'll get to this at some point, that I teach college freshmen a course called First Year Introduction out at Eastern Connecticut State University, and most of them live within 30 miles of the school, and I just say, "Geez, I went a thousand miles away from school. With no cell phone." [Chuckles.] There was no such thing as a cell phone.

Once a week, you waited in line at the end of your dorm. And I was in what was then known as South Wigwam [Hall,

now French Hall], South Middle [Wigwam Hall, now Judge Hall] and North Wigwam [Hall; demolished in 2006]. I think they're now called some crazy names, just—what are those? The River Complex [sic; River Cluster] or what are they? The three dorms that are down there on the bluff overlooking the river.

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: I was just there last fall, and I remember one of them—my old dorm had some—you know, some guy, probably some rich alumnus's name.

So anyway, I sidetracked. What was your—what was your original question?

PEARL: I was asking about what you thought about going so far away for school—

JOHNSTON: Okay. I—

PEARL: —and actually all-boys, too.

JOHNSTON: What's that?

PEARL: How did you feel about going to a school that was all boys, all male?

JOHNSTON: I think—again, I didn't think much about it. I mean, I did once I was there because it was so different from a big public high school, but I think at the time I just thought, *Okay, it's all guys. There must be girls around somewhere.* And, you know, I discovered that there were, and there was a whole social life that was wrapped around the way Dartmouth boys met girls. Even though it was superficial and poorly structured and sexist and, you know, not very healthy, it existed.

But I don't think I really thought about it. I think I just saw it as an opportunity. And once I got admitted and the scholarship and everything, I just said, *Well, this looks pretty cool, and I'm just gonna do it.* And so I don't think I worried about the distance or the fact that it was—was all men. Of course, in those days, the Ivies I think were still all men, and that was just a—a norm. You know, Dartmouth didn't have it, but a lot of the schools like Harvard and others had

companion schools with girls nearby. You know, what did we have, Hanover High School and Colby Junior College (now Colby-Sawyer College).

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: Even one of my close friends, my freshman roommate, who is now the junior senator from Maine, Angus [S.] King [Jr., Class of 1966], who was also a quarterback and he and I quit the same day, but—he married a girl who graduated from Hanover High School and met her when she was in high school. So I think it wasn't a big deal that it was all men.

PEARL: Okay.

And could you tell me about your first year on campus?

JOHNSTON: Freshman year was a real eye-opener for me. I mean, first—quickly, I had to get over, you know, being a potential star football player. As I said, there were a lot of guys out for football, and Angus King and I, as I said, were roommates, and he was from Virginia, and he was also a high school quarterback.

And, you know, after two weeks, I was studying—spending more time studying football because the system they had—it's probably still the case—that Bob Blackman had for quarterbacks—there were, like, a thousand plays, and all these different combinations, and there was an incredible amount of studying that you had to do to learn this kind of pro-style offense.

And in 1962—this is hard to believe, you know, all these years later, but college football players had to play both offense and defense. And I think, like, my second practice I was playing defense, and I hadn't played defense since ninth grade. You know, I never did in high school. A guy named Roger [D.] Brett [Class of 1966], who ended up being my roommate my sophomore year, was an All-High School, All-American fullback from Canton, Ohio, at about five foot ten [5'-10"], about 220 pounds, and he just ran right over me.

And I remember thinking, *This is not fun*. So that every time I got to, you know, try being a quarterback, I was already feeling pretty battered by it, so—and Angus kind of felt the same way, and after two weeks he and I—you know, laugh

about—you know, we must have held hands, went in to see this coach, the same one who had come to my high school, and said, “We’re quitting.”

And he—he sort of implied that I could lose my scholarship, but my [sic] parents had done their homework. They’d had a family lawyer check out the conditions of admission, and I suppose my parents did, too, and concluded that you couldn’t take away a scholarship for not playing sports.

So I left it because it was pretty clear that I really needed to knuckle down and study, that this was way harder than high school. You know, I mean, my first class was 8 a.m. calculus, and beside from the fact it was at 8 a.m., it was very fast, very hard. Dartmouth had and probably still does one of the best math departments in the country, and then it was under John [G.] Kemeny, you know, who was an [Albert] Einstein protégé. And they had this high-powered math department with a lot of super-star high school math students coming, so I was behind the curve.

And I really struggled at first. I mean, I got—I ended up getting a D in calculus my first term. And, you know, after being a straight A student, this was a, you know, jump into ice water. And I didn’t do well my first term, and when I went home at Christmas, I made the mistake—I ran into my—I went to I guess a basketball game. You know, you show up with your—with your Dartmouth jacket on, and you parade around, trying to look like a big shot.

And high school kids still do that. I was at a game recently. The kids who went off to college still, you know, show up with their jackets. Well, why not?

But I ran into my high school math teacher, with whom I’d gotten straight A’s, and told her I’d gotten a D in calculus, and it was a big mistake to tell her that because she about cried. I mean, how could one of her star students get a D in math? And it was just saying it’s really hard.

So academically, I really struggled my first year. I think my scholarship was jeopardized. My scholarship came from Sears Roebuck [& Company], I think. It was then Sears Roebuck. I’m not sure they even exist any longer. It had been bought out by somebody. And the guy who was their

scholarship director showed up in the spring of my freshman year.

And I was doing better by then. I had gotten out of math and physics, and I had taken two semes- —we can call them semesters—two terms of physics, and it was mostly calculus and didn't do well in those. And even—I studied German my first term. And I'd been studying German for years. I have no idea why I started studying German in seventh grade, but I did and had done quite well.

And I took some placement tests, and I placed out of German I and II or whatever they were called and was put into this advanced German course, where we spent the whole term with this dour-faced guy, who never smiled and seemed to have a perpetual frown [chuckles], translating a book by [Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe [sic; by Friedrich Gerstäcker] called *Germelshausen*, which is the original story that was done as *Brigadoon* as a Broadway show. They—they changed it to Scotland because it was still too close to World War II.

But Goethe [sic] wrote this famous story about *Germelshausen*, and it was written in Old German, so it was hard to read, and we had to translate it into English. And that's all we did for the whole term. And it was excruciating. And that was it for German for me. I quit taking any more German. I think I got a C in that course.

So I started out with, you know, two C-minuses and a D my first term. But, you know—I mean, I do a lot of college counseling now with pretty challenged kids, and one of the things that kids who come from a healthy background get—and you're probably the same—cut from the same kind of cloth—is that you know that you can rebound from hard places and find a different way to be successful.

And my parents never panicked. I think they knew that I was motivated and that I was, you know, reasonably intelligent, and, you know, eventually I changed the type of courses I was doing. I think by spring term I was taking—I don't even remember. You know, geography and politics or some kind of history. I took a lot of history courses and eventually majored in government, but took social science type courses and did much better. And did better my whole time. I mean, my grades gradually rose all the way through college,

although in four years I got one A, after working my butt off on some courses.

Professors those days didn't give many A's, although I had some close friends who got nothing but A's at Dartmouth, who were just smarter than I was or better prepared, in many cases. Had come from better high schools, so—so freshman year was tough.

I did—you know, because I'd been an athlete, after I stopped playing football, I started playing rugby, and I loved that. I mean, I was—I was—I was good at it. You know, the ruggers are—in this country are I think mostly ex-football players, which means that guys are big and tough and hardy but not necessarily all that skilled. But it was a fun sport, and I did that.

I only really played consistently in my freshman year, I think, and that was mostly in the spring, and then in the following summer I hurt my back on this construction job, and I think I only played intermittently after that.

And then I joined a fraternity and played intramural stuff—you know, football and basketball, I guess, and did—you know, did sports that way, but—so school got better, courses got really interesting to me. I ended up changing my major to government. It was then called—I think it's probably called political science now. And I also took a lot of history courses. I loved history and still—still do.

And some of the great courses that I had were—were history courses. And then, you know, the climactic course that helped forge my views on Vietnam in I guess for the fall—and I had the timing a little bit wrong on this, so when I looked at the history of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution [sic; Gulf of Tonkin Resolution], I was off by a couple of months because what I remembered was my professor, Kalman [H.] Silvert, coming in the day after that happened, which wouldn't have been possible because those incidents were in July, so it was the following fall when I was in this course, when he gave his views on what had happened and basically said, "This is a fraud," so—

So anyway, freshman year I reoriented myself, kind of got my feet on the ground. You know, I wasn't the only one who was struggling with being average. You know, we all hit that

sooner or later, where there's somebody—you know, the joke used to be, "My dad could beat up your dad." And it was an analogy to, you know, there's always going to be somebody who is smarter or bigger or faster or better or better looking or more successful or whatever, and you better get used to it because that's life. And that's certainly been my experience.

So a bumpy first year that then righted itself over the—over the course of the year.

PEARL: Yep. And can you tell me about the social life on campus then?

JOHNSTON: Huh! Social life. Oh, God! So the beginning of freshman year—you know, you've probably seen pictures—we were all racing around with our little—our funny-looking little beanies on. I can't believe people used to do that, and that went on for, like, a century. And upperclassmen told us—

Oh, I forgot a key piece of my very beginning of my freshman year. My first day moving into South Wigwam, my sophomore adviser—like, a dorm—whatever they were called, the dorm resident adviser, who was, you know, a mature 19, I suppose, or 20. Handed me a can of beer and said, "Drink up, boy, you're in the big time." And I'd never had any alcohol in my life. And so there was this exposure to the drinking culture, which was everywhere and probably excessive. And for people—and I've discussed this with some of my classmates who eventually became alcoholics—it was Russian roulette in terms of how you—how you—how you processed that.

And I remember getting really quite drunk and—whatever—what's the fall weekend called? Is it still called—what's the fall weekend called?

PEARL: Homecoming?

JOHNSTON: No. Well, I guess—yeah, they used to call it house parties, I think, but not Homecoming. Maybe it was Homecoming. I got pretty drunk, which for me was still a new experience, and after a couple of hours, I had this wicked headache, and I just remember thinking, *This is not fun*. It was sort of like with football. *This is not fun at all. This is supposed to be fun*. And I, you know, ended up not being much of a drinker, even with

beer, the whole time I was there because it just was not something that went down well with me.

And I was just lucky. I mean, some of my friends—I know I have two friends—one of them just died last year. He was a serious diabetic and told me at a reunion that he became an alcoholic by the end of freshman year. So people who were perhaps genetically predisposed—it was Russian roulette to do that, so—

Anyway that's now. But I've dodged your initial question at this point. What the heck was it, Josh?

PEARL: Social life on campus.

JOHNSTON: Social life. So right at the beginning of freshman year, there was going to be a mixer. You know what a mixer is, right?

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: You probably know what it is. It's a quaint historical phenomenon [chuckles] when girls would come in from Smith [College] and Mount Holyoke [College] and Skidmore [College] on buses for a dance. And the upperclassmen said to the freshmen, "You guys need to form two lines over at"—it was the old gymnasium. That's all there was in those days, the gym, where the dance was going to be, in the gym. "You need to form two lines on either side of the doors, and as the girls come in, you need to get one."

And I remember saying, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you need to jump out of line and just identify, you know, a good-looking one and introduce yourself, or you'll be left out of having somebody to date." You know, again, having come from a big co-ed high school and I'd had an active social life and I had a steady girlfriend my senior year and all that stuff, this was just a real strange phenomenon.

And I remember thinking at the time, *This is really goofy*. And, of course, in retrospect it was really awful, and even worse for the girls, who had to run the gauntlet of all of these gawky guys with their little beanies on, so—but I did, and I met a girl who went to—I don't remember—one of those schools, and I ended up having her come up for a couple of weekends. And, you know, it was okay. But it was just such a strange way to be introduced to the social life.

And then it was clear that when you wanted to have a date, you had to somehow go and visit those schools and meet people or know somebody whose sister went to those schools. I mean, I went out with sisters of half a dozen different Dartmouth friends. I also had a number of blind dates, a couple of which were fine, a couple of which were really awful, and probably twice as bad for the girls, to come up and have a bad—you know, a bad time.

So it was not a healthy situation at all, and I did it intermittently for three years. And by my senior year, I sort of stopped dating, although there was a girl who was the roommate of one of my frie- —one of my fraternity brother's girlfriend, permanent girlfriend, that I did go out with some, and I have a picture of me standing with her at some spring weekend, I guess.

So the social life was distorted and rushed and—you know, there used to be pay phones in the library. You know when you come into the library, there are steps down and then there's kind of a landing on either side of Baker Library [now Baker-Berry Library]?

PEARL: Yes.

JOHNSTON: So there used to be pay phones there. Have you ever seen a pay phone?

PEARL: Yeah, they still have the booths there.

JOHNSTON: Yeah, okay. You can probably go to a museum [chuckles] to see a—to see a pay phone. You don't see them anymore, obviously. But they had pay phones there, and, you know, you'd get up your nerve to go in and call—try to call some girl at, you know, Smith or Mount Holyoke or some place like that, and I went out with girls from most of those schools. And we did, you know, so-called road trips. And I think there were even organized ones, where you went to those schools to try to meet—meet girls.

I mean, one of the ironies in my life is that I did go out with a girl from Smith College who lived in a dorm on Kensington Avenue in Northampton, Massachusetts.

[Recording glitch, then interruption.]

PEARL: This is Josh Pearl with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. Today is January 18th, 2016. This is my second part of the interview with David Johnson [sic; Johnston].

David, I think you were last speaking about a girl you were dating your senior year at Dartmouth.

JOHNSTON: Yes. There were a couple of different girls I dated my senior year, but they were all friends of friends and, you know, nothing particularly serious. I had had serious girlfriend, actually, but not from Dartmouth, whom I had met when I was home previous—two summers previous, I think, who was a student at the University of Wisconsin. And every time I went home for a vacation, I would go up to Madison.

One of my two best friends—I had two very close friends in high school. One of them went to Dartmouth, [John B.] “Jack” Aley [Class of 1966], who graduated with me, from Elgin. And the other one, a guy named [Richard S] “Dick” Lieberman, was at the University of Wisconsin. And every time Jack and I would go home, we’d go up to visit him, and he would get us dates in Madison, which—you know, had 15,000 women and was a different kind of campus than Dartmouth. If I had to University of Illinois, it would have been like that as well.

And I really fell for one of those girls I met and dated her for two summers, but then we broke up at the end of the second summer, so my senior year I was kind of pining for her and had some casual dates. You know, nice girls. I dated a girl from Mount Holyoke. I dated a girl from Wellesley [College]. You know, fun to have at parties and dancing and all that sort of thing. Probably a little bit of beer drinking.

But I was really sick of the—what I then considered the distorted social life. I just was downstairs, and my wife was just leaving for an appointment, and she said, “How’s the interview going?” And I said, “Well, I’m talking about the social life at Dartmouth,” and she said, “You mean when you all acted like adolescent assholes.” And I said, “Yeah, something like that.” And I—and I think we were dimly aware of that. I like to think that I was.

But it took years later to really understand that that social life was not normal and pretty distorted. And my recollection is that after I graduated, when I got, you know, the first fundraising letter, which I think comes in, like, the day after you graduate, asking you to contribute to the alumni fund, that I wrote and said, "I'm not—I'm not giving Dartmouth a penny until it goes co-ed," because it was pretty clear that all-men was unhealthy. And it was another I think six years before Dartmouth went co-ed, and eventually all those—you know, all the Ivies went—went co-ed.

So social life was there, but it was—it was really distorted and unhealthy and sexist. And, you know, girls were objectified. There was a lot of adolescent talk about sex and sexuality and looks and all that stuff, and a lot of that went on at parties. And eventually, you know, I joined the Pi Lambda Phi fraternity at the beginning of my sophomore year. In those days, you couldn't join a fraternity until your sophomore year, which I think was a good policy, and I think that's no longer the case. Is that right?

PEARL: No, that is the case now.

JOHNSTON: It *is* the case.

PEARL: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Wow. Well, I'm glad to hear that. Somehow I thought it had changed. But I think you got enough to worry about your freshman year without—without that—without that issue.

And fraternity life was good and bad. I mean, it was good in that I made some great friends, still close friends. I just spent an overnight in Boston, really in Newton, just this past week with two of my closest friends from Dartmouth, who have been advising me on this little organization that I—that I've been running for the last four years. And they became great friends at Dartmouth.

So there was that whole aspect to it, and I think perhaps that was something that was especially nurtured by the all-men environment, but I'm not sure that, you know, my friendships were any closer than probably the friendships you've been making and, you know, will continue to make as a—as a Dartmouth student.

But that's kind of the consensus that a lot of us have about the all-men's thing did forge those really close friendships. I mean, one of the wives in the groups that I—circles that I run said, "Yeah, you didn't have any choice. You know, you either became friends with men or you were pretty lonely." And I suppose there's some truth in that.

So the social life was something that needed to change. And, of course, eventually it did. So—

PEARL: Yep. And can you talk about the Tucker Foundation and the work you did there?

JOHNSTON: You know, I don't remember a whole lot of what I did on campus with the Tucker Foundation. I think they had events that I participated in. As I mentioned, after my sister was killed, the then dean, [Richard P.] "Dick" Unsworth, who—again, small world—after that became a colleague of my future father-in-law because he went to Smith College, and I saw him in later years, and he knew—he knew my wife-to-be when she was a girl.

But he was very instrumental in—in helping me find an even keel after that event. And I think through him I got involved in some of their activities, but to be honest, I don't remember any great detail. I mean, I think probably the groups that formed around both civil rights—yeah, that's right. He was—he was definitely involved in the creation of the—it was then called the Negro College Exchange Fund that I helped to start, is my recollection, although I'm not positive that we started it. I think we did. So Dick Unsworth and the Tucker Foundation were instrumental in—in that.

You know, the rest of my time on campus was studying and fraternity life. I ended up becoming first the treasurer and then the president of that, of the Pi Lamb fraternity, which was—it's no longer there. It went—it went bankrupt two or three years after I graduated. And I—and I inadvertently caused that bankruptcy, which is another story I can tell you about. It's not something that could have been foreseen, but—

And in those days—it maybe still is—Pi Lamb was a predominantly Jewish fraternity, and I'm not Jewish, but my sophomore adviser, the same one who had handed me the beer my first day, was a member, and when it came time to

rush fraternities the beginning of my sophomore year, he came and said, "Come over to the Pi Lamb house."

And I also was already friendly with one of the two guys I just mentioned, who lived in the same dorm, and so several of us who were friends—and they were all Jewish, I think—were leaning towards joining there, and I eventually did as well. I mean, I had, you know, a peculiar experience of, you know, rushing all these other fraternities. And I remember thinking as I went into, I don't know, SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon] and the Beta [Beta Theta Pi, now Beta Alpha Omega] house and places like that, which were, you know, nice people, I think, a lot of athletes. But a lot of them looked like me. They were, you know, kind of football players or athletes in the Midwest. And I remember thinking, *I don't necessarily want to be in a group that's—you know, that's sort of a similar background to mine.*

And I also—this other best friend of mine at Wisconsin happened to be Jewish, and I had spent a lot of time in his home, and they were quite religious, and so for me this was a very familiar environment, and so to hang out with Jewish kids was quite familiar to me and not a big deal.

But the night I made the decision to join the Pi Lamb house, I was at a—I won't name it, I guess, at this point because they're still around, I think—another fraternity, and they asked me who their competition was. And I said, "It's the Pi Lamb house." And this guy looked at me, and he said, "You would join that kind of a house." And I looked at him and said, "Goodbye," and I got up and walked out and walked over to the Pi Lamb house and said, "I'm in." Because I just realized that there was—you know, there was an attitude which didn't comport with my values, and certainly went back to the kind of values that I grew up with and that my parents had—you know, had taught me.

So, again, I forgot what your question was, but—

PEARL: I was wondering how you got involved with the Tucker Foundation,—

JOHNSTON: Oh, it was the Tucker Foundation.

PEARL: —the exchange program that you said you helped set up.

JOHNSTON:

Yeah. Well, I think, you know, there was a growing concern about civil rights, and Tucker—Tucker was involved in that. And I think—you know, I'm pretty sure it was through Tucker that I got involved in some things on campus that were Tucker events. I think some of the people who came to campus—you know, I don't remember if it was—what the timing was in relation to my sister's death, but I was at the last college speech—I think it was the last college speech that Malcolm X gave, in Spalding Auditorium.

We had something called Great Issues, which was required for—maybe for seniors. I can't remember. I just remember we all would show up in ratty clothes, but you had to wear a tie. Everybody had a few—we called them G.I. (Great Issues)—G.I. ties, also known as “blow lunch ties.” But that's another story.

But Malcolm X came and spoke, and I actually got up and—stood up and asked him a question, and so I had a back-and-forth exchange with Malcolm X. And given the apparent connection to my sister, it was a strange kind of thing. I'm pretty sure that was a little bit later on. And he was assassinated about—about two weeks after that.

We also heard George [C.] Wallace [Jr.], who then was the fiery segregationist governor of Arkansas [sic; Alabama], who stood on the steps of the statehouse down there and said, “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” And actually if you listen to his speeches, he sounds a lot like someone else who is now running for president. He was a blustering kind of bully.

But I think Tucker Foundation was very involved in those kinds of issues, of promoting things, and I think it was through them—and Dick Unsworth I think was called the dean—in looking at how we could create more involvement. The college, itself, was also—I mean, this was right at the dawn of so-called affirmative action, was looking at—along with a lot of schools—and how can we bring in more students of color, and in those days that meant mostly black students, although there was a dim awareness that, you know, maybe we ought to think about the Dartmouth heritage and Native Americans. But that was just growing as well.

So my class had I think three black students, one of whom was a pretty good football player, Edgar [M.] Holley [Class of 1966], and there were three or four in the Class of '65, and then the following class—I mean, the Class of '67—the Class of '68 had, like, 40 or 50, so suddenly there were many more black students on campus because of special programs.

And I think Tucker Foundation was right in the middle of that, of pushing Dartmouth Admissions. And this was happening all over the country, of that awareness, that schools like Dartmouth needed to change the way they admitted people. And, you know, that was a big bold social experiment that was good news and bad news.

You know, it's a whole 'nother issue of the experience that those students had when they came to campuses like Dartmouth that—you know, that was not—not always positive because of the culture shock that went on.

So Tucker was instrumental. I remember having dinner several times at Dick Unsworth's house, so for me it was a real important connection, I guess.

PEARL: Yep. And could you talk about your decision to maybe join the Freedom Riders or some of the other civil rights movements?

JOHNSTON: Well, you know, the drumbeat, the fever, the fervor, whatever word you want to choose, was in the air about the civil rights movement, about what was happening in the South, about the protest movements, about the violence directed at marchers, [the Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.]—you know, this being Martin Luther King Birthday day—actually, I didn't—I usually go to the celebration in West Hartford, which is a good one. I've gone for several years. I didn't go this morning because I knew I had some other stuff to do this morning.

There was just this energy in the air, and I tried understanding about it and people studying it, all the volatility that was happening in the South—you know, George Wallace and everything else that was going on. So a lot of students were interested, got involved in whatever ways they could in studying the issues around it and studying prejudice and discrimination and trying to understand that better.

I took a Great Course called The Nature of Prejudice. Probably wasn't till my senior year. That was really instructive for me, and some of the work that I ended up doing in following years. So that issue was all over the campus.

You know, the Vietnam issue was just starting to bubble up. I actually was in—I forgot to mention—I was in [U.S.] Air Force ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] my freshman year. I joined that, as far as I can recall, because they offered free skiing at the Dartmouth Skiway. If you joined Air Force ROTC [pronouncing it this time as ROT-cee], you got to go to the Dartmouth Skiway and ski for nothing. I have no idea why that got set up, because I had not—you know, I hadn't skied at home. There weren't any hills to ski on where I grew up. And so I learned to ski out on the—I don't know if they still do this, but they did lessons out on the golf course, in that big hill out there, so I learned to ski there.

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: And then off to the Skiway. And because I was a speed skater, I took to skiing really, really easily and quickly because it was very similar in terms of the weight shifting and all that sort of thing.

So anyway, there was all of that stuff going on, you know, and I was working hard, studying hard. Because I joined the fraternity I joined, the academic expectations in my fraternity were very high. You know, there were just a lot of smart guys. And, you know, it was a joke that you better get A's to keep up the house average. I mean, there was—you know, how stereotypes get formed about certain groups of people, and I had friends who, you know, were probably members of those other fraternities two or three times who came to me and said—

There was a rumor that the Pi Lamb—and is there's still a fraternity called TEP, Tau Epsilon Phi?

PEARL: I don't think so.

JOHNSTON: You don't think so. That was also—I mean, this shows you how things develop and how things get stereotyped. Was also a Jewish fraternity, and our two were the last two—TEP

was the last one on Dartmouth Row, and then the Pi Lamb house was around the corner. You know, where the Newman House is down at the end of Fraternity Row, on the bluff overlooking the river?

PEARL: [No audible response.]

JOHNSTON: Well, right next door—

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: —is a big gray apartment building, and that was the Pi Lamb house that sits on a beautiful site overlooking the river. And so those—there was this rumor on campus that the Pi Lamb and the TEP house had secret files, and I had, on more than one occasion, friends of mine who were in other fraternities who said could I get them access to the secret files in the Pi Lamb house, and I remember having to say to them, “Guys, the secret files are in the heads of these guys.” And I was doing pretty well by that time. You know, “This is just a myth. Just because there are just a lot of smart guys here, and they do well in school, and, you know, that’s just—that’s just the way it is.”

So there was some—you know, that sort of thing that went around, but some of the—when I first joined the Pi Lamb house, there were—there were some guys I didn’t meet during rush, and there was one guy named [Charles C.] “Chuck” Cohen [Class of 1962], who came up to me and said, “What are you doing in a fraternity like this?” And kind of challenged me. And I remember thinking that he was pretty interesting, and he and I ended up becoming friends because for me this was not—you know, because of my background, it wasn’t such a strange thing.

And I wasn’t the only non-Jewish guy in the fraternity. There were several, and they used to joke that they recruited me so that I could—the following year, I could stand out on the porch at rush and attract some other athletes so we’d have better teams. And I don’t think that was really the case, but it was—it was a joke that went—that went around, so—

Anyway, a lot of stuff going on campus that I mixed with. You know, I didn’t really get involved in the [Dartmouth] Outing Club, although I did occasionally go with friends out hiking—you know, using the cabins and all that.

I had been on the—I think they still do the Freshman Trip, don't they, the beginning of freshman year?

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: You go out and hike around. You know, that was kind of—that was kind of orientation. You go out with five or six guys, and you hike around the woods with a backpack, and you sleep in those cabins, and a couple of times, you know, at some lake we'd take all our clothes off and jump in the water, and it was just great fun for 18-year-boys. And that was kind of orientation.

Then back to campus, put your beanie on, go to hear President [John S.] Dickey [Class of 1929] speak, and then the following morning you were in calculus class, and that was it for orientation.

I mean, I now teach a three-credit course called First Year Introduction, an entire semester, at one of our state universities, and those kinds of courses exist on a lot of campuses now. I'm not sure Dartmouth has something like that or maybe even really needs it. But, you know, middle-of-the-road schools certainly do.

So what else? What else about campus life?

PEARL: Let's—I'd like to move into your involvement in the Air Force ROTC. Can you tell me a bit about that?

JOHNSTON: I did that for exactly two terms, winter term and spring term. We had to go to meetings—you know, in addition to the skiing, which I think was once a week you got to go up to the Dartmouth Skiway. Does that still exist, the Dartmouth Skiway?

PEARL: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Or did they close that down? Oh, good. Okay, that was always, it wasn't—

PEARL: No, it still exists.

JOHNSTON: Not a big skiway, but it's a nice one. I always liked it because I went off and, you know, did a bunch of others, but...

Anyway, we would—once a week we could do that, and then we'd have meetings, where they would I guess try to teach us something about Air Force life. And once a week we had to go to the gym and march—you know, march around, learn to march. And I just remember that it was like a big joke, that, you know, when the lead guy, who was an older student, would say, you know, "Left," you're supposed to turn and march left, that some people would turn and march right, and then you'd look, and there they'd be, up against the wall, till trying to march against the wall, and that it was not taken very seriously.

But you had a uniform—you know, a blue Air Force uniform and a big—one of those big old Air Force hats. And I don't—and I'm not disparaging the Air Force or ROTC or any of that. It just was—there was an atmosphere around involvement in it that wasn't as serious as I think the people who ran it really wanted to see. But, you know, we were 19-year-old boys, so it was a different—different approach.

There was something called Armed Forces Day that they had on campus, where all of the people in ROTC plus I think some other veterans showed up and marched around with martial music, on campus, if you can believe that, and marched on the [Dartmouth] Green and assembled and had a patriotic speech and all that stuff.

So I marched around on Armed Forces Day, sometime in the spring, and I remember coming back to my room with my uniform on and my roommate, "Gus" King—you know, now Angus King, Senator King, if you will—looked at me and said, "Dave, you look like a bus driver with your uniform." I just remember thinking, *This is silly. You know, I'm not really committed to this, and I can go skiing.* And that was it. I—I quit it after two semesters. And, you know, when I came back in the fall of—what would that have been? That would have been 1963, I guess, I didn't do it again.

You know, and by that time, was moving towards more of an antiwar approach in my philosophy and, you know, getting smarter or at least more educated about some of those things and would not have been very comfortable.

And, as you probably know, know your history, the ROTC programs eventually were—were really criticized and in ill

repute, and by the time the anti-Vietnam stuff got into full swing, they were pretty much forced off campuses, although I think they have now come back. Is there an ROTC program now at Dartmouth?

PEARL: There's just an [U.S.] Army ROTC program.

JOHNSTON: Army ROTC. Okay. Well, you know, and that's fine. I mean, I have—again, I have nothing against that. I mean, I have—I'm against war and all that sort of thing, but at the time, it was—you know, it was viewed I think not too seriously by most students. I mean, in all fairness to it, though, I mean, one of the—one of the guys who was in charge of it, who was Class of '64, two years ahead of me—he was lost flying an F-4 [McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II] jet over Vietnam—you know, like three years later. I read about it. And he was the guy who was marching us around in the gym, and, you know, he obviously took it seriously, went into the Air Force, became a fighter pilot, and died. Disappeared. You know, his remains never—never found.

One of my classmates, [Peter D.] "Pete" Barber [Class of 1966], was badly wounded in Vietnam. Comes to all our reunions, and I just saw him at Homecoming, and he's been in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down, since—you know, since he was 25 years old. Really interesting, smart guy. He'd been a terrific athlete. Baseball player, I think, or lacrosse player or something.

And there were a couple of other guys—I think there were a couple from my class who were killed in Vietnam. Maybe not. I might be confusing it with my good friend from high school, who was killed in—well, he was actually killed in Cambodia but not in Vietnam.

And I had other friends who went off that way.

PEARL: Yeah. Well, we'll get to them. Did you ever consider joining the Air Force as an officer from the ROTC program?

JOHNSTON: No.

PEARL: When you first joined.

JOHNSTON: I just dropped out of it after two semesters, and I'd already had my brush with the Naval Academy. And I think by that

time, I was pretty much geared towards being, you know, an antiwar person, and so I never considered seriously doing that.

However, I know that when I was reclassified 1-A, which meant eligible for the draft, in 1968, I was then living in San Diego. I remember thinking, *I think it would be fun to go through basic training, just to see what it's like* and whether I could survive it because I considered myself a, you know, pretty healthy, athletic kind of—kind of guy, so—but that wasn't—you know, that's not the same motivation as wanting to be committed to the military life or being in some branch of the military and taking that seriously.

I mean, I didn't disparage, again, the people who went that route and did that. I respected those choices, and, you know, old men send young men off to war. That's always the way it's been, so there's no point in criticizing the warriors. It's not their decision to go and do that. But you can just criticize the politicians that do that.

So, no, I never—I never seriously considered that.

PEARL: Okay.

And was there any awareness of the Vietnam War on campus when you were there?

JOHNSTON: Sure. As it developed, I think, you know, my exposure to this particular course, which was—I don't remember exactly what it was called, but it was International Politics or Foreign Policy or something like that. I'm pretty sure it was a professor named Kalman Silvert, who had either worked for the State Department [sic; U.S. Department of State] or had had some experience in Washington[, D.C.,] and was the one who, in our class, talked about the history of our involvement and actually took us back to the history of the French involvement.

The French had been, you know, badly beaten by Hồ Chí Minh and the North Vietnamese and General [Võ Nguyên] Giáp in the 1950s, and they had their big, huge battle that they lost at [the Battle of] Dien Bien Phu or something like that.

So there was that history, which the U.S. didn't seem to learn from, and in this course we studied that history, including that the Vietnamese had hated the Chinese for, I don't know, a thousand years, so there was this bitter back-and-forth that was a deep cultural piece, and the idea—you know, the theory in those days was—you know, it was called the domino theory, that we were so afraid of communism coming out of, you know, the end of World War II and the Cold War and communism and the [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy era and the H-bomb [hydrogen bomb] and all of that stuff which was hanging over us—

You know, that's what I left out of my elementary school experience. We used to do H-bomb drills—where we'd get under our desks in case the Russians dropped an H-bomb, which of course, in retrospect, was completely ridiculous because if they dropped an H-bomb you'd never know it because everybody within a hundred miles would be dead.

Anyway, there was just this feeling about the war that grew pretty rapidly into antiwar sentiment. But, as I said, for me it was fueled specifically by this course and this very popular professor, who said the Tonkin Gulf [sic; Gulf of Tonkin] Incident and what's called then—became known as the Tonkin Gulf [sic; Gulf of Tonkin] Resolution that was passed was a fraud.

And I just was reading about it before you and I started talking, and I wanted to brush up a little bit and whether I had my facts wrong. And in fact it was revealed—actually, it was much later than I thought, not until 2002, for sure, that the whole incident had pretty much been fabricated and provoked by the U.S., that the boats, North Vietnamese boats that supposedly attacked the USS *Maddox* [DD-731]—that that never actually happened and that it was the U.S. ship that sailed across the boundary that the North Vietnamese claimed, which was 12 miles, and we said international boundaries could only be three miles and that they fired shots first at the Vietnamese. And that got changed around, and [President Lyndon B.] Johnson used that push through a resolution.

And this professor looked at that incident and the resolution and said, "This is a fraud. This should not be happening this way, and we're about to go to war." I mean, we already had soldiers there, but in 1964, when this happened—and then I

would have been—I guess my junior year, or '64-'65, U.S. involvement was pretty tiny compared to what happened.

But when Tonkin Gulf happened and the resolution—and they basically passed a declaration of war, even though they didn't call it that. I mean, this has, you know, echoed down to [the wars in] Iraq and Afghanistan. But authorized a huge escalation. You know, by the time we left Vietnam, we'd had up to 500,000 troops, and the antiwar movement grew.

So I was involved already with people who had that as a sentiment. And, you know, I don't remember that we had active protests on campus. We had people come in and speak. We heard more about it. But I think, you know, most of us were still focused on getting decent grades and our—our—lackluster social life and what were we going to do next, and who was going to med school, and who was going to go to law school. And, you know, I didn't want to do any of those things, so what the heck were we going to do?

So I think there was a growing awareness of that issue, but it wasn't—it wasn't there. And, you know, plenty of my classmates ended up, because of the time, either joining or becoming officers. Some of them got drafted. And I wasn't about to go in any of those directions.

So my antiwar sentiment was sparked at Dartmouth, I think through my—you know, piece of my education, but it didn't take full bloom, really, until I got to the University of Wisconsin.

And that paralleled what was happening nationally, too, in terms of the growth of antiwar sentiment. You know, it was a huge, volatile issue, divided families. It divided people in my own family. Huge arguments that broke out because, after all, our soldiers were going to war, and when the commander in chief says you go to war, people—the public is supposed to support that.

Because people still had a World War II mentality. You know, “the war to end all wars.” Well, that's what they called World War I, but World War II was just a continuation of World War I anyway. That that's what you do, and you're patriotic, and you support our boys and all of that sort of thing.

And so a lot of my classmates believed that and, no disrespect to them—and a lot of the men went into the military, and I think the project has profiled several of them and the things they've done, and that's fine. I mean, their careers should be celebrated and their achievements recognized.

One of my close friends from high school—well, one was killed, the one I mentioned, and he was in Cambodia when he was killed, even though the [President Richard M.] Nixon administration, which came in in 1968, saying they were going to end the war and in fact escalated it; it went on for another five or six years.

One of my—this classmate who was killed was in Cambodia when he was killed, and the Nixon administration said—denied that we ever had soldiers in Cambodia, I think. I was with this guy's high school girlfriend at a reunion many years later, and she said she had a letter from—his name was Lex [Elwick] from him, written from a foxhole in Cambodia the night before he was killed.

And this guy, I had played football with, and in fact the—I know I'm a little off target, off your subject here, but it's all related to the Vietnam issue and feelings about it. He and I worked on a construction crew. I think I'd mentioned this. We built corn silos as a part of a six-man crew, which was an incredibly dangerous, exhausting job. I don't think my parents were at all aware of how dangerous it was.

And I injured my back while doing that, and that eventually kept me from being drafted in 1969, and my friend Lex, who was on this crew with me and we competed to see who could carry more of these cement blocks around the fastest, gets drafted and killed in—in the war. And so there was this strange irony for me, that—that I'm not particularly proud of, but it was a different time and a whole different set of attitudes, but, you know, all of that started while I was at Dartmouth

PEARL: Yep. And when were you building these corn silos?

JOHNSTON: Summer after freshman year, after I'd played rugby for the spring. My father had—because he had political connections, had gotten me a job as a—as a toll road toll collector, and I took one look at that and said, *Oh, man,*

there's no way I'm gonna sit in a booth with all those fumes all day long. And I ended up getting a job with the company owned by the father of one of my high school classmates, who ran this construction company that built corn silos.

And you probably don't know old-fashioned corn silos were built, but they were cement blocks called staves that were assembled, and then you put a steel hoop around it, and they had a way of tightening that up with a great big wrench. And you assembled these things up to 70 or 80 feet, and climbed as it grew. And you had a safety belt that you hooked into these loops, and, you know, a fall from that would have been fatal, basically.

So we did that every day. We put some kind of tarry stuff down on the inside. We had to go in there with hats and gloves and long sleeves and pants on. That was probably 120 degrees in some days, and slopping this stuff on there.

So—and it—you know, and it paid—I mean, it was great pay. I think it was a dollar an hour, and in 1963 for a 19-year-old that was pretty good money, believe it or not. Sounds ridiculous now, but in those days money had a different—a different value.

So I really strained my back doing that job, and then I made it worse. At the end of the summer, I was in a bad—took a really bad spill while trying to turn around on a slalom water ski, going, you know, some ridiculous speed across a lake in Indiana, where I was staying with a girlfriend and her parents, and really hurt my back even worse so that when I got reclassified 1-A, which meant eligible for the draft, in 1968 that became my ticket to get exempted for—for medical reasons.

And I was, you know, fervently against the war at that point, and that actually led to some fairly difficult, volatile situations, not just in family but in some other situations, which we can get to as you—you know, as you choose.

PEARL: And you were talking earlier about directions after Dartmouth?

JOHNSTON: Right.

PEARL: Did you have any idea of what you wanted to do?

JOHNSTON: You know, I changed majors three or four times, eventually settled on political science, or I guess they called it government then. And I didn't really know what I wanted to do with that. I ended up taking the law boards, although I was just lukewarm about becoming a lawyer, and most of my friends were either headed to law school or medical school, some to business school—you know, into professions.

And I was not very enthusiastic, and at some point during my senior year, I think in the fall, I had a really good professor, whose name escape me now. Wilson, maybe? What the heck was his name? [Likely Arthur M. Wilson]. Really good political science professor, who asked me if I'd ever thought about city planning as a—as a career. And I hadn't, but I did some research and ended up using that—you know, the political science and the history and the kind of education I had through that—even the whole course on, you know, prejudice—all kind of fueled into work that I eventually did but that drove my decision to apply to city planning graduate schools in my—spring of my senior year.

Or maybe, like, over Christmas I went up to the University of Wisconsin, which is where I eventually went, and I also applied to Harvard, to Cornell [University], the University of North Carolina and at least one other, and Wisconsin and actually got into all of them but chose to go to Wisconsin I think because it was close to home and also because I'd been up there so many times. I liked the idea of after Dartmouth going to a campus with 15,000 women. That struck me as attractive. [Chuckles.]

So—so by the beginning of my last term on campus I was focused on city planning, applying to those programs. Took whatever that exam was called, the GRE [Graduate Record Examination], which I think was the general one, and I did pretty well on that, and then getting admitted in the spring to these programs.

The only one that I visited besides Madison was Harvard, and I remember coming away from that thinking it was a pretty dull place, frankly. [Chuckles.] So—and I think it wasn't as good a deal. I ended up being awarded a national fellowship to go to the University of Wisconsin, which was, like, a full scholarship, and it also provided, I don't know, a thousand dollars, which at the time was a lot of money, to

the city planning or I guess it was called urban planning department at the University of Wisconsin.

So I was a fairly attractive candidate to them, so I knew all of that by, you know, moving towards—towards graduation.

You know, and in the backdrop of all this was—was Vietnam. I applied to VISTA. You know what VISTA is, right? Volunteers in Service to America [now AmeriCorps VISTA], which had been created, along with the Peace Corps, by JFK's [President John F. Kennedy's] brother-in-law, [R.] Sargent Shriver [Jr.], in about 1963, I think, before Kennedy was killed. VISTA was the domestic equivalent of that.

And I applied to that and would have gone to work for a year after graduation from Dartmouth somewhere in a—you know, in an inner city, probably, or an Indian reservation or something like that. But it was not a draft deferment, and the draft was in sort of full bloom by then. But going to graduate school guaranteed you a deferment, and for a master's degree that meant two more years of not being eligible for the draft.

So I went right on, and, you know, looking back, I would have done something else for a year, and actually I'm all for people doing that now, and if I were the king I would make every high school graduate have to take a year off and go do something else before they go to college. Two of our four kids did that, and it was really good for them.

So that—all of that mixed in with where I was my senior year. You know, like a lot of seniors, you get to the point where, *Oh, my God, what is next?* And that's a difficult place. I was just with one of your—you said you're a junior?

PEARL: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Well, she's actually—my class supports Dickey [the John Sloane Dickey Center for International Understanding] interns to go abroad and do things. But we also have students from different classes that—we support 66 scholarships, and there's a young woman named Zonia [pronounced ZAHN-yuh] [R.] Moore [Class of 2016], who I think is—she's a senior, and we do a dinner at Homecoming at the Norwich Inn on Saturday night, and I ended up sitting across from her and chatting with her about choices.

And I could sort of hear the tension in her voice about “what next?” And, of course, that’s a big thing, and it’s true for almost everybody coming up on college graduation. Like, *What next?* And I’ll—you know, maybe after we’re done you can tell me what you—what you’re thinking about. I’m always interested what people are doing.

So for me, I made a choice—

PEARL: Of course.

JOHNSTON: Sorry, go ahead.

PEARL: Oh, no, I was just saying we could talk about that after.

JOHNSTON: Yeah. So I made a choice that was based in part on interest and in part—well, it’s all based on interest, but part of it was self-interest in terms of avoiding the draft, and part of it was intellectual interest, that city planning looked like a pretty interesting thing to do.

So I—all of that—all of that settled in in a nice way of being accepted into a program at a school I really liked, and financially in a pretty good way. And the whole time in the background was Vietnam and the antiwar—of the war expanding and the antiwar movement expanding, and Madison was at the heartbeat of antiwar sentiment, and I stepped right into the middle of that when I got there and ended up not being a leader but participating and, you know, meeting people.

I know I’ve had conversations with some of my Dartmouth classmates about some of this stuff, and it can be a touchy subject for people who were in the military and served honorably, and some of them went to Vietnam and so on. And, again, I respect that. You know, I’m not—at this point not particularly proud of the fact that I managed to avoid that, but at the time, there were plenty of people like me, who were doing exactly that.

You know, the country was split right down the middle over—over this, and the antiwar movement was strong and loud and smart. You know, some of my guy friends who were also affected by this at the time—we have kind of agreed that the level of protest against the war was as

strong as it was and articulate as it was because of the draft, because so many of us were threatened with being drafted.

We couched our antiwar fervor in all of this strong, we thought patriotic language about opposing the war for all these sort of high moral reasons, but a lot of it had to do with self-interest and the fact that so many middle-class guys were—were going to be affected. And I think that fueled the strength of the anti-Vietnam effort of the protests. You know, the military was then full of people from different backgrounds. I think it was a much healthier kind of military than the one we have now, where we basically pay mostly poor kids to go off and fight our—you know, fight our wars. And some of them do it because they can get to college.

But in those days, it was a whole different approach, and we were out there, you know, yelling and screaming and protesting and feeling like we were at the high edge of the moral curve on the opposition to the war.

PEARL: Can you tell me about some of your involvement in the anti-Vietnam War protests, the movement?

JOHNSTON: Well, as I suggested, some of that certainly started on campus with—with meetings, with some rallies about the war, where the general sentiment on campus—my recollection is, is that it—it grew to be—I don't know if it was a majority, but a lot of students who felt like I did, that there was something wrong with the war, and by 1966 a lot of us—there were certainly many others who didn't feel that way or who were headed towards the military or came from military families, who disagreed with that, but their voices were pretty quiet at the time.

So—so I had the pieces of that opposition kind of in my head and a little bit of my background when I went off to the University of Wisconsin and stepped into the sort of powder keg of protest. I mean, Madison and [University of California,] Berkeley were—were two of the real hot-point campuses in terms of protest.

The Students for a Democratic Society [SDS], which was a national student group that led a lot of these demonstrations, was quite visible and with a lot of students involved on several campuses, including Wisconsin. I went to a lot of the

meetings there at the student center, called the [sic; Der] Rathskeller.

There was a guy named Paul Soglin, who became the head of SDS and eventually became the mayor of Madison and was instrumental in national legislation that allowed college students to be considered legitimate voters. And, because of the number of students on campus, they managed to vote him in as mayor, I think to the horror of a lot of people in Madison.

But anyway, this guy, Paul Soglin, was a visible, fiery protest leader, and so I participated in a whole lot of meetings where a lot of students sat around, shouting at each other about the war and about democracy. And, you know, if you see the movie, *Forrest Gump*, there are some scenes in there that are probably a little bit exaggerated, but they weren't far off to the kind of chaotic discussions that went on, where there were very few leaders and lots of people who thought they should be leaders screaming and yelling about the—you know, about the “effin’ war” and all of that stuff.

And eventually resulted in—I think I mentioned to you this book, *They Marched Into Sunlight[: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, 1967]*, which is about happened on October 12th, 1967, which was my first year in—in Madison. What happened there that day, both in Madison and in Vietnam, and the parallels between the two.

And in Madison there was a huge protest—protests on many campuses, against the corporations that made military weapons. And Dow Chemical [Company] made napalm, which was the most god-awful war weapon short of the hydrogen bomb ever invented. It's sort of a plastic, fiery stuff that got shot out of flame throwers and basically burned people's skins off. And we—we used that extensively in Vietnam. There's a famous photograph of a little girl with her whole body burning, naked, covered with napalm.

So Dow was the manufacturer of that, and they recruited students on campus, on many campuses. And SDS—there were a bunch of protests, saying they shouldn't be on our campus, and we should stop them. And I basically supported that. I didn't want them, you know, recruiting employees to go make napalm or other—other war weapons.

But I kind of drew the line at preventing students from interviewing for jobs. I felt, *Okay, if they're gonna make that decision, that's their right to do it.* SDS decided that they were going to block access to the interviews of students who wanted to do those interviews, and on that October—I mean, this built over several weeks, and the book kind of chronicles the whole development of it—the day of the riot, which eventually turned into a riot, SDS—and there are some photographs in the book, one with Paul Soglin in the front, looking in horror because the policemen are about to charge them with batons. And that's what happened.

And outside, where I was, there were probably 5,000 students, screaming at the tops of their lungs, "Kill the pigs! Kill the pigs!" Which was the name that was given to the police. And the police—and this comes out in David Maraniss's book—were mostly high school graduates, mostly of Polish or other, similar ethnic backgrounds, from Madison and Milwaukee. And most of the leaders of the protest group were college students from elsewhere, including a lot of Jewish students. And there was a whole sort of anti-Semitic role to a lot of the friction that developed.

Soglin was—happened to be Jewish and was from—I don't remember, even—maybe Chicago or maybe New Jersey or something. So there was this instant kind of friction over—over culture that went on.

So this riot started. The police used tear gas. They called in reinforcements from the state police, and it was the one and only time that I was ever tear gassed, and I wouldn't recommend it to my worst enemy, to experience that.

And the book shows what was happening in Vietnam on that particular day. Two companies, I think, of Army soldiers were ambushed by the Viet Cong, and most of them were killed in an ambush that was based on faulty intelligence—in fact, manufactured intelligence, which Maraniss researches in this book, that started with Lyndon Johnson, went through [Robert S.] McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, went to [William C.] Westmoreland, the head general, basically saying, "You need to up the body count in Vietnam. I'm up for reelection next year." That would have been, you know, in '68. He eventually didn't run, of course, because of the antiwar effort. He said, "I'm not gonna be wimped out by the Viet Cong."

And so the order went out to up the body count. And they upped the body count, and they upped the body count by just changing the numbers, and Maraniss in his book interviews a bunch of soldiers who survived, who said, “We just went out on patrol, and five of us killed five Viet Cong. We reported the number killed as 25.” And over several years, almost every day in the paper there was a body count. It was like the ball scores. I mean, when you think of it now, it’s just horrifying, but they would say, “Today in Vietnam the Americans killed 350 Viet Cong, and we only lost 25.” You know, “only.” I mean, now—you know, we lost what? I think 6,000 in Iraq or something like that, or maybe—I don’t remember.

But not that any of that is good. You know, one is too many. But in October 12th, 1967, there were, in quotes, “only” I think 15[,000] or 16,000 casualties, American casualties, meaning dead soldiers, not to mention the wounded ones. And by the end of the war we had lost, you know, 57,000 soldiers. So the war was really just escalating at the time, and that incident on October 12th was reported in a small story in American newspapers as a victory.

And one of the guys who survived it was interviewed by Gen. Westmoreland, the top general, right after it happened, in a field hospital, and he said, “Son, what happened?” And the soldier said, “We were ambushed and wiped out.” And Westmoreland apparently said, “No, you weren’t. That was a victory.” And so it just got reported as a victory, and yet it was basically a slaughter of American soldiers.

So the whole issue of faulty intelligence and of manufacturing numbers I’m sure didn’t start with Vietnam. It probably happened in World War II, and it, you know, probably happened in the Civil War and in the American Revolution and, you know, probably when Agamemnon or when Ajax reported back to Agamemnon on how many Trojans had been killed, they had—they exaggerated as well. So that kind of storytelling—

PEARL: Yeah.

PEARL: —in wartime has been around for a very long time.

So anyway, that—so my attitudes coming out of college then took full bloom in graduate school as I was—you know, found myself in the middle of this environment where everybody was anti war, and it was not considered cool to be a supporter of the war, even though Madison had ROTC and there was a—you know, there was a group of students who were very much in favor of the war, and there were confrontations between groups. But—but the overwhelming balance of local power was on the—was on the anti side.

And I don't know how much we want to jump around here, but my attitude ended up being a very difficult thing in a very specific way when I came home the following summer. But what's your next question, and we'll see where we go.

PEARL: I was hoping you can go into how you got involved with SDS and eventually the Dow Chemical riot, how you ended up there that day.

JOHNSTON: I think because of the attitudes I had coming out of Dartmouth, the education I had, the challenging of authority that was rampant in the country, and I was certainly a part of that. It was—it was just in the air. I mean, and culturally the Beatles and long hair and everything else.

So when I stepped onto that campus, it was exciting to feel a part of something that seemed to be really important and made us all feel really important. And, as I suggested a few minutes ago, there was more than a dose of self-interest in that, but I think we—we overlooked that at the time because we were just on the—you know, the right side of God, if you will, or something, on this issue, and there was only one way to—to look at it.

So because of the environment in Madison—I mean, if I had gone to the University of Mississippi for graduate school (which would have been pretty unlikely, probably), or in some other places as well, but there it was—it was just part of the—it was in the air, and so it was easy to get involved. You know, I was the kind of person who was very interested in—in policy issues, so for me it was natural to—to get involved in that and to—and to be a part of what was happening.

You know, as I suggested, I didn't become a leader of the protests in Madison, but I was part of the group of people

who supported what the—you know, what the real hot-heads like Paul Soglin were—were doing and espousing at the time.

PEARL: Yeah. And can you describe the day to me, the riot, where you were and what you were doing? What was your role?

JOHNSTON: Oh, I was just a participant, an observer. There's a picture in that book that shows a whole lot of students outside I think it's called—it was called Bascom Hall. And it was inside where this confrontation was going on, and everybody's running around because the tear gas was just starting.

But I went because it was another protest. There'd been a bunch that I'd been involved in on campus, and this was very specific because the opposition to companies like Dow Chemical recruiting for job interviews was a big deal. And also students were trying to find ways to oppose that.

And this particular day, as I suggested, the SDS blocked the hallway so that students who had set up interviews with Dow Chemical to get a job, for God's sake, to get probably a good job, you know, in terms of their future and pay and all that sort of thing couldn't get to the interview, so the—the—the dean or I think he was called the chancellor, how was actually against the war but he had to enforce kind of law and order, and so he had to call the police to help these students get to their interviews.

And, you know, when Maraniss wrote this book, he—I think he interviewed this guy, but I can't remember exactly—but who basically was very conflicted about having to do this, but he had to enforce law and order and allow people to get to their interviews.

And, as I suggested, I was against the company. I was in favor of the protest. But I was not in favor of not allowing people to go for interviews. To me, that crossed a line. You know, that was a violation of their rights to—I could yell at them and try to convince them not to do that, along with everybody else who was doing that, but it wasn't right to stop them. But SDS stepped over that line, blocked them off, and the police came in, ordered them to disperse. They refused, and then the police charged.

When David Maraniss interviewed some of those cops, you know, however many years, 30 years later—many of them were still alive and around—they talked about how frightened they were. You know, there were 20 of them, and there were 5,000 students chanting, “Kill the pigs.” So some of them thought they were going to die right there, that they were going to be smothered or overwhelmed by students.

And one policeman was badly injured. Somebody threw a brick from the building outside and hit one of the cops in the head. So it was ugly. But, you know, it was part of the—part of the atmosphere.

And for me, with my background, it was very easy to—you know, to do that. I mean—and, of course, a lot of those—the potential for those attitudes came out of my background from years before, and my parents, my mother in particular and their—their values and kind of politics that they—that they espoused. So for me to be a part of that protest, which turned into a riot, was kind of a natural evolution.

PEARL: Yeah. And you speak about the book a lot and about the people, the movement that David Marius [sic] spoke about, the manufactured numbers, but how much of this stuff were you aware of at the time, itself?

JOHNSTON: Not specifically. I mean, the issues of the—you know, of the Vietnam part of the book, of manufacturing numbers—I think a lot of people in the antiwar movement were suspicious of what—you know, of the PR [public relations] that was coming out of the government and the military about what was happening in Vietnam and whether and how much of it was—was accurate.

But I think—you know, we certainly, in terms of the campus stuff, the issues around the companies that manufacture these weapons—you know, everybody knew about that. But I think—I think it wasn’t very nuanced at the time. I think the—the energy level and the excitement was so that it sometimes got in the way of thoughtful, careful analysis. You know, that’s what historians are for, I guess, that—a lot of that didn’t come out until later.

And, of course, there have been, you know, any number of books written about Vietnam, both about the policy stuff and about the war, itself, and some of the movies that—you

know, that have come out about—about the war. So there's a lot of good stuff that's out there that is probably a lot more objective than any of us really understood.

I mean, I'd like to think that that Dartmouth professor knew his stuff and was coolly analytical about it, and he was such an impressive professor otherwise that I think most of us thought, *Boy, he must really know what he's talkin' about.* So that really was instrumental in helping to channel my views.

But I think the potential for me to be oriented that way—that was all there when I—you know, when I heard this stuff in 1964 and as it got reinforced in the early antiwar efforts I participated in on campus. And, again, I don't remember that any of that was on a huge scale. I think because of the stuff I got involved in in Madison, that that kind of overshadows my recollections about the Dartmouth part.

And, you know, the antiwar movement did get quite volatile on campus. You know, people—students took over the administration building in—I don't remember—maybe 1970 or something like that. So certainly antiwar sentiment grew to a much higher level at Dartmouth, as it did on many campuses but at Dartmouth after I graduated. And then I experienced it elsewhere, so—

PEARL: Yeah. Did you ever consider that there would be tear gas or riot either at Madison or elsewhere at the protests that you attended?

JOHNSTON: I think we were aware that there was a certain risk involved, you know, when you get a volatile situation and the police had been at previous protest rallies but mainly just to keep the peace, and by and large, everything up to that point had been peaceful.

You know, I was just listening this morning to some of the things about Martin Luther King's career just before he was killed in Memphis, when he went to Memphis to help the sanitation workers, and some of the people marching with him turned violent. And for him that was a slap in the face because he had always been about nonviolence.

So I think up to that point, most of the protests in Madison and around the country were loud and, you know, obnoxious

and fueled by idealism and some self-interest but were basically peaceful. And then there were some things that happened. This was probably the first one that turned that violent.

Of course, there were a number of things that had happened elsewhere, you know, culminating at Kent State [University], with the National Guard [of the U.S.] killing four students on May 4th, 1970, which ironically was my wife and my first anniversary.

And Madison—when the so-called Weather Underground [Organization], which was the radical extreme group that was out there, antiwar group—when they set off a bomb in a—I think it was a math building in Madison, and they killed a poor maintenance worker, and all the stuff kind of stopped at that point. I think people were so startled by real violence that—

I mean, I wasn't in Madison then. By then I was in—you know, gone on working in—got married and avoided the draft and all that sort of thing, but—

So, no, I don't think—I think we were all pretty startled when that incident turned into such a melee and the tear gas and all of that, and I remember running away and having to go back to my apartment and flush my eyes out and just sitting there, thinking, *That was really awful.*

But were we seriously reflective about that? I'm not sure. I think it was still too fresh and too raw that there was no real serious questioning about our motives or about the righteousness of our strong feelings.

PEARL: Mm-hm.

And you mentioned earlier family issues when you came home that summer?

JOHNSTON: Okay. So, 1967 in the summer I was a city planning student at Madison. I came home and worked for the city manager as a city planning intern. I was—I didn't realize this till last summer, but I was kind of the first person really called a city planner in Elgin, because they'd never had a city planner, so to speak, and planning decisions got done other ways.

So I worked for the city manager, whom my father had helped to hire several years before. I think I'm remembering that correctly, but I haven't gone back to research it. But he certainly—they knew each other.

And there was also a lot of volatile political stuff going on both about the war and about civil rights. They were—I mean, you have to understand—and if you've studied this, you probably understand this, that there were these twin things, protest things going on. One had to do with civil rights; one had to do with Vietnam. And, of course, Martin Luther King pulled them together and said—and he became anti war and said, you know, "We're over there killing people who don't look like us, who are dark skinned" and so on. So he tied them together. But they were—they were separate movements but with a lot of people like myself, who overlapped in their involvement in it.

So anyway, I had this job, and one day I ran into one of my high school coaches, who was—who was the vice principal, still, at the high school. And he—I ran into him on the street, and he looked at me, and he said—and I probably had long hair. I had pretty long hair by then. I probably had bell-bottom pants and a flowered shirt and was probably wearing sandals. And he looked at me, and he said, "Dave, what's happened to you?"

You know, I'd been the sort of hometown hero who'd gone off to college to play football, and here I was, looking like a—you know, a goddamn hippie. And I'm sure that's what he was thinking. And I just looked at him and said, "Mr. Corman, education. That's what's happened to me."

Anyway, so shortly after that, I ran into a boyhood friend—and I alluded to this earlier—Richard, whom I had not seen in five years, since graduation. And he had not gone to college, had joined the [U.S.] Marines and did *not* go to Vietnam. He was lucky. And he got out of the Marines, came home, and I ran into him walking around the street with a great big Afro hair- —you know, hairdo, which was fashionable then for young black men and women. And he had a big ebony fist made out of some kind of ceramic, on a chain, a big chain around his neck, hanging out.

And we hadn't seen each other—I mean, we'd been to each other's birthday parties, we'd played sports, we'd gone all

the way through school together. We gave each other a hug, and then we went off to, you know, have coffee or maybe met a couple of days later for pancakes, and I said, "Richard, what's with the black fist?" He still had it on. He said, "It scares people, doesn't it?" I said, "Yeah, is that the idea?" and he said, "Yeah, pretty much."

He said, "People here need to wake up that the issues that we're protesting"—and he was then the leader of a—of a young group of black, mostly men, young men who were protesting on civil rights stuff. And so he was leading that, and he said early on that he thought he was probably being followed by the FBI and that he was being investigated.

You know, meanwhile I was participating in marches both against the war and for civil rights in town. My minister, a Universalist Unitarian [*sic*; Unitarian Universalist Association] minister, was the lead minister on antiwar and civil rights activities. And, again, these things crossed over in terms of the issues and emotions and, you know, the antagonism towards the government policies and so on.

So my friend was leading this group, and the group actually, with his energy, sparked a little riot one night, and his younger brother and a bunch of other kids firebombed a Sears store and were arrested. And the night this happened, I was outside the police station, which was in the City Hall where I worked, and I was still there when another high school guy, who hadn't been a great friend but I knew and I'd played sports with him, a guy named Charlie, came running out of the police station—he was a cop—with a shotgun and came over to me and said, "Hey, Dave, how's it goin'?" And I said, "Charlie, I didn't know you were a cop now." And he had beer on his breath.

And I said, "Charlie, you got beer on your breath." And he said, "Yeah, I was home, off duty, lying on the couch, drinking a beer, watching a ballgame." And all the cops had been called in because of the riot. And I'd like to think I had the nerve to say to him, "You shouldn't be running around with a shotgun." I don't think I did. I think I probably was a little frightened by this visage, but—

So civil rights and the Vietnam stuff kept crossing over. But I had discussions with—not in my immediate family. I think my mother was proud of me. I think my father was both proud

and nervous about the way I was and, you know, the things I was out involved in through our church. But I had other relatives, you know, cousins and other people at family events where we just had screaming arguments about—about the war and our opposition to—to the war.

And that happened to young people all over the country, because people were so divided about it. You know, it's like politics now. You know, you could have a [Hillary Rodham] Clinton supporter and a [Donald J.] Trump supporter from the same family. And actually some of my relatives in the Midwest are arch, right-wing Republicans. And that's fine. I have no problem with that. But we have just different points of view on that.

So all of that was in the air, and, you know, splitting families down the middle, splitting communities, splitting different parts of the country. And it got—you know, it had got bigger and bolder through the late '60s up to the very time the—you know, when the U.S. basically conceded defeat and left Vietnam after, you know, 57,000 casualties and a president, Nixon, who lied to us and eventually committed the Watergate scandal and all of that stuff, which also was—was connected to the war.

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: You know, Daniel Ellsberg and the Ellsberg [sic; Pentagon] Papers, and you probably studied some of that stuff. Are you involved in this project through a course?

PEARL: Yeah. I'm going to actually stop the recording right now—

JOHNSTON: Okay.

PEARL: —because we're coming up on four o'clock, and there may be others who have this room reserved. I'd like to thank you so much for your time, and I just stopped the—

[Recording interruption.]

PEARL: This is Joshua Pearl interviewing David Johnston. Today is January 23rd, 2016. We're conducting a phone interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. This is part three. I am

interviewing from the Rauner Library on Dartmouth College campus in Hanover, New Hampshire, and Mr. Johnston is in his home in West Hartford, Connecticut. Is that correct, David?

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

PEARL: All right. So last time we spoke, we just finished talking about the summer of 1967, but if you don't mind, I'd like to go back and talk about your time in Wisconsin a little bit more, about the Dow Chemical protest.

JOHNSTON: Sure.

PEARL: I was hoping—you spoke about the book by David Marianus [sic; Maraniss], *The March Into the Sunlight* [sic; *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, 1967*].

JOHNSTON: Right.

PEARL: I was hoping you could tell me more about what you experienced and what you saw at the protest, itself.

JOHNSTON: Well, I get to Madison in the fall of 1966. I had a nice Sears Roebuck fellowship to study urban planning, and that was all well and good. And actually I found it to be easier than being at Dartmouth, academically, which is always a nice reflection on—on our alma mater. Well, not yours yet.

And the anti-Vietnam protest stuff was in full bloom or I guess really escalating on campuses all over the country, and Madison, University of Wisconsin, was one of those places where there was a pretty powerful group of students called Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, and they were national. And they were holding meetings about the war and lots of discussion.

And there was kind of an excitement in the air about it that was infectious, and I think that did affect how—how some people got involved and maybe how many people got involved, because of how infectious that was to be at that age and in a place where everybody was feeling the same way.

And since I had developed some antagonism towards the war, coming out of my academic study and other involvement at Dartmouth, it was natural for me to—to step into that. And I began to go to the meetings in the student center, called The [sic; Der] Rathskeller, where a lot of people were shouting and screaming and without much organization.

But there was one guy, Paul Soglin, who kind of emerged as the SDS leader, and I think probably chatted with him briefly, but there were just a lot of students involved. And, after all, we're talking about a campus of 30,000 students, so certainly not everybody was—was involved. In fact, [Vice President Richard B.] "Dick" Cheney was on campus at the same time. I didn't know that till many years later, but interesting coincidence.

So I attended those meetings and of course was following what was happening nationally and all the distress about it. And one of the ways of focusing the protest was to challenge the recruiting by companies that manufactured weapons for the war in Vietnam, and one of the most publicized ones was napalm, which was a plastic that I think was shot from, like, a flame thrower, which was really an awful weapon. It burned alive and didn't even necessarily kill them.

So Dow Chemical was the producer of that. And there were other companies that were certainly the target of the protests, but Dow in particular because of that weapon and the publicity and the famous picture of the naked little girl, running, screaming, burning, somewhere in Vietnam.

So Dow was coming, like other companies, to recruit graduating seniors and maybe some grad students to go to work at Dow Chemical—you know, the normal thing one would do approaching graduation. But the protest basically said we shouldn't allow these companies on campus, and SDS decided that they wanted to stop people from interviewing.

And I was involved in some of the protests against Dow Chemical. I was not in favor of blocking students from going to a job interview. To me, that crossed a line. If we couldn't convince them to not work for the manufacturer of napalm, then so be it.

But things escalated. The tension escalated around the particular day when these interviews were going to take place, which I think, as I recall, was October 12th, 1967. Students were supposed to go to some rooms in the main administration building. I can't remember the name of it. Bascom Hall, maybe. To interview with representatives of Dow Chemical. And there were apparently about 5,000 students, including me, outside—you know, we'd be yelling and screaming about Dow Chemical and "Don't do this" and so on.

And then there were a group of hard-core SDS people inside the building that filled the hall, and they basically blocked the students who were going to go for the interviews from going to their interviews. And the campus police and police from Madison were sent in by the—I guess invited by the chancellor of the university, who ironically was against the war but had to enforce the laws that were about free speech, I guess. And the police came in with their—with their—looked like oversized billy clubs. I'm not sure they were, but to students they looked—they looked pretty menacing.

But in reality, and as the book recounts, there were maybe 20 cops and there were probably 50 students inside the building, and there were thousands of students outside. And I was in that group. And people were yelling and screaming. And, as Maraniss noted in his book, they were—one of the things that was being shouted was, "Kill the pigs," which in those days meant "kill the cops," which in retrospect was just an awful kind of thing. But it was in the heat of the moment in this totally polarized situation.

And inside the building, the police ordered the students to disperse and allow the other students, who wanted to go for interviews, to—to pass, and the SDS folks refused, and the police all of a sudden went at the SDS folks. And there's a picture in the book of the shocked look on the faces of the students, including Paul Soglin, the leader, as the cops came after them with—you know, with their billy clubs and basically started clobbering them.

And the noise—this communicated, I guess, outside somehow that—that the cops were beating the students, and the noise just grew louder outside. Other police showed up, I think from the county. They shot tear gas canisters so the whole place was filled with tear gas. One cop was hit in the

head with a brick. There's a picture in the book, which became sort of a famous picture, of a student taking—I think he'd taking the American flag down off the top of the building, and he was later arrested. But everybody was cheering.

And again, in retrospect, this was pretty extreme and over the top, I guess, but in the heat of the moment, that's what was going on. But, of course, as soon as people got a whiff of the tear gas, which I did and hoped to never do again, everybody ran and dispersed. A lot of students went to the hospital with head lacerations. No one was killed. A lot of people were injured. And just an awful situation.

There were echoes of that that happened after that, that I was involved in, and, you know, that was just a time and a place in our country—I mean, the irony is that at that time, when he wrote his book about that day, there had “only”—and I would put that in quotes—“only” been I think 16[,000] or 17,000 American soldiers killed in Vietnam. And, of course, we eventually lost I think 57,000. So this was still early in the war.

The Tonkin Gulf [sic; Gulf of Tonkin] Resolution had happened three years before. We had—I don't know; I can't remember—maybe half a million troops in Vietnam. And so these protests were exploding all over the country. Ironically, my wife, who was three years younger, was involved in protests at Columbia University that happened I think in—yeah, the same year, 1967. She was then an undergraduate in—in New York City.

And so these things were going on all over the country. It was a time and a place in the country when—when that was happening, and the fervor of that was—was there. And, as I mentioned before, it really split families. I had arguments with relatives of mine the previous summer, who were in favor of the war because, after all, it was patriotic.

I think my father, who had not been in the military just because of his age break between the two wars but was involved in civil defense thing, was I think very nervous about things that I was involved in and some of the ideas that I was expressing about—about the war, because it was still considered, I think by the majority of Americans, to be unpatriotic.

And, of course, many of my both high school and college classmates were in the military, and some were killed, and it was just, you know, a hard—a hard time.

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: So I think that's the basics of the Madison experience. That was certainly the most outstanding single incident that I—that I went through up there.

PEARL: And after the protests and after you experienced the tear gas and witnessed the violence, how did this affect your determination to continue protesting? Did you ever doubt the protests or the movement?

JOHNSTON: No, I really didn't. You know, I also—there was this complicating factor, which I think a lot of young men my age didn't think about at the time, but I think I have since discussed with friends of mine who were either in the military or managed to avoid getting drafted, that the size of the protests I think were larger than they might have been because there were so many middle-class young men who were threatened with the draft, and it was easy to be against the war because your personal situation was so directly threatened by it.

But I think we all thought we were being complete noble and idealistic about it and that our opposition was purely ideological, but I think, looking at it from hindsight being 20/20, is that there was a good measure of self-interest in it. So at the time I didn't really see that. It took, I don't know, 20 year—maybe 30 years before I really came to understand that through reading things like Maraniss's book and just talking with my—with my peers from that era. And, of course, many of my peers, both from high school and from college, don't agree with that perspective, served honorably in the military at so forth.

But, no, I was involved in a number of additional protests the summer of 1967, which was before the Dow Chemical riot. There were marches in my hometown in Elgin the summer I was working there, and I can't remember: Did I talk about the confrontation I had with a—with a policeman in—in Elgin in the last session, Josh? I can't remember.

PEARL: I don't remember, either, but we can briefly go through it.

JOHNSTON: Well, so the summer I was working there and ended up mediating between the black protest group, which was headed up by a high school friend of mine—actually had been a friend of mine who happened to be black, from probably kindergarten. We all went to school together and played sports together and were in each other's homes a number of times. He led a group which was loosely connected I think with the Black Panthers in Chicago, which was the big black group at the time.

But the—the opposition to the war and the protests for civil rights were intermingling in terms of issues. And if you listen to some of the speeches of Martin Luther King, he came out against the war and said, you know, "You're sending mostly young men of color over there, and you're fighting against other young men of color, and we should not be there."

So for people who were opposed to the war, typically they were also involved in civil rights work. So that summer, I—because I was in a negotiating role, really, or mediating role between the black protest group because of my friendship with this young man, Richard, and I worked for the city, the city manager—I was a city planning intern—I was called in one afternoon to the police chief's office, which was in the basement of City Hall, where I worked, and met with him and his lieutenant.

And there was another guy sitting in the corner I thought was another—another cop from my town. And they asked me about the protest group. They were convinced that they were controlled by the Black Panthers. I said there might have been some contact but I didn't think that was the case, that the issues being protested for civil rights were the issues—were issues in our town, of housing discrimination and employment discrimination and racial prejudice.

So at the end of that conversation, the lieutenant asked me what I thought about the war in Vietnam, and I was too young and stupid to shut up and just say, "Well, that's not our subject today" and say, "Thank you very much" and get up and walk out, because I was 23 years old, idealistic and thought I knew everything.

And so I started to talk about my views about the war in Vietnam, and after, oh, I don't remember, a few minutes, this lieutenant suddenly jumped up, hit his fist on the table and said, "My nephew just took a bullet in the gut and died in Vietnam because of yellow-bellied cowards like you" and stormed out of the room. And the police chief sort of apologized but I think probably intellectually was on his lieutenant's side and not on my side of that issue. So I left.

And later that night, my father, who had been on the City Council—I think I mentioned that—and had helped to hire this city manager—my father had since retired from the City Council—got a call from the city manager, apologizing for that lieutenant's behavior and feeling that he had to alert us that this lieutenant had left the police station, had gone to a bar, had a few drinks and had threatened to kill me, and also that I should know that the guy sitting in the corner was an FBI agent.

So clearly, I had an FBI file, which got created at the time, and I've thought about trying to find that because those records are open now. And I was joking with my family, and I said, "Well, probably what it said was 'another misguided liberal with long hair, wearing a flowered shirt, bell-bottom pants and sandals.'" Now, I doubt I was dressed like that, working my day job, but probably was looking like that otherwise.

At the same time, I had run into one of my high school coaches, who was the vice principal at the high school, still was. I hadn't seen him in five years, and he looked at me, and he said, "Dave, what's happened to you?" And I know he was looking at my appearance. And I said, "Mr. Corman, education."

And I don't know that we had more conversation about it, but I just remember there was this gulf between my views and those of other people my age—not everyone—and a lot of other people that mixed those two issues together at the time. You know, and also people sometimes say, "Isn't it amazing how much protest there was and how many people protested?"—I think trying to compare that to the last 15 years of whatever opposition there has been to America's involvement in war.

But I think it's hard to compare the times, and I think when you add in this business of the draft and the threat to middle-class boys, that's an issue that doesn't—that is not there now. Now we just send, you know, poor people off to our volunteer army. But that's a whole 'nother story.

So anyway, a mixture of idealism and self-interest.

PEARL: Okay. So let's start talking about 1968, because you mentioned that you were involved in a lot of different, very big anti-Vietnam rallies and protests.

JOHNSTON: Yeah. I'd have to look up the dates of the different marches, but I certainly—we had—going into that year, I was still around in the Midwest before I left for my first job in—in California. And there were some marches in my hometown about the war, and I participated in that. My minister at the Universalist [Unitarian] Church was the leading minister, actually one of the only few ministers who was willing to get out in front on issues like that, and he actually had an attempt on his life. A piece of our church was blown off by some crazy people from another town, who were in favor of the war, I think, and were eventually arrested. But fortunately for my minister, he was sick that night and he wasn't in his usual place, writing his sermon.

So things got pretty ugly around some of those things. And then in the end of the summer—I had been hired to—to go to work in the city planning department in San Diego, basically because I thought it would be fun to go to California. I think everybody wants to move to California at one point in their—in their life. Maybe not anymore, but in those days. You know, with no phone call, no interview, just an exchange of paperwork, and I got hired.

And out there, San Diego was then and I think still is a very conservative place. There were no protests against the war, but I met people who certainly had similar feelings, but there were things going on elsewhere in the country. There were marches in various places. I think there'd been marches in Washington that I didn't participate in because I was in California.

And then sometime in the fall, I was notified by my draft board in Illinois, near by hometown, that I was now 1-A, which meant I was eligible for the draft. I'd had a deferment

all the way through college and graduate school. And actually, as I recall, I went to graduate school when I did because otherwise I'd be drafted, because I had been applied and been accepted into VISTA to go work for a year, but that was not a deferment.

So I got reclassified. I had left Madison with a handbook from the University of Wisconsin Draft Resistance League [Wisconsin Draft Resistance Union?], which was a pretty formal organization that taught techniques for fighting the draft. And because I was in California, I was able to get the physical shifted from Illinois to California, which took about six months.

And at the same time, I was having some trouble with my lower back. I had injured it—I think I mentioned this before—the summer of 1963, working on silo building construction, which included a friend of mine from high school, who was eventually killed in—in Cambodia. I went to an orthopedic doctor, and he looked at my back and said I had a congenital defect, a gap in a vertebrae [sic] and I should start wearing a back brace. And I didn't tell him about my—my impending draft status.

But I came back to see him a month later, follow-up, and then I told him, and he said, "Well, I'm gonna write you a letter saying you shouldn't be in the Army, that your back would be a problem." Of course, at the same time, I was running four or five miles a day on the beach in San Diego. So, yes, I had a bad back, but I was also playing the system. And because of my education and participation with the organization back in Madison, I knew how to fight the system, as did a lot of people of my—you know, similar background, middle-class boys, who had an advantage over poor kids who didn't.

I did have to go and take a draft physical spring of 1969, and I had to go to Los Angeles, and I was there in the day they broke the record for the number of physicals. My recollection is that there were 2,200 guys who were getting their physical. And my doctor had said, "Bring your file with you." I also had read some of the suggestions in my Draft Resistance League handbook, just some really dumb stuff, but, you know, you get a little desperate in those situations.

So the night before, I went to a disco club and sat in front of the speakers until I had practically blown my eardrums out, and I ate about 25 candy bars so that my blood sugar was highly elevated. But the doctors who were doing the physicals—they were—they were—they were alert to these tricks. So I had all of those things going on.

But I did this physical, and most of the other guys were black and brown guys from the Los Angeles and San Diego area. And it was clear to me that they were headed to Vietnam. And even though I was sympathetic to their plight, I certainly wasn't planning to go to Vietnam, given my feelings about the war.

And I was also in touch with my relatives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in Canada, cousins who lived there, about the possibility of moving there, and as you'll note in your study of the history of this era, a lot of—a lot of boys did move to Canada and were eventually pardoned by I think [President James Earl] "Jimmy" Carter for that. So I could have had a totally different life if that had happened.

But anyway, to make a long story short, because of my back issue, I got a temporary deferment, and I also had written a letter, sent all the paperwork, to the draft board in Illinois and requested a hearing, and had requested permission to bring my minister and a lawyer. And I think this was pretty early in the draft resistance game, and I think they just said, "Oh, this guy's a nuisance," and they then made my deferment permanent, so I ended up being deferred completely from being drafted.

So, you know, in retrospect I'm not particularly proud of all of that sequence, but I think, given what was going on and the feelings about the war being an immoral war and, you know, a complete waste of—of blood and treasure, as they say, I was not about to get drafted and go into that war, so I did what I had to do, but certainly respected my peers who—you know, who went into the military and so on.

So the protest stuff continued. And just jumping forward a little bit, I got married that year, moved to New York so my wife could finish school, and we participated in at least two monster marches in Washington. I think there were, like, a million people. And I'd have to do the research, but I think it was probably, like, 1970 or something the time we did that.

So my commitment to the antiwar ethos was still there. I wasn't directly involved in protest stuff again until probably about 1970, when there were these bigger marches on the—on the East Coast.

PEARL: Okay. And do you still have this anti-draft manual?

JOHNSTON: No, I don't, unfortunately. I suspect that I left it in my parents' home in Illinois along with a whole lot of other stuff, and, you know, you kind of forgot about it. No, I'm sorry, I must have had that with me in California because when I was reclassified for the draft, I must have been looking at that. Or maybe I remembered. I just don't recall. I just know that a lot of things that I had kept in my parents' home, after my father died a few years later and my mother ended up selling the house and moving—moving to another community to live with my sister—she just threw a lot of stuff out, including my Dartmouth jacket, much to my dismay.

But, you know, I wasn't around to claim those things, and as the parent of grown children in a big house that's full of our kids' stuff, I'm sympathetic to my—to my parents at the time—or my mother at the time for saying, "Ah, he's never gonna use this stuff. We're just gonna get rid of it." But I think—my wife and I are at least going to at least ask. [Both chuckle.]

So unfortunately, no, I don't have that. That would be a wonderful thing to find. I'm sure there must be copies around somewhere, but you're the first person who's ever asked me that, so now I'm curious, and I may just see if I couldn't track one down. If I do, I'll let you know.

PEARL: [Chuckles.] Good to know.

And when you went to California, did you expect to receive your draft card once you left school?

JOHNSTON: You know, I think I didn't. I think somehow I thought because I was going to become a city planner and there was a shortage of city planners—I think I even wrote a letter to President Johnson, saying, "People with my education should be deferred" because of the jobs, because of the critical nature of the jobs we had, and I'm pretty sure that came out of that draft resistance manual.

And, of course, they were getting thousands of letters like that from people in different professions, you know, who were wildly exaggerating the value of those professions—I mean, not that what I was doing wasn't important at some level, but it certainly wasn't directly important to national security. So, you know, we did those things because we were a little desperate to figure out how to avoid it.

So, no, I don't think I really expected that and was a little startled when I got the notice that I had to report for a draft physical.

PEARL: Okay. And you mentioned that in the end it was your back that got you a medical deferment, but were you considering any other deferment options or plans?

JOHNSTON: Yeah. Actually, I'm glad you asked that because I did explore going into—you know, one of the options for people who didn't want to go was to get into the National Guard, and I remember doing some research on—on that and were there ways to do that, and I never—I never pursued it enough to—to do anything actual about it.

I remember thinking at the time—and it just shows you how—how you can—how you can pull yourself into [chuckles] self-interested alleys that you justify with some great, overarching idealism. I remember thinking that because I was in good shape—I mean, ironic, given my back situation, which was legit and has bothered me ever since, although not—not so badly that it has seriously impaired me.

I remember thinking at the time that it would be fun to go through basic training for the Army or the Marines, just to see if I could do it. And, of course, basic training is more than just the physical nature of it; there's a huge psychological game that they do with you to build obedience and so on, which you need in the military.

So there was—there was that piece, but—so I thought about alternatives, did a little bit of research, but never did anything specific.

PEARL: Okay. And can you talk about your decision to maybe go to Canada?

JOHNSTON: Well, that was in the air at the time, and there were people who were doing that. I don't remember the exact timing, but [folksinger and antiwar activist] Joan [C.] Baez's husband, then-husband [Thomas E.] "Tom" Hayden, you know, was quite a well-known student leader I think at Berkeley. And he had fought the draft, and he went to jail. Joan Baez actually devoted a whole album to him at the time.

But there were a bunch of other people around that who decided that the only alternative was to move to Canada, and since I had Canadian relatives I had known all of my life, that was an easy decision. My wife and I were on a vacation with my cousins and their children last summer, and we were laughing about it over dinner one night, that if I had done that, I might have a completely different life and I probably never would have met, you know, the woman that I married and would be a Canadian. And they joked and said, "Wouldn't you be lucky? We have a good healthcare system. We don't have Donald Trump, and your life would be different."

But who knows? A lot—as I mentioned, a lot of the people—a lot of the guys who did that eventually came back because they were, after all, Americans and American raised, and were pardoned and came home. But surely their lives were—you know, were badly disrupted by that, although I don't know anybody specifically, I don't think—I might have had the time—who did that and came back. I think I was the only person around, the only person I knew who was considering that. But certainly nationally it was pretty widely publicized that a lot of—a lot of guys were doing that.

PEARL: Okay. And you said that you later regretted—you said that you later weren't proud of your deferment, at least now. Can you talk about that a bit?

JOHNSTON: Well, as I suggested, I think the degree of self-interest in that was—was buried for many of us. I mean, I can't speak for anybody of that generation, but certainly for me, it was wrapped up in the idealism of the moment, you know, over—over several years.

But, you know, knowing that—you know, for example, that because of my back I got a deferment and my high school buddy, Lex, had gone—had been drafted—he had been an art student. He hadn't gone to a regular college, so he got

drafted without getting a degree. I think became an Army Ranger—you know, a very high-risk job—and was killed over there. And it just struck me as terribly unfair and ironic.

I had other friends who did serve in combat and survived. I had one high school friend who—who was kind of the—the class bully of my high school class, played on the football team, although he wasn't particularly good; he had so many muscles. He had gone from the 98-pound weakling to the Hulk through a lot of weight lifting. And he ended up as an Army Ranger or [U.S. Army] Special Forces or Navy SEAL [**S**ea, **A**ir, **L**and Teams] or whatever they were called then. Green Berets, I think.

And I heard later that his job was to, with a small team of these commandoes, to parachute into Viet Cong territory, capture somebody, torture them for information and then kill them, because they couldn't take prisoners, and then get out, and that the mortality rate was about 50 percent. And he re-upped for two more tours of duty, so he did three tours of duty doing that work.

I didn't have any contact with him during that—during that period. I saw him later—actually, I heard later that he'd become a bouncer at a bar, and I thought, *Boy, that's a really bad idea* because he's been trained to kill people in about six different ways, and then I heard that he was running a body-building and tanning studio in Los Angeles, and in fact, he came to our 125th high school reunion, and he did a body-building exercise. And he—he looked like one of those guys you see on a magazine cover, of a body-building magazine, with muscles, oiled muscles. And his wife played music, and they turned the lights down, and he stood out there, flexing, you know, his 853 muscles.

And it was a little spooky, but here was this guy who had survived all of that, and I went over to him afterwards, and I said, "Gordy, it's nice to see you. And it sounds like you've had a nice career"—you know, since your military duty, which I didn't mention; he didn't mention. And he said, "Well, I found Jesus, and that was my salvation." And I said, "Well, that's terrific. I'm really pleased for you." And then I heard just a few years ago that he had died of cancer, so I suspect he had been using steroids or something to build his—build his body up, but—

So, you know, there was that whole issue. So now I forgot what your first question was. I'm ADD'd [attention deficit disorder] often—

PEARL: I asked about had you considered any other deferment plans or options.

JOHNSTON: Right. Oh, and you also asked me about thoughts about the other folks and so on.

PEARL: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: You know, I've heard many stories from friends of mine who—who served tours of duty. I was looking at a box full of old letters, sort of love letters back and forth between my wife and me, and some other girlfriends and so on, but I found a six-page letter from my former next-door neighbor, Harold Hanson (called "Harry"), written from the top of a hill in Vietnam as he was about to go in to fight.

And I had apparently written to him and expressed my anti-Vietnam views, and he'd written me back, and he said, "I understand how you feel that way, and I respect that. But I'm over here to do a job, and there's a hill a mile from us, just like the one I'm on right now, filled with Viet Cong, and we could take that out in two minutes with our Air Force if we wanted to, but the jokers in Washington"—I think, you know, the bureaucrats—"won't let us do it. So it's not a good way to fight the war. We could win this war quickly. So anyway, Dave, that's all I have to say for now." You know, "Go light on the girls" or something like that, and "I'll see you soon."

And I never saw him again. Actually, I have no idea what happened to him. But just the irony of his writing from this hill in Da Nang, and I'm—I think I was in graduate school at the time and still in Madison. And I think, actually, I'm going to look up the—I think you can look up the people whose names are on the Vietnam [Veterans] Memorial [in Washington, D.C.], all the guys who were killed over there, and just if he's in it, because I never heard anything about him again.

But, again, there were these ironies all across the country between people who supported the war because it was the patriotic thing to do and people who opposed the war

because they thought that the intellectual argument was on their side.

PEARL: Yep. And did you ever consider what you were doing was not only the right thing but the American thing to do or anything like that, or the patriotic thing to do?

JOHNSTON: Oh, sure. Oh, yeah. I think we thought we were arguing about, protesting about fighting for—you know, not with guns but fighting for protection of the country from this terrible mistake that it had made. You know, we—we termed it the worst foreign policy blunder in the history of the country. I mean, some people now say that about the invasion of Iraq, and, of course, there were people my age when the Iraq War came along. It was almost like going into a war where we felt—and this is certainly how those who opposed the war, the Vietnam War felt—that the U.S. had not done its homework, that we didn't really understand the cultural divisions, including the fact that the Vietnamese had hated the Chinese for centuries and that the domino theory, which was the prevailing political theory that had started with [President Eisenhower's Secretary of State] John Foster Dulles, I think, in the late 1940s to stop—stop the sweep of communism—we thought that was bogus.

And there were plenty of smart people in Washington and elsewhere, including people in Congress, who felt that way, that—that this was a mistake. So at the time—oh, yeah, we were totally self-righteous about it at the time, and, you know, I think in retrospect the jury was certainly out about that, but I think I still feel that that was a mistake, that not only did we lose a lot of men and a lot of other people were killed over there, that it was another type of patriotism.

And I think the people who are opposing—you know, whether it's Iraq or fighting in Afghanistan—feel the same way of looking at what's in the best interest of the country and that it isn't just about having the most guns and, you know, the biggest budget for—for defense. But, you know, that's a big, complicated argument.

And I think there was also a whole issue of our parents, who had lived during and many fought in and members of families died in World War II, which of course was an incredibly patriotic war and against a worldwide set of enemies. But that mindset was in place for a lot of the older

generation that couldn't understand how so many people could be opposed to our fighting another just war, which is how they saw it, and stopping communism, which, of course, was—was the thing to do. You know, we had bombers in the air 24 hours with hydrogen bombs and nuclear missile firing submarines in the ocean and all that, so it got very complicated, kind of the ideology across generations around that.

But, no, I—I thought I was being a red-blooded American by opposing the war.

PEARL: Yeah. And I think we understand what your solution and opposition to Vietnam was, but what did you think was the solution to communism in general and the Cold War in general?

JOHNSTON: Well, that's a—that's a big question. Certainly, we had to be firm in opposing the Soviet Union-backed aggression in eastern Europe and what they did to those countries. But the proxy wars that were fought by the Soviet Union and the United States all around the world sometimes didn't take account of the cultural subtleties that existed—you know, such as the antagonisms in Southeast Asia, and that we seemed to do that.

I mean, I felt like when we went into Iraq, there was a similar lack of real understanding of culture there. We went in with the “shock and awe” war and tore down Saddam Hussein's statue and didn't protect the treasures—you know, the ancient treasures that were there, much of which was looted. So there was just, you know, a huge conflict around that.

PEARL: Mm-hm.

And when you were protesting in the '60s and '70s, what did you consider to be an American? How did you define to be an American? I guess.

JOHNSTON: Well, again, I think those of us who opposed the war respected our brethren who went off to war but thought either they made a bad decision or they were the victims of a system which had made a bad decision to get into that war. And given the history of things like the—you know, the bogus Tonkin Gulf Resolution, it was clear to us at the time that that was a big mistake.

But, again, you know, history is complicated that way, and, you know, there was this ideology that we had to stop communism, the domino theory that if Vietnam falls, then the rest of Southeast Asia, and then there's Japan because of—communist China will—you know, will march across Asia and turn everything into—you know, into communism.

And because of what had happened in eastern Europe after World War II, with all of those countries, like Hungary and Czechoslovakia and Romania and half of Germany, Poland being controlled by the Soviet Union, there was ample evidence that the domino theory did happen in places and had happened after World War II and hence the need for our, you know, amazingly large and complicated military, which, of course Dwight Eisenhower, when he left office in—what was that, 1960, I guess—warned about the power of the “military-industrial complex.” And, you know, this is a big, complicated issue that is still out there—still out there today.

But because of the history coming out of World War II with the evil nature of [Joseph] Stalin and people knowing, all during World War II, that, oh, we had to defeat—you know, the Nazis and the Japanese at the time, that the ultimate huge enemy was the Soviet Union. And that was all real.

The fact that when I was in elementary school we did H-bomb drills and had to get under our seats in case the Russians' missiles came and exploded H-bombs, which, of course, was completely ridiculous because if an H-bomb came anywhere near, there wouldn't be anybody surviving anything.

But there was this great fear about it, which I think led to the decision to—to oppose anything that called itself communist. I mean, our policy toward Cuba when [Fidel] Castro took over and the fact that we always accepted Cuban refugees with—with ease in—in Florida, wherever they came, because they were fleeing communism versus people, say, from Haiti, who were just fleeing, you know, poverty and desolation.

And it was all part of that logic. You know, the Cubans who live in Florida still rant and rail about the evils of communism. But, you know, that is now I think starting to change, and, of

course, Cuba is changing as well. But I think that—that was also another symbolic result of the fear of communism.

PEARL: Yeah.

And ultimately you got the medical deferment. Did you ever consider, if you didn't get the medical deferment, you know, going to jail or eventually joining?

JOHNSTON: Well, I knew that was a possibility, you know, if everything failed. But I was bound and determined to avoid that. You know, after all, I had all this education, and I was—you know, was ready to contribute greatly to the country with all my education and all that kind of self-serving rhetoric.

So I think, no, I would not have gone to jail and, because I had the option to go to Canada, would have exercised that if my—if my effort to get a medical deferment had—had failed. I think at the time, I had no doubt about the—you know, the right moves to make. I think it tended to get simplified in a situation that maybe wasn't so simple.

PEARL: Mm-hm.

And you mentioned meeting your wife around this time. Could you talk about her and about that?

JOHNSTON: Sure. I met her at the end of my time in Madison, right at the end of finishing my master's degree. She was then a senior at Barnard College in New York City and came to Madison the summer of 1968 to go to summer school, and I was a waiter in a place called the French House, and she lived there.

And I guess my roommates and I lived in a townhouse with two other graduate students, and we—we threw great parties. And we invited her and several of her friends from the French House to a party, and she ended up going out with my—one of my housemates for a month or so. And then they stopped going out. And then he left, and then she and I went out one night, and it was the sort of classic love at first sight. Actually, I think that had been there since—we had seen each other many times when she was going out with my—with my housemate.

And we ended up going out for eight nights in a row and the third night talked about, you know, we might get married. So it was one of those kind of storybook things that's both amusing and amazing to think about in retrospect. And I know our children like to hear that story because it's so idealistic and simplistic. But that's basically what happened.

She then—I finished my degree, got my—got my master's degree. She went back to New York to finish her—her education. I went to San Diego. We spent all of our extra money on phone calls across the country. There was no [chuckles]—you know, no e-mail in those days. Had barely heard of computers at that point, 1968.

I flew out over Thanksgiving and spent a week on the East Coast with her and met her family in Northampton, Massachusetts. Her father was a veteran professor at Smith College. She had a very erudite grandfather, a self-educated man who—well, I won't go into his history, but he was one of the founders of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers [of America] and a very well-known labor leader in his youth. But he prided himself on education.

And when I met him, the first thing he asked me about were my degrees and where they were and what I had studied, and that was always a big issue. And he seemed satisfied that I had gone to Dartmouth and had gotten this master's degree and all that stuff.

And so I hit it off with her family, and I went back to California. She went back to school. She was not particularly happy in school. She was facing her last semester and what the heck was she going to do after graduation. She had majored in French literature, I think partly to please her father, demonstrating the importance of the humanities. But she really wanted to do was go to medical school but hadn't said that to her family.

And with one semester to go, she dropped out and came to California. I helped her find a lovely little studio apartment right down by the beach in San Diego. She got a job as a—as a waitress in a restaurant, and I continued to work there. I proposed to her in the shadow of the Mount Palomar Observatory up in the mountains east of San Diego.

And one night we got into an argument, I guess late April, and decided to break up but spent two hours walking around the neighborhood I lived in and changed our minds and decided to get married. And a week later we were married, without telling our families, with some local friends.

And in the meantime, I had applied for jobs on the East Coast so that she could return to school. And so I left San Diego after about a year of working there in order to accommodate my wife, and we drove across the country and eventually had a huge wedding at Smith College with half the faculty there because of her father's prominence, and a lot of our friends. The only person who knew we were already married was one of *my* friends, who came to the wedding and had—had been with us I think in California. And had a second wedding and were married again. And we celebrate both anniversaries, in May and September.

And we didn't tell our parents until several years later. So a funny kind of experience, but that was—we're coming up on our forti- —uh, '69— 48th anniversary, I guess; 2016, yeah.

PEARL: And what is your wife's name, and what were those anniversary dates?

JOHNSTON: Her name is—her first name is Hera [pronounced HEHR-uh] [Cohn-Haft], H-e-r-a, like the Greek goddess. Actually, her mother was Athena [Capraro Cohn-Haft]. It's a long story with her family. And her last name is Cohn-Haft, C-o-h-n-hyphen-H-a-f-t. Her father was Louis [pronounced LOU-ee] Cohn, who was raised Orthodox Jewish in New York City. And his mother was Goldie Haft, and she married Harry Cohn and became Goldie Haft-Cohn. And [laughs] my father-in-law changed his name, I think around his 21st birthday, instead of Louis Cohn to be Louis Cohn-Haft. He added his mother's maiden name to form this hyphenated name, kind of a unique name. So my wife and her two brothers are Cohn-Hafts, and—let's see, what was the second part of your question?

PEARL: Dates of marriage.

JOHNSTON: Marriage dates. So the first—the first wedding was May 4th, 1969, in San Diego, and then September 7th, 1969, in Northampton.

Just an ironic little footnote: On May 4th, a year later, on our first anniversary, we were at dinner at one of my—one of my Dartmouth friend's, Harry [B.] Greenberg [Class of 1966] and his wife's—their apartment in New York City, and that was the night of the Kent State shooting. You recall from your history that the protest on the Kent State campus resulted in the National Guard opening fire and killing—I can't remember—four students?—and wounding some others, so it was just ironic that with all of our—and we were by then going to the marches in Washington and so on—that this thing happened on our anniversary, so it's always kind of stuck in my head.

So anyway, those were the two dates.

PEARL: Yep.

And now that you were married and deferred, did your protest methods or your fervor in the movement change at all?

JOHNSTON: Not really. I mean, I was, you know, trying to pursue a career. I had gotten another job in New York with a consulting firm, doing—it wasn't city planning, but it was, you know, related kinds of things. I was actually evaluating some government job training programs, and it was work that pointed to directions that I've been involved in ever since, through—you know, I call it nine different careers but all related to kind of human services, social service stuff.

But we participated—we were—in New York, and also I did some consulting gigs that first year. One, I was—we were in Atlanta for five months and then in Miami for another four months, evaluating this program, but our base was in New York. And we participated in several marches, and I know two huge ones that—my recollection was, like, a million people in Washington.

But, you know, you get a little bit older, you get a job, you've got some responsibilities, you're trying to follow a career. You can't just be hanging out on the street, yelling and screaming all the time. You have to—you have to have a life. But it doesn't necessarily change your—your political views; it just—it tempers your—your actual activities related to those views. And I think that happens.

I know there's an old joke about, you know, you're a liberal in your 20[s] and you're a conservative in your 40s because you have a mortgage, or something like that. And there is a certain amount of truth in that.

But certainly my views about the war did not change, and the complication of Richard Nixon being elected, saying he was going to end the war—he was elected in 1968. He beat What's-his-name, Johnson's vice president, [Hubert H. Humphrey].

I guess the other thing I forgot to mention was that I supported George [S.] McGovern when he ran as a—as an antiwar candidate and ended up being a nominee. And I had done some campaigning for him in Wisconsin when I was there during my time in Madison.

So there were—there were places in—in my life and I think my wife's life where we were able to pursue our antiwar sentiment, but meanwhile life had to go on.

PEARL: Yep.

And could you talk about your work for George McGovern?

JOHNSTON: You know, I don't remember much except that it was part of a—you know, there was an organizing group that came into Madison and worked all over Wisconsin that I went out [for] and did some door-to-door work, knocking on doors and passing out literature. You know, it's what a bunch of people are doing in—I think in Iowa and New Hampshire right now. So that—that part of political campaigning probably hasn't changed much.

But McGovern represented, you know, an alternative, and as a turned out, not a very good political alternative because he got crushed in the—in the election.

Now, do I have my dates right? Yeah, Nixon was elected in '68 and then was reelected in '72, and, of course, unbeknownst to anyone at that point, they had already committed the Watergate burglary because of Daniel Ellsberg publishing the Pentagon Papers, the history of Vietnam, which was a secret document.

And so there was still a lot of stuff in the air that opposed the war and challenged Nixon. And, you know, the war went on till I think 1973. And Americans and Vietnamese continued to be killed in alarming numbers. There used to be—they used to publish the body count in the newspaper. It was like the ball scores. You know, “Today in Vietnam we killed 330 communists, and we only lost 25 soldiers.” When you think about it in comparison to the number of soldiers we lost in—you know, in Iraq and Afghanistan—not that even one is—is sufficient or is justifiable—it was—it was pretty ugly that we were doing that.

And, of course, it turned out—and Maraniss documents this in his book—a lot of those numbers were cooked. The numbers coming out of Vietnam on casualties were just all cooked, and they were made up. And even that so-called massacre on the same day as the Dow Chemical riot was described as a victory—you know, like, on page 15 of *The New York Times* as just another battle when in fact, you know, two-thirds—I think two companies of American soldiers were—were wiped out by the Viet Cong.

So it was a strange time with the government making stuff up, and I think a lot of us knew some of that, and I certainly never wavered in my feelings about it. And then, of course, we finally got out of the war. And, you know, that’s led to a lot of other stuff in terms of politics and laws that have been passed and ways to limit the president that—you know, that have in some respects even come back to haunt us at this point, but—

PEARL: Yeah.

And how’d you feel in 1973 when you learned the U.S. was leaving Vietnam?

JOHNSTON: Oh, I think those of us who had opposed the war felt finally vindicated. You know, “It’s about time after all of that loss,” and the country needed to heal. You know, and then—I think—I don’t know that I have the exact timing right, but the Watergate thing had happened, and that whole episode that,— you know, that unraveled the Nixon presidency and led to his—well, he would have been impeached if he hadn’t resigned—was also happening, so it was—in a way, it was like—somehow like vindication, that we’d been right all along. And on top of everything, we had this devious

president who had, you know, authorized, you know, two-bit burglars to burglarize the Democratic Party's office in the Watergate Hotel.

So there was just a lot of stuff out there that led those of us who had opposed the war to say we were right all along. But, you know, in retrospect, I think we were often simplistic in those judgments against the complexity of what was really going on.

PEARL: So the war's over. You feel vindicated. Is that it? What happens next? Do you feel like there was more work to do at the time?

JOHNSTON: You know, I think that dissipated. Life went on. People wanted to forget about the war. One of the—you know, the most unfortunate aspects of that was that Vietnam veterans were—were looked at suspiciously and were feared. They didn't come home as heroes the way soldiers and sailors did from—you know, in World War II or even in Korea [the Korean War]. And, of course, Korea is a whole 'nother story of a forgotten war, and we still have soldiers there, but—

So I think people sort of forgot about it. There were certainly a number of movies and books written about it at the time and following on, but I think most of us just wanted to go on with—with our lives and hoped that nothing like that ever happened again, you know. And it took until 9/11 [the 9/11/2001 attacks] and, you know, Afghanistan and then the invasion of Iraq to kind of rekindle some of those feelings.

You know, there was—what's the name of the guy? I'm going to have a senior moment here. The group. Creedence Clearwater Revival. And their lead singer—he did a solo album as the Iraq War was happening called *Déjà Vu All Over Again*, and it was based on—and he's probably about my age, and his sense that “here we go again into another situation where we have no business intervening and we are ignorant about the cultural complexity in this part of the world, and we're gonna commit blood and treasure.”

And, you know, I think a lot of us still feel that, you know, the debt that [President] Barack [H.] Obama inherited when he came into office—a lot of that was driven by the costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq because those were done kind of off the books, as I understand it.

So I think there was a legacy of “let’s not do that again” coming out of the Vietnam War, but, you know, by and large, most of us went on with our lives and worried about other issues that came along. And, you know, stuff happened along the way. Certainly the appearance of so-called Islamic fundamentalism (which, of course, is unfair to a vast majority of Muslims here and around the world)—but some of those issues were starting to happen.

But it has taken, you know, a long time, I think really until 9/11 to come full circle, to have another, different—different kind of a threat that maybe is also rooted in part on the level of cultural ignorance in this country.

I don’t know if you heard the news just this morning about two different Sikh men, who wear turbans and beards—I think in California, have been attacked. Oh, one was killed, I think, because some guys thought they were Muslim.

So anyway, I think those kinds of issues are still with us, but—so I think there was a legacy coming out of the—the war in Vietnam, which is still with us, which was part of a—you know, a historical train of events going all the way back to right after World War II and the fear of communism and then, you know, led up, over many years, eventually to the fall of communism—you know, [President] Ronald [W.] Reagan saying [regarding the Berlin Wall], “Tear down that wall, Mr. [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev [the last leader of the Soviet Union].” And all of that stuff.

PEARL: Yeah, yeah.

JOHNSTON: So it’s had—it’s had a huge impact, I think, over many decades.

PEARL: And how did you feel in 1975 when North Vietnamese finally invaded and took over South Vietnam?

JOHNSTON: I don’t think anybody felt good about that because it was clear that they were going to be a brutal, repressive, you know, authoritarian regime. But I think most of us were not surprised, because the government that we propped up in Vietnam was corrupt and inefficient, and, you know, our military kept saying, right up to the time we left, that, you know, “We’re gonna train them to take over the war.”

So, of course, when the rhetoric around Iraq and our getting out of Iraq—the same rhetoric about getting them to take care of their business came along, many of us said, “Déjà vu all over again.” But—so I think people were saddened by it but not surprised.

And I think it also led to all of the efforts to help Vietnamese refugees. You know, my community here, in West Hartford—we have at least five wonderful Vietnamese restaurants, and that’s an ironic kind of legacy [chuckles] to the war in Vietnam, that we have all these people who fled—you know, who fled Vietnam, came to this country and, you know, established a better life than they could have, trying to escape the brutality of the communist regime, which has become much less brutal, you know, in the last, oh, three decades, I guess.

I mean, we now have investments in Vietnam, and we have old soldiers going over to meet with North Vietnamese soldiers and talk about things that happened and compare notes and all that sort of thing. And so we’re now more or less friendly, but at the time I think nobody had any illusions about what was going to happen. And, of course, a similar and even worse series of events happened in—in neighboring Cambodia, with the Khmer Rouge, who were hard-core communists and, you know, committed genocide on their own people.

So there was a legacy of—of that war, and a lot of the people who had supported the war in Vietnam, when the North Vietnamese took over said, “Well, see? We were right all along. We shoulda stopped them. If we had just”—you know, like my next-door neighbor, if he was still alive at that point, probably felt, “If they’d just let us win the war, we would have done it.”

But I think at the time, when people said things like that, we said, “Yeah, the only way you could do that would be to bomb so much that you’d kill every person in North Vietnam. Otherwise, it’s a civil war, and we’re not gonna win it.” So I think there’s just a legacy that—that came out of that period. And, you know, things have changed since then, fortunately. Communism is certainly not the threat that it once was. We’ve replaced that with—with other, you know, bogeymen.

PEARL: Mm-hm.

And did your activism continue after 1973, either for civil rights or antiwar movements or anything else?

JOHNSTON: Well, I guess you could say it did, in a way, in the career choices that I made in that I was committed to, you know, human service, social service things, I think. Because of what had happened to my sister in 1964, I was pretty committed to being involved in work that contributed to the common good, to community good.

You know, I was involved in a variety of organizations, social justice efforts through the church that I've been a part of, the Unitarian Universalist Church here in West Hartford for the last I guess 20 years. So I made career choices which built on my interest in whatever you want to call it: community service, social service, human service choices to do things which I have felt contributed to the common good and used my education and experience to—you know, to good effect.

I know that—I think I mentioned the little organization that I run now, called the Center for Higher Education Retention Excellence, which is a—

PEARL: Yeah. Can you talk about that?

JOHNSTON: Yeah. It's a—I'm sorry. You say did I or would I?

JOHNSTON: Would you talk about it, please?

JOHNSTON: Okay, sure. I worked for the [Annie E.] Casey Foundation for ten years. I ran life skills programming out of New Haven, Connecticut, for all of New England and actually spent quite a bit of time at the then Casey office in White River Junction, so got a chance to be on campus occasionally because of that. That has actually closed now. But I worked with foster kids all over New England, planning life skills training systems.

But when I hit ten years at that, I retired from it. I got a retirement package, and I joke with my friends that since I don't play golf, I had to do something else, because I had learned a lot about how to help foster kids finish their education, finish high school and get into college and how to build support systems for them.

So I did some more homework on college retention, especially for underrepresented, first-generation, you know, challenged students. And I started this organization, which I brought in inside another organization in Hartford, to be my program partner and fiduciary agent. I didn't want to start a separate 501(c)(3), so I gave it this big fancy name.

And actually that was a name that got generated in a discussion with two of my—my best friends from Dartmouth, fraternity brothers of mine, [Donald W.] “Don” Glazer and Alan [W.] Rottenberg [pronounced ROE-ten-berg] [both Class of 1966], who were both well-known lawyers in Boston. Don actually is the author of one of the best-selling textbooks on some kind of corporate securities law. He lives in Newton, Mass. And Alan Rottenberg is a senior partner in a—in a big law firm in Boston.

And I met with them several times. They applied their business acumen to—to what I wanted to do and helped me think through strategy and convinced me that the thing I created should be a center, that it should be about excellence. So hence the long, cumbersome title of Center for Higher Education Retention Excellence, to focus on college retention.

And the main activity is to put on small, interactive conferences on important issues in higher education around challenged students. And since the first conference I did in September of 2013, I've run 11 conferences and have two or three more big conferences planned for this year in two smaller forms. The next one is actually next Friday to look at alternatives to remedial education.

And I've been involved with the state and some other people and sit on a couple of different committees, and I've had a chance to do that. In the middle of all this, I managed to talk my way into teaching—I may have mentioned this the other day—what's called First Year Introduction, or First Year Experience, at Eastern Connecticut State University. It's one of our state universities in Conne- —one of our four state universities, separate from the University of Connecticut, a flagship school.

And it's, of course, on college survival, and it's a three-credit, required course for all freshmen, and I've done it for four

years now. And one of the things I say to my kids the first day of class—these are by and large 18-year-olds coming right out of high school. And it's basically that I'm an old guy, but I know a lot of stuff, so some of it will even be relevant to our course content. And so I think I bring a lot of the experience I've had into the—into the classroom and am able to contribute to their understanding of how you think about things.

But it's clear to me that having a broad liberal arts education, a lot of different kinds of experience—I think is the kind of thing we need to expose students to. It isn't just about vocational education. And, you know, I'm grateful to [sic] having had that kind of education.

But back to the—when I created this organization, I needed some seed capital, and I wasn't quite sure where that was going to come about. Certainly, some of my—maybe out of my retirement savings. But one of those guys, Al Rottenberg—we had a little reunion of my fraternity, I think before—before reunion, and he asked me how I was going to fund it. And I said, well, I wasn't sure; I thought I might get some contracts and be able to get some grants and maybe do some consulting work.

And he said, "Well, why don't you let your fraternity brothers help you?" And I said, "Well, that's a generous offer, but I couldn't ask you guys for money." And he said, "No, but he could." He's actually the bequest chairman for our—for our—our class. And so I ended up being able to raise enough money to get this organization off the ground from not just fraternity brothers but several other of my Dartmouth friends and then some other old friends.

I had one of my old buddies that—my original contact at the University of Wisconsin from my high school, who's a very successful doctor in California, put up a pretty nice grant in to help me get started, and I've since been able to raise institutional money from at least three different foundations, like, the Travelers Insurance Foundation [sic; Travelers Foundation] here in—here in Hartford.

So I put these conferences on. I teach freshmen. And I also have a third [chuckles]—a third job. This is some retirement! I'm the recruiter for something called the Intensive College Transition Program, in a community right near Hartford

called Meriden, Connecticut. And I've just finished recruiting about 35 so-called adult learners—some of them are right out of high school, but most of them are older; many of them are foreign born—to go to college for the first time.

And we have an intensive program that helps them do the work they need to do to really qualify to take credit courses at—at the college level. And I get paid for that, so I've been able to develop these three different but related opportunities. So, you know, until I learn to play golf, I'm going to keep doing this stuff because I'm pretty healthy, do a lot of exercise, and I can still think about these things. My brain seems to work pretty well, and I intend to keep going.

But I know that a lot of the ideas and thinking that I—certainly, a lot of it—whatever credit there is to give out has to go to my parents, but having a fine education helped in terms of our overriding subject here, the war in Vietnam and the opposition to it, as I mentioned, came out of my education and my application of whatever skills I had.

And I have blended, I think, those—those kinds of skills ever since. But there's—I wax nostalgic occasionally about the energy and enthusiasm of that time and the ability of so many people to get so exercised about—about something. And I sometimes think maybe young people aren't able to do that anymore. But I don't think that's actually true. I think people your age are—can get plenty excited about things and push things in a—you know, in a good direction.

And, you know, my wife and I have four grown children. Our older daughter is involved in a lot of civil rights stuff now in New York City and is involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. She's an elementary school teacher in New York. And sometimes I—I hear myself in her energy and enthusiasm and idealism, so that's a good feeling.

PEARL: Mm-hm.

And can you talk about some of the work you're doing with Dartmouth right now? You mentioned that you're working with a senior, in your last interview.

JOHNSTON: Well, I've been—I haven't been actively involved since—I did—I mean, I chaired our 25th reunion. I got involved in the 20th reunion. I ended up being the treasurer of my class, and

then I ended up agreeing to chair the 25th reunion. And in retrospect, I think I did that because I got to choose the band for the reunion [chuckles] but made some good friends of people who hadn't been friends as undergraduates.

But I haven't been actively involved since then except occasionally, but I go—I usually come up for Homecoming, and our class, I think like a lot of classes, supports some undergraduate—I think they're called Dickey Scholars, and I'm not sure if there are a lot of those and if a lot of classes support them or if that's just something that our class does. Actually, I don't know whether that's the case. But you probably either know that or could find that out if it's at all important.

But I know our class supports a couple of people every year to go abroad and do something over the summer. And at Homecoming, they always come and talk to us, and I think we're always amazed at the—at the intelligence and commitment and—and idealism. And for me, given my own background, it's really nice to hear people committed to—you know, to causes.

There was a young woman who came in two years ago, who had spent the summer in a very poor community in India, teaching life skills, and, you know, those are life-changing experiences, so—

And we support—our class supports those things through extra contributions, and, you know, I've been a regular contributor to the alumni fund. I mean, I've never made a lot of money, so I'm not in the—you know, my friend who's in charge of bequests hasn't called me to ask me to commit, you know, a million dollars in my Will to the endowment because I haven't made the kind of money that a lot of those people have. But, you know, I'm not complaining about that. It's just the way things worked out.

But now, because we have this 50th reunion coming up, our class has had quite a bit of contact with the '16s. We helped build—have you been out to the—the—it's now called, I think, the Class of 1966 Lodge that the DOC has.

PEARL:

Yes, it's enormous.

JOHNSTON: Yeah, it's enormous. And my name is on a plaque in there as one of the people who contributed to the—to the building of that. And I know that we worked—and I didn't—I was not involved in any construction stuff, but I think several of the members of my class, who live in Hanover or nearby, have been involved in that.

And now there's another, similar piece with—I think it's a bunkhouse up at Moosilauke [Ravine Lodge], which I think it going to be called the Class of 1966 Bunkhouse, although I'm not sure. And I know—I think some of us are going to be there a day extra, a day early for our reunion, up at—up at Moosilauke, to do that.

And I think all of that work has involved cooperation with Dartmouth students and especially with members of the Class of, you know, 2016.

And then at Homecoming last fall—I think I may have mentioned this before, or maybe not—Zonia Moore from that class—I don't know, do you know Zonia?

PEARL: No.

JOHNSTON: Okay. Well, she's a senior, and I know Phi Beta Kappa and seems like a really outstanding young lady. Was sitting with me and a couple of other members of my class and a couple of wives, and I had just done a whole class at—in my college course here in Connecticut—on social media and smart phones and smart phone etiquette and larger issues of what were the implications of the use of this technology for people and especially for young people, and distraction and so on, and some research that has been done by a professor at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] on the impact of cell phone use on empathy, on the ability of young people to feel empathy and sense that it—it declines when you do a lot of your interpersonal communications by texting instead of sitting and talking to somebody and seeing their body language and so on.

So we got into a whole conversation about this and of asking Zonia what she—what she thought about that. And one of the guys sitting at the table, [James. M.] "Jim" Lustenader [pronounced LUST-in-ah-der], who's on the planning committee for the 50th reunion, said, "Gee, that would make a great seminar at the reunion." So I said, "Well, you know,

sure. I'd be happy to, you know, help plan something like that. Let's see if we can work it out."

It turned out that there really was not room in the schedule, in the actual reunion, to do that, that things had already been planned, and the seniors were busy, you know, getting ready to graduate. And Zonia's first suggestion was we do this on Sunday afternoon, after graduation, and I just said, "Zonia, you're gonna be involved with your family at that point, you know, celebrating or maybe even leaving campus. I don't know. But"—

So we ended up deciding that we didn't have to do it at the reunion; let's do it before the reunion, as a reunion-building event. There are many members of our class who live in the Hanover area, and actually I think we're going to reach out to the—I think it's called the Alumni Group of the—of the—of the Valley [sic; Dartmouth Club of the Upper Valley]—what do you call it, the valley there?

And I just had a conference call yesterday with—with this guy from my class, Jim, and a guy in the administration who was alumni affairs for our class. And unfortunately Zonia at the last minute couldn't participate, but we're going to have some more contact with her and a couple of other students.

And we are planning a little seminar on probably a Tuesday or Wednesday night in April, probably at Collis Center [for Student Involvement], and I suggested that we have a panel. I said, "There's certainly a professor—there's gotta be at least one professor, if not more, with expertise in social media and the whole technology." And maybe *you* have suggestions as well.

But the guy from the college, [Richard P.] "Rich" Ryerson [Jr., Class of 1980], who's in the administration, I guess in alumni—alumni affairs—he suggested a couple of people he was going to reach out to that might be able to participate. So I said, "Okay, let's get two Dartmouth students. Let's reach out to Hanover High School and get two Hanover High School students. Plus let's find a parents of another high school student, not a parent of one of the ones on the panel"—because you never want to do that to a kid, to have their parent on the same panel on a tough subject.

“And a professor. And I can moderate that because this is the type of thing that I’ve done many times, discussions. And let’s just have a good discussion about, you know, the nature and future of interpersonal communications, represented by social media and smart phones and”—

You know, one of the anecdotes I said to these—we just had this conference call yesterday afternoon. I was on a cross trainer at the gym that I go to, at the [Mandell] Jewish Community Center [of Greater Hartford] here in West Hartford, when I go, five days a week. I was on the cross trainer, and three teenage girls, who probably weren’t more than about 13, came racing in and took up the two machines to my left and one to my right. And I think the one to my right was annoyed she couldn’t get on the one *I* was on to be *right* next to her friends.

But the whole time they were there, they were exercising, chattering back and forth across, and on their phones, texting, doing all three things simultaneously, much to my annoyance, and I had to bite my tongue from saying, “Couldn’t you just exercise and not have to be on that?”

But, knowing how this technology I think had addicted people—I mean, we’ve kind of done it to ourselves in terms of, you know [chuckles], you know, the capital system and profitability and Verizon [Communications]. You know, “Never be disconnected.”

There was another article in *The New York Times* recently of a woman who’s done some research, and she was at a focus group with teenage kids in California someplace. And she asked these I think it was girls when they were off they off—when were they off their phones? And one of them said, “Only when I’m asleep or in the shower.”

And, I mean, I see some of that—maybe not quite that bad—with my freshman at—at Eastern, Eastern Connecticut State University. And I find that a little bit frightening, and I’m not exactly sure where we’re headed with that. But my own grown children have reminded me that “Dad, there are plenty of smart young people doing all sorts of amazing things. Look at what’s happening in Silicon Valley and other places, so don’t get so exercised. In other words, don’t—don’t sound like such an old dumb fart.” [Chuckles.] “You’re just blindly opposing the new technology.”

So I do listen to that. Anyway, so I think we can have a good discussion, and I don't know exactly how that will play out. But, you know, maybe you can come.

PEARL: Yeah, sounds great. I'd love to meet you in April or, if you're on campus, in June.

JOHNSTON: Sure. That'd be great. So what else can I do for you at this point?

PEARL: I'm actually about ready to wrap up the interview unless you have some last words to say?

JOHNSTON: I don't think so. I mean, I think my—you know, my comments about sort of the heritage of the—of the Vietnam War protests—even some skills that—skill building that goes on as a result of that activity, I certainly see as something positive in my life. But I think, as I suggested, I now see the opposition to the war in—in a more complicated and I think realistic perspective, that it was just more complex than we saw at the time. But sometimes one can get so blinded by an ideal that you can't see the—you know, the forest for the trees. So I think at this point, I understand both the forest and the trees a little bit better.

PEARL: Well, thank you very much, David. On behalf of myself and the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, I really appreciate you spending your time with us.

[End of interview.]