

Peter C. Sorlien '71
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Connor Norris '25

CONNOR
NORRIS:

This is Connor Norris. Today is Tuesday, May 9, 2023. It's 2:15pm. And I'm conducting this oral history interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. I'm conducting this interview with Mr. Peter Sorlien ['71]. This interview is taking place in person in the History Hub room of the second floor of Carson in Berry Library on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Mr. Sorlien, thank you for speaking with me today.

PETER SORLIEN: My pleasure. Thank you very much for your interest in what might seem like old history. I've always been a history buff, always interested in studying history, but never had the chance to talk to somebody who actually did it, somebody who is actually there.

NORRIS: This is as exciting for me as it sounds like it is for you. So let's start from the beginning. Where and when were you born?

SORLIEN: I was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1949.

NORRIS: And did you grow up in Hartford or...?

SORLIEN: My dad worked for General Mills, large corporation. With every promotion, we moved to a new city, so roughly every five years it was Hartford [CT], Montreal [Canada], Toronto [Canada], and Boston [MA]. I finished high school in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

NORRIS: Did you spend more time at one place than another?

SORLIEN: Roughly every five years. Pretty much five-year intervals.

NORRIS: How was that growing up? Was that tough for you?

SORLIEN: It left me a little rootless. It meant that I had to make new friends every time we moved. Fortunately, there was one friend who was a constant. And we're still in touch.

NORRIS: Is that your brother?

SORLIEN: No, his name is Drew Leverett, and he lives in Georgetown, suburb of Montreal. Or no, a suburb of Toronto.

NORRIS: Where was he from?

SORLIEN: I was born in the US. He was born Pointe-Claire [Canada], I believe. Pointe-Claire is a suburb west of Montreal. He was born in Montreal and stayed in the Toronto area throughout his adult life. He was a teacher, and then principal, and then finally became principal of the magnet art school in Toronto [Etobicoke School of the Arts], which was very cool. I went to visit him, for a staff meeting no less, and it was pretty impressive.

NORRIS: How'd you guys sustain that relationship as you're moving?

SORLIEN: I'll give him the credit for that. He always was really good about staying in touch. And I never have been, because of that sort of constant moving: When I go from place, I leave that place behind, and just move on.

NORRIS: Where'd you first meet him?

SORLIEN: That was in Point-Claire. First met Drew when I was five. Our backyards met corner to corner.

NORRIS: Do you have any siblings?

SORLIEN: Yeah, two. My brother [Cai E. Sorlien '67] is four years older. And he figures fairly prominently in my thinking about Vietnam. And my sister [Patricia Sorlien Read] who's a year younger.

NORRIS: And were you close with them growing up?

SORLIEN: Yeah. With my brother, of course, it was always a question of who could beat each other up, you know? Four years older, he's a lot bigger, and I'm just a little brat. But we did a lot together. We camped – As a family, we often went camping. There were about four or five summers where we camped for the entire summer. And my father [Kenneth E. Sorlien '43] went back and forth for work.

NORRIS: Did your father work wherever you were living?

SORLIEN: Yeah, he would be. For example, when we moved from Hartford [CT] to Montreal [Canada], he was there to set up the Canadian sales division for the company. He trained the staff. When we moved to Toronto, he was working in the Toronto office. We returned to the States and moved to Boston, at that point, he was the sort of regional sales manager for the Boston area.

NORRIS: What was your relationship like with your sister?

SORLIEN: Oh, outside of my tormenting her? [laughter] We were really pretty close. She's just a lovely person. At this point now, she's really the social center of the family, now that my parents are gone. Most of the family gatherings are at my sister's house. My older brother, of course, partly because he has PTSD, he lives on the other side of the country, and we're happy to see him once a year, sometimes twice a year. I've been out to visit him only a couple of times. But when we speak, I feel closer to him now than at any time in my life. Just because of what he has done to remake himself as a person to get over his PTSD.

NORRIS: What was your relationship like with your parents growing up?

SORLIEN: They were great parents. I had a real privileged life, it was really pretty stress free. There was, of course, always the expectation to achieve, but I never felt like I had any trouble with that. I was like, "Yeah, I want to achieve, I'll do the best I can" and never encountered any major failures or any major sort of stress about that. I took pretty naturally to being a student, I'm the intellectual wonk of the family. My brother is an athlete, life-long. [He] still considers himself an athlete. He's four years older than I am and is in perfectly amazing physical condition. When he was here at Dartmouth, he was a hockey player. And he was recruited for the Dartmouth hockey team. After a falling out with the coach, he just started playing semi-pro on the outside. He never tried to go pro, like NHL level professional, but he played for teams around here. He's always been quite the athlete. As he says, "I learn by moving, you learn by reading."

NORRIS: If you were reading a bunch, what kind of stuff were you reading or interested in growing up?

SORLIEN: Literature and history. I never thought of myself as a writer, but I think it was pretty obvious. It just sort of came and that's what I did. I got involved with the student newspaper and that sort of thing. I had a very influential English composition class in high school in Wellesley [MA]. A teacher named Crockett [Wilbur Crockett] who really ran a college level seminar. I learned a lot about essay writing from him. It was a pretty natural development for me to become a writer. Essentially, now I write nonfiction. It's been my job to explain the intricacies of the art market to people who don't know anything about it. And it's such a murky world that it's actually pretty fascinating.

NORRIS: Were you in Wellesley [MA] all throughout high school?

SORLIEN: No, I just finished high school in Wellesley [MA], When we lived in Toronto [Canada], we actually lived in Oakville, which is a suburb west of midway between Toronto and Hamilton. Unlike Ontario, of course. My dad was in the Navy. We always had a boat.

In Oakville, that was actually one of the reasons for the move: everybody, including me, felt that there wasn't sufficient challenge. I had the top grades in the high school year after year, so... I was gonna go to private school, [which would] be more challenging, or [come] back to the United States. It was close. And I'm actually really glad we came back to the U.S. because at that time, private schools were all mono-educational.

NORRIS: What does that mean?

SORLIEN: I would have been in a boys only school. When I came to Dartmouth it was men only. By going to a public high school in Wellesley [MA], there were girls there. Woah. [laughter] I seriously considered going to Harvard because [it was coeducational]. I just didn't like being in the city that much. I decided that being in the woods meant more to me than seeing women.

NORRIS: You mentioned your father was in the Navy, was he involved in World War II?

SORLIEN: World War Two, yeah. He was [Dartmouth] class of '43. As soon as he graduated, he was off to officer training school in Florida. At Dartmouth he'd always been a kind of an indifferent student. He got really close to getting kicked out once for drinking too much and not studying enough, you know? And he said when he got to Officer Candidate School, he had never worked so hard in his life. Because most of the people in that school were going to subchasers [submarine chasers]. A World War Two subchaser carried a couple of machine guns and three inch gun.

NORRIS: Is a subchaser a submarine?

SORLIEN: No, it's a surface boat intended to go after submarines. Submarines are more heavily armed. And they can duck, a subchaser could not. The top five guys in the class got to go to run crash boats instead of subchasers, so he worked really hard [laughter]. He spent the war in North Carolina running a three boat squadron of crash boats. A crash boat is an ambulance basically. His job was stationed at a Naval Air Station. His job was picking up the pilots who crashed.

NORRIS: Did he drive boats from North Carolina to wherever they--?

SORLIEN: He was at the Naval Air Station in in North Carolina so he was pretty much the base ambulance. [indiscernible] They're training Navy pilots there, and they have large numbers. Being an ambulance driver has its own stresses. He never talked about it very much. He was proud of his service, proud of the boats, but the most he ever said was "Some of the guys we picked up were pretty badly beat up." Yeah, like dead.

NORRIS: You said he was an ambulance driver. Was he like a physical ambulance driver?

SORLIEN: No, no. This is a boat. So it's the equivalent. They actually had three boats. And one of them was pretty much like a PT boat. If you know what they're like, PT boat, that's a torpedo boat. They're plywood V bottoms. Not much more than skiff, about PT boats – I should know this -- but they're about 40 feet, a little over 40 feet long. Usually had a crew of five or six [powered by Packard v12 [boat engine]]. And he had twin Packer V12s in his boat and then he had two smaller also plywood V bottom plywood skiffs, I think they had single Packard V12s in them. So they've got a chief engineer and they've got a navigator, they've got a medical guy, and probably two or three other people who run the boat.

NORRIS: Do you know where they typically were picking people up from?

SORLIEN: Yeah, I don't recall the name of the Sound [Albemarle Sound] but there's-- I don't know specifically. You know, it's funny that you mentioned it, I've never looked it up on a nautical chart to see you exactly where they were.

NORRIS: Like ballpark, was it near North Carolina? Was it near--

SORLIEN: Oh it was in North Carolina. I'm trying to remember the name of the town. Because this is, of course, before I was born. My brother could probably tell you the name of the town, because he was born in 1945. Not that he would have much memory of it either. But it was a large protected sound there on the coast.

NORRIS: So is it picking up people who had been injured from war overseas?

SORLIEN: No, no, these are the pilots in training. These are the guys who took off, somehow blew it, the plane went down. Or coming back in and they blew the landing and end up in the water instead of on the

runway. It's maybe a little hard to think about now, but these airplanes are all strictly manual. Airplanes now are all controlled by computers and the pilot is just there monitoring it to make sure it's going okay. Then, everything was manual. And these are really high powered aircraft. So one little mistake, and all of the sudden, you're in really deep trouble. The men who were good at flying these things were really good.

NORRIS: Moving into high school, you mentioned that you were very into literature. What kind of things were you involved in in high school? Did you play any sports?

SORLIEN: [laughter] I tried playing center on the intramural football team. Of course my brother had been, you know, he was an athlete in every sport you can imagine. He was a good really good baseball player too, as well as a hockey player. If you can imagine, I think I weighed not much more than I weigh now, or less. I think I was around 130-135 pounds.

NORRIS: That's like me.

SORLIEN: Yeah, like you! Right! But I was center on the football team. I only did that for one season. I ran cross country.

NORRIS: Me too.

SORLIEN: Did you? Yeah, I ran cross country for several years, but I began to have some real trouble with my knees. Actually, I tried wrestling once too, because I was so lightweight. I competed in the I think 128 pound weight class. So I was big for the weight class [laughter].

NORRIS: Was there anything in high school that was-- so you eventually applied to Dartmouth-- Was it because your father and your brother went there? Or was there anything that appealed to you? You mentioned the woods.

SORLIEN: What appealed to me? Yes, I was following in their footsteps, no question about it. And at that time, that also carried weight with the admission. But I was admitted to Dartmouth—where else did I apply? I forget. I was admitted to Harvard, and one other school and for some reason, I applied to the Rochester Institute of Technology too. But I was definitely liberal arts guy, not a tech guy. We'd been camping all the time when I was a kid. So being

outdoors meant a lot to me. The company of trees is very comforting for me.

NORRIS: Where did you guys typically camp? You mentioned it before.

SORLIEN: We started out-- the first campsite I can remember when I was about five, six years old was on the slopes of Mount Greylock in Western Massachusetts. But we spent a complete summer camping in Georgian Bay in Lake Michigan. You know where that is?

NORRIS: I know where Lake Michigan is.

SORLIEN: It's the northern end. A beautiful, beautiful area.

NORRIS: Upper Peninsula [MI]?

SORLIEN: Yeah. Just above that, just north of that. And we spent three summers camping in the 1000 Islands, both from the Canadian side, and then spent -- trying to think-- one or two summers camping on Lake Winnepesaukee here in New Hampshire.

NORRIS: Was that typically your whole family or just--

SORLIEN: Yeah, typically all five of us. As my brother got older, he had other things he wanted to do so he didn't spend the whole summer but Pat and I did.

NORRIS: Pat's your sister?

SORLIEN: Yep, that's my sister. Yeah, we were there for the whole summer. It was glorious! Why would you go anywhere else, you know? It was really great fun. And occasionally we'd be-- my mother's younger brother, Jim, had been pretty close to my mother and our family and he camped with us some. And then he brought his wife and daughter, so we all camped together sometimes. And then that was a whole-- particularly when we moved to Montreal [Canada], we became good friends with the families in the neighborhood. And my parents made a real effort to stay together with everybody, and so we often saw them the 1000 Islands.

NORRIS: What was your relationship with your mother [Priscilla S.W. Sorlien] like?

SORLIEN: [pause] She was very, very supportive. I don't I don't recall ever being much of a discipline problem. I'm sure my dad was in charge

of that. Just very loving, supportive. You needed something, you want the mom, and she took care of it.

NORRIS: You end up going to Dartmouth, did your sister go to school as well?

SORLIEN: Skidmore, she went to Skidmore was a psychology major—Philosophy, sorry. She was a philosophy major. And her husband [William G. Read] a philosophy major at Harvard. They run an excavation business.

NORRIS: Now?

SORLIEN: He's just now kind of semi-retired. He still has the excavator but there's, you know [laughter]. We used to joke Bill—we used to tease Bill about, “he's the most thought out hole in the ground you'll ever see.” [laughter]

NORRIS: Moving into you coming to Dartmouth: So you get to Dartmouth in the fall of '67.

SORLIEN: Correct.

NORRIS: And your brother had just left.

SORLIEN: Yeah, he's off to Vietnam. He graduated in June, spent the summer—at that time he had a Chevrolet convertible that he drove across the country visiting friends and road trip just a couple of months before he had to check into the army and off he goes. He'd had been through Army ROTC, so when I arrived that was the natural thing for me to do: sign up for Army ROTC.

NORRIS: Right? Just because he had?

SORLIEN: Yes, just because he'd done it. The phrase that he used, which I thought was quite telling, was “that was the honorable thing you did-- to do.” That was, for a young man, to sign up for that service to your country was the honorable thing to do.

When I moved to Dartmouth, he gave me his furniture, gave me his dorm room refrigerator, gave me his girlfriend's telephone number [laughter]. So, I mean, I really followed in his footsteps.

NORRIS: Was his girlfriend still at school? Or I guess she wasn't at the school.

SORLIEN: She was at Colby. There was, at that time, frequent interchanges between Dartmouth and Colby.

NORRIS: Was she younger than him? She was still in school?

SORLIEN: Yes. She was still in school. She was she was, I think, two years younger than he was but much, much older than I was. She was much more mature. [laughter]. I mean I was real green when I when I arrived here. I was a very naive kid. Not much view of the world. That's what happened when I got here.

NORRIS: What was your impression of Dartmouth right when you arrived?

SORLIEN: Well, I was pretty familiar with it because parents had chaperoned fraternity parties for my brother. My dad was always really happy to come back. And so I'd been to the campus, I kind of knew something of what it was like. Though at that time— have you ever seen the film *Animal House*?

NORRIS: I have.

SORLIEN: Right. So that's what Dartmouth was like. I mean, take a few of the excesses off, but not many of them. It was pretty, pretty close. And I knew that wasn't my-- that was not my personality. But still I was pretty familiar with campus already.

NORRIS: Right. What year did your father graduate?

SORLIEN: 1943.

NORRIS: And was he in a fraternity here?

SORLIEN: Yeah, he was. Which one? I fully don't remember.

NORRIS: Or I guess what was he involved in?

SORLIEN: I ended up in my brother's fraternity.

NORRIS: Which was that?

SORLIEN: Gamma Delta Chi. Again, it's this sort of funny thing. By the time I was there, it was a very different place than when he had been there.

NORRIS: Your father?

SORLIEN: No, my brother. My father was in a different fraternity. I don't remember which one. I never went there [Gamma Delta Chi]. I think I set foot in the house twice my entire college career.

NORRIS: Into Gamma Delta Chi?

SORLIEN: Yeah. I was a brother, but I never went there. Just wasn't my scene. Sure. They had the big beer hall in the basement, which smelled awful. You know, it's like, "I don't want to go there."

NORRIS: I think that still might be there.

SORLIEN: Yeah, I'm sure it is. [laughter]

NORRIS: Do you know much about what your father was involved in when he was here?

SORLIEN: Only to the extent that there was a cartoon of him. I think that cartoon might have appeared in *The Dartmouth* in the newspaper. But there was this cartoon of him with this great enormous mug of beer in his hand. And he was he was famous for not having to go to the go to the bathroom as often as his fraternity brothers. [laughter]

NORRIS: That's quite the legacy.

SORLIEN: I guess while he was here [indiscernible] it was a hard drinking fraternity. Everybody did. That's what everybody did. And it was true with Gamma Delta Chi. The parties that I remember observing but not partaking... Let's just say this: that I remember we were up [at Dartmouth] for my brother's graduation, and couldn't find him. And finally somebody dragged him out from underneath the couch in the in the fraternity living room. At that time he had a BSA, two cylinder BSA motorcycle. I can still see him flying down the road... I can't remember the name of the road but the one that goes right by the green here, has the fence on that side, not the Dartmouth Hall side, but the other side.

NORRIS: Yeah, I'm not sure the name of it. I think that might be Main Street. It turns into Main Street.

SORLIEN: Yeah. Turns into Main Street. Anyway, so we're standing on the Green, I see him go whooshing by with his graduation gown flying out behind him, like somebody had finally found him, you know? Dragged him out. That's the legend was: That [indiscernible]. Somebody noticed the foot sticking out from underneath the couch. [laughter]

NORRIS: Alright, so then you enroll in ROTC once you get here. What was your experience like-- that was your first experience in ROTC? First getting here?

SORLIEN: Yes.

NORRIS: What was that like?

SORLIEN: It was, it was kind of boring. It was very civil. There were classes that went with it. And [pause] the classes were pretty simple. But it was all about military discipline. And I got fitted for a uniform and... I wasn't real impressed. It's like this was neither very stimulating, not very challenging and actually, to be truthful, just sort of not very interesting. But it's what my brother did. It's what was the honorable thing to do.

NORRIS: Did your brother tell you anything about ROTC before you had joined?

SORLIEN: No, no, he really hadn't.

NORRIS: Was his opinion-- it wasn't that strong about it because he hadn't gone off to war?

SORLIEN: Yeah. At that point, it was just the honorable thing to do. He had several years of it. And so it was—oh, and a hefty scholarship, by the way. Which really helped because our parents were paying for all this.

NORRIS: It was an ROTC scholarship?

SORLIEN: Yeah, he got an ROTC scholarship. And they were pretty good about, you know, you kind of had to stick with the program for a while, qualify for it. And he did. He was doing his duty. He was being the dutiful son. That's what his parents wanted him to do, and it took some of the financial burden off the family. He was glad to do that. Not that I don't think, I don't think he was particularly temperamentally suited to the military life, but he was being a good son. So, you know, he would, he would do that. You know?

NORRIS: The fall term goes by, you're in ROTC. You mention it's just mundane, boring.

SORLIEN: Yeah. And I got mononucleosis, I was pretty sick for a good chunk of the term. I remember being in Dick's house with a nurse, bathing

me with alcohol that had ice cubes in it to try and keep my fever down. Because I had such a high fever, they were afraid of brain damage. And I remember laying there thinking, “damn, this better be good for draft deferment.”

NORRIS: So what was that like, knowing? I guess there was a lot of people--the upperclassmen were worried about being drafted. And at the time, was that--

SORLIEN: By 1967, everybody was worried about it.

NORRIS: Right. So was that something that was kind of buzzing around campus? Was that something that was on everybody's mind?

SORLIEN: Yeah. Everybody was really very aware of it. You know, and as long as you're a student on campus, you're sheltered. But everybody was aware of what would happen if they left school, for example.

NORRIS: Do you ever look back? Because your time at Dartmouth kind of was this safety bubble in the sense of the draft.

SORLIEN: Yes it was.

NORRIS: How do you feel about that looking back at it?

SORLIEN: Well, fortunately, I was just really into the school. At that point, of course, I had no idea about where my interests lay, or what I wanted to do and my attitude towards Dartmouth was, “this is a chance to explore.” It's a chance to try doing different things and see what's appealing. And I thought, that “now's the time to do it, because eventually I'm gonna have to go out and earn a living.” So now's the chance and I was very fortunate to fall in with—Okay, I could tell you the exact moment this happened, but-- to be mentored by a couple of very fine men, professors, a couple of very fine professors who steered me through art history. Art history was my major. And amazingly, I was able to actually make a profession out of studying art history.

NORRIS: You mentioned this moment. What was this moment like?

SORLIEN: Oh [pause] God that's right. So I had been on foreign study and went on a long foreign study sojourn. I both went through the college-sponsored program in Strasbourg, France—[or] Strasbourg, Alsace-- which is sometimes France sometimes Germany. Alsatians hate the Germans [laughter]. And then went to a school in

Bad Reichenhall, Germany to study the German language. At that point, I had French, I studied Russian here. [Indiscernable] I wanted another language group, so I studied German. And then following that, I toured for several months. I just had a motorcycle. I bought a motorcycle over there and just toured for several months. So I was over in Europe for quite a long time.

And when I got back, I was talking with the-- people asking me "where you been, what did you see?" And I said "well, I spent some time in Paris and Paris is just magical, this wonderful city." "Well, did you go to the Louvre?" [They asked] "No, I never did." [I said] "Where were you staying?" [laughter] I told them I was staying over by the American Embassy in a friend of a friend's apartment. "You used to hang out over in the West Bank?" [They asked] "Yeah." [I said]. "And how did you get there?" [They asked] "I used to take this shortcut through this great big government building, a big courtyard." [I said] "That was the Louvre, you idiot" [They said]. [laughter] So I thought, "boy, that was really stupid." So I decided to take an art history course.

NORRIS: So that was after you got back?

SORLIEN: After I got back. I said, "All right, this is so woefully ignorant, I really should know something." So I took an art history class, and it was sort of your basic survey class that started with Renaissance Art. And taught by Frank Robinson [Franklin W. Robinson], who was a brilliant lecturer. One day, he puts up a slide of an Albrecht Dürer painting of a young Venetian woman [Portrait of a Venetian Woman, 1505] And nobody knows who she is. But she is to Dürer what the Mona Lisa was to Leonardo [da Vinci]. He puts this slide up and I just, I just-- my jaw dropped. I was like, "Oh, my God, she is stunningly beautiful." You know, I just fell in love with this image. And then after the lecture ended, I thought "wait a minute" that was a photograph of a painting that's 500 years old. And I can still experience what he experienced? That's astounding. I got to know more about this. This is, I mean, art can be that powerful? That it can transcend 500 years, and I can still feel what the artist felt?

So I began to study a lot more art, took more classes with Frank Robinson. Who then, he had quite good connections in the art world, knew a collector of prints, collector who had a very good collection of prints. And so we as his students set to work, preparing an exhibition, an exhibition catalog of prints this guy owned. We actually did that twice. This is graduate level work that I was getting to do as an undergraduate. It was fabulous. It was just a tremendous opportunity, sort of thing you could get at Dartmouth

and never get at Harvard. [laughter] Yeah, that just, you know, sold me. Art History is really my [indiscernable].

NORRIS: I guess we'll go chronologically and then we can get to the arts stuff. So we were in the fall of '67, joined ROTC, it's okay. You get mono and that's not great. And then going into the winter of '68, that's when your protest comes eventually.

SORLIEN: That's when my eyes opened. When I got to Dartmouth, finding information that does not appear in the mainstream press. I'm finding out the alternative facts, as they say now. I'm finding out the facts the government was hiding.

NORRIS: Where are you finding things like that?

SORLIEN: At that time, there was an English professor named Jonathan Mirsky here, who was very familiar with that part of the world, with that culture. And he knew a lot more about what was going on. And so he was beginning to tell the truth. Then I was also directed to other alternatives-- the alternative media, not the mainstream media, but the media that was also doing much more investigative journalism.

NORRIS: What kind of alternative media would that be?

SORLIEN: Actually I don't remember too clearly. But it was a story here, a story there. And being interested in history, I began to really read up on this about and learned two things: One is that people are not all good. There are people in the world who are sociopaths who have no empathy, no feeling of remorse, no guilt, no sense of good or bad. They just do what they need to do for them for their own benefit.

NORRIS: Are you referring to people who were people in the government that were setting up the war, or?

SORLIEN: Well, actually the next step beyond being a sociopath is being downright evil. Those are people who will harm or kill other people without remorse, for their own benefit. And I found out that some of those people were corporate leaders, and some of those people were in government and that the leadership of our government was very cynical and hypocritical. That the government was lying to us. The theory justifying our intervention in Vietnam, was the Domino Theory, which was total hogwash.

NORRIS: Could you explain the Domino Theory a little bit?

SORLIEN: The theory was that Western democracies are in a pitched battle with communism. So this is leftover from World War Two and the Cold War that that ensued. "Communism was just the worst thing that could possibly happen anybody, and certainly couldn't happen to America, and if we allowed Vietnam to become a communist country, then all the other countries in Southeast Asia would also fall and become communist countries as well. And then the Russians and communists and the Chinese would then dominate that half of the world and we couldn't let that happen." [sarcastic]. Total bullshit.

The Vietnamese have been fighting with the Chinese for 1000s of years. The alternate-- But it's unfortunate that, first the French and then the Americans when we intervened right after the French, and tried to prop up the same nepotistic brutally oppressive regime. The alternative that was available was communism. We didn't create any alternative that that would have a better outcome for the Vietnamese people. So we went to war against the communists, they say. It's total hogwash. And so then I began been thinking, well, maybe there's-- there must be an economic motive here. What does Vietnam have that the United States needs? This isn't Saudi Arabia that has all the oil. Vietnam had a big rubber industry, the French extracted a lot of rubber from Vietnam. But by that time, we had synthetic rubber. And we didn't need that much rubber.

And Vietnam had bauxite deposits. But there were plenty of other places in the world you could get bauxite to make aluminum. There was no compelling economic reason for it either except what Dwight Eisenhower warned us about in 1961

NORRIS: Which was that?

SORLIEN: The United States in the course of World War Two had built a military industrial complex. He would know, he was in charge. They built a military industrial complex that was so large, had so much money, was so powerful that it could, it would influence foreign policy and elections for its own benefit. So I became-- I concluded that the war in Vietnam was just the latest iteration of the military industrial complex, finding a place to have its products destroyed, so that we would spend the money to remake them. That, we had a large military, we'd had a large military for the Cold War. We built up this enormous nuclear deterrence and other aspects of this really large military as part of the Cold War opposition to the communists, and the war in Vietnam was just an extension of that.

But it didn't do any good to just stockpile weapons, you had to destroy them. In order to make money by making more.

NORRIS: Was this guided thinking directed toward-- was this as a result of speaking with professors or friends or readings of your own? How did you come to this?

SORLIEN: Yeah, all of the above. But prior to Dartmouth I was totally unaware of Dwight [D.] Eisenhower's speech or even the term the military industrial complex. But yeah, you know, all of the above. We're just very fortunate that Dartmouth was an intellectually enquiring community. I was about to use the word free, but it was not free.

NORRIS: Why do you say?

SORLIEN: Two reasons. One is the college administration bought this big lie, hook line and sinker, and then promulgated it. And so a professor who was too outspoken, of course, would be putting his career at risk. That's why I think Jonathan Mirsky was incredibly courageous, and he was not the only one, but he's just the one that sticks in my mind. And say, the College bought by this big lie, but I had sources of information and people encouraging me to think, in ways that I had never thought before. So to think not only about the specifics about the war in Vietnam, but how American democracy worked or was not working. And thinking about human nature, what people were like, because I could see clearly that politics and democratic politics in particular are very susceptible, are a very good breeding grounds for sociopaths. The person who is really evil was the sociopath who could manage to become an autocrat. Who could so subvert democracy that it withered and died? And we've seen that all over the world.

NORRIS: You say that the democratic space is a breeding ground for sociopaths.

SORLIEN: Yeah, sociopaths do well. In because they'll tell you whatever you want to hear, whatever it takes to get elected. The truth is of little consequence. The ability to actually perform what you've promised has very little meaning. And if you have enough money, you can avoid being held accountable for any of it.

NORRIS: Was this something that you started getting interested with right as you entered Dartmouth? Or with or more towards your second term there? Was there a specific turning point?

- SORLIEN: Yeah, says that it was in the second term that there began to absorb some of this--
- NORRIS: Was there anything specific that led to your interest in all these topics?
- SORLIEN: It was a hot topic all over campus. Yeah. I mean, it's on everybody's mind. And my brothers over there. So why is my brother there? Why is his life at risk?
- NORRIS: Do you know when he specifically, when he--
- SORLIEN: I don't know the exact date when he transferred over but it was probably January of 1968. Yeah, so it was about that time was when he was first over there. Never heard from him, at least I didn't.
- NORRIS: I was gonna ask.
- SORLIEN: I never saw a letter or anything of that sort. As you often know, often your imagination is worse than information. I knew him as a strong, tough character, but it's like, why is he at risk? This does not make any sense.
- NORRIS: Do you remember the last time you talked to him before he went to Vietnam?
- SORLIEN: Wow, you know, I don't have a specific memory to tell you the truth. We didn't confide in each other. Men didn't do that. Men didn't think about-- you didn't think deeply about your feelings. You buried your feelings, you didn't want to feel them. Men didn't talk about that kind of squishy stuff [laughter].
- So no, I don't remember a conversation. I don't remember, for example, sending him off or something of that sort. But by early 1968, I'm seeing he's at great risk for no good reason. In a few years, I'm going to be at risk. And this is an absolutely appalling abuse of the trust in the American people, of trust of me. I mean, this is like, all the sudden, "wait a minute, not only is my government lying to my, my college is lying to me. Who can I trust?"
- NORRIS: Were you guys aware of the Tet Offensive that started in late January [1968]?
- SORLIEN: Oh yeah. That was good, By that time, they were beginning to get some pretty good mainstream media coverage of events like that.

The casualty numbers, stuff like that, those are still lies. But at least there was some information beginning to come back of what was actually happening. This is before the photo journalists really made a big reference. That was one of the big differences for the Vietnam war over previous wars:

NORRIS: The photograph?

SORLIEN: The photograph and the video, television, that we could actually see on television what war was like, and what we were doing, what we as Americans were doing to the to the Vietnamese. We had this enormous firepower, we had all this technology, these people had their black pajamas and small arms. Have you seen *Good Morning Vietnam*?

NORRIS: I have.

SORLIEN: Yeah, that was a pretty good look at a little bit of what it was like on the ground, without making it too bloody, too violent. But I really admired that film. Yeah and—I'm sorry I'm blanking for a minute about the name of a book, but there's the title of a book about Achilles [*Achilles in Vietnam* by Jonathan Shay]. That also was very telling about the psychology of a soldier. I may think of the book if you haven't read it. Because it really is worth reading. It's important reading. And it opened-- it was recommended to me by my brother.

NORRIS: So was that after he had come back?

SORLIEN: Yeah, that's recently yeah, that's-- sorry, I jumped the chronology. So by February of 1968, I'm disillusioned.

NORRIS: So were you saying-- you mentioned that you now know that all the casualty numbers...

SORLIEN: Were lies.

NORRIS: Yeah, so is that something that you knew then? Or is that something that you had come to realize and now can...

SORLIEN: No, that was then.

NORRIS: How can you...?

SORLIEN: Because you could see the mainstream press is covering the war, talking about what's happened and doing it with some integrity. But they're not getting straight information. And then there were other

journalists who were investigating the same thing and reporting back without the constraints of the mainstream media. And— [Professor Edward Miller walks by] that was Professor Miller-- so they spoke on unvarnished truth saying, just for example, we don't know how many people died there, but, we know it was way more than that.

NORRIS: So you're--

SORLIEN: Also, I have to say the other thing that was that was really different about which we lied was the nature of the enemy.

NORRIS: In what sense?

SORLIEN: The American people were being told that these were communists who are well-organized and well-armed and that they were a formidable foe that had to be defeated. No, these people were just trying to make a life in their own country. They were just trying to not be bombed, trying to not be napalmed, trying not to be murdered in their own homes. And their homes were very modest, Vietnam was a poor country. The French had systematically extracted all possible wealth out it. Vietnam was a poor and poorly educated population. You would think they wouldn't stand a chance against American armor.

NORRIS: So were you getting most of this from classes you took? Or readings?

SORLIEN: No, but there were a lot of... it's at this point-- Well, this is the very beginning. I'm reading things that professors for example, like Jonathan Mirsky, things that professors and other students had published. And we were beginning... At the very beginning of it, there really weren't... And then there was this vigil that took place on the green where the trash dumpsters are now. Every Wednesday at noon.

NORRIS: By the flags?

SORLIEN: Yeah. Are there flags there? You know, the path that comes directly across from Main Street to Dartmouth Hall.

NORRIS: On the opposite side of Dartmouth Hall.

SORLIEN: At the Main street end of it, yeah. On the north side of it, so we have our backs to Baker Library. And somebody had just made up a sign, it was waist high and about four feet long. Blue with white

lettering that said "Peace." And, and we stood there in silence, Wednesdays at noon.

NORRIS: This was starting at the beginning of the winter term in '68?

SORLIEN: Yeah, this is certainly 1968. And that made a lot of sense to me. You know, then of course, standing there I began to meet with other people who felt similarly. I can't name the specific times but I'm sure Dave Aylward [David Aylward '71] and Dave Green [David H. Green '71] were there. And Dave is a natural leader. And David Green is a very smart guy. And so I joined in with them and some other people, and then we began to publish stuff. We began to organize lectures, began to organize more public protests and the weekly vigil grew in numbers, until it grew big. But early on, like in February of 1968, there would be, on an average Wednesday, 10 people.

NORRIS: And then was it by late February that it was just grown, was it grown exponentially?

SORLIEN: No, at that point, say by late February [1968], there was maybe 10 people. 10, 12 people. Paul Smith [Paul G. Smith '68] showed up in [ROTC] uniform one week. And Paul was a senior in ROTC. And, of course, he got in trouble for that. But he had a scholarship to protect, so we did the once and, "okay, that was it." And it was no big deal. So I did it. And showed up in uniform and...

NORRIS: Like the next week?

SORLIEN: The next week, yeah. Next week I came in uniform, because he couldn't. And that did-- now this was a deliberate slap in the face. Because ROTC had informed us all that you cannot do this. And I looked at it and said, "I've got to resign from this organization. How can I make this meaningful?"

NORRIS: Was this like a sentiment that was kind of like brooding from the beginning of winter until the protest? You knew that you wanted to resign?

SORLIEN: Yeah. In seeing the response to Paul [G. Smith]'s, that was like the last straw. I was like, oh, come on. This is... and so I showed up in uniform, which made the front page of *The Dartmouth*. That was part of the goal, was to create an awareness on campus if it was an alternative to the big lie. Because the group of us who looked at it that way, it was still quite small. And, then, of course, I was kicked out of ROTC. So the next week, *The Dartmouth* interviewed me.

And I decided to take a slightly different tack. Because I felt that there were other people who were better expressing their concerns about conduct of the war. And so I decided to take a freedom of speech tack, saying that ROTC had no place at Dartmouth. That the basic tenet of military life was contrary to the basic intellectual tenant of being a liberal arts college. The military life means no freedom of expression, no freedom of thought, there's no individual responsibility, you're responsible for doing whatever your superiors tell you to do, and that goes all the way up the chain. And those are three basic tenants of a liberal arts education. And so that was the approach I took and that was the argument that I could make that no one else could, that went into *The Dartmouth*. And then from there, I was even more committed and more active and we did much more to-- we published position papers.

NORRIS: Where did you publish those?

SORLIEN: We went to a mimeograph machine. And just ran them off and then passed them out. Yeah, it was real grassroots. I don't remember whose mimeograph machine it was. But it was temperamental.

NORRIS: What is a mimeograph?

SORLIEN: [laughter] Yeah, so what you had to do was put a special form in a typewriter. And you it's a multi-part form, because one of the parts is a little bit like a photographic negative. Right. And so then you type your text on this form, peel it apart, and put it in the mimeograph machine, and then hand-crank it. And then the ink then stuck to the paper wherever the typewriter had struck the paper or struck the master, I think we called that a master, a little like a negative. And so every each sheet of paper was cranked out by hand. So if you're doing a 15-page position paper and you want 100 copies, this is [snoring noise]. Yeah. This is a real snore. But it's what we did. We organized lectures, and then we organized other protests.

NORRIS: So the rest of your winter term, you're still doing a lot of anti-war protests, part of the anti-war movement. So it wasn't necessarily-- there was no formal name behind it. There was no club or there was no...

SORLIEN: Well, we did eventually kind of self-identify with a national semi-organization called Students for Democratic Society, SDS, which had had its birth in California. And [pause] sorry, just stopping and thinking for a second about the timing of all this.

While we took some cues and ideas and stuff from what students at other campuses had done and, all of which is being publicized by SDS, and we received information from SDS. But there was no organization, we were not an affiliate or something of that sort. It was a very decentralized organization of people who just shared this opposition to conduct a war in Vietnam.

The first lottery was held on the first of December 1969. And Paul Rahmeier [Rev. Paul W. Rahmeier] was a chaplain of the college at the time, and he had become quite active in the anti-war movement. And so when the lottery was held, he looked at it, and he advised me since “there's only one month left, they're never gonna get to your number.”

NORRIS: What was your number?

SORLIEN: That was like 250. Very high number. There was no chance they were gonna get to me. So you know how the lottery worked?

NORRIS: You could... explain it.

SORLIEN: Every date in the year in a one year calendar was given a number, by lottery.

NORRIS: Up to 365.

SORLIEN: 365. Right. And if that was your birthday, that was your number. And the draft board started with number one, and two, and three, and four, and just started drafting people in the order of their birthday. And my birthday was April 28. So I had a very high number, April 27, might have been a very low number. You know, I just – literally it was a lottery, I just lucked out. But fortunately, I had Paul Rahmeier's advice, he said, “declare yourself eligible. They're not going to get your number. And then once they pass you by, in that way, you're no longer eligible.” So I declared myself 1-A [Available for military service] for one month. And then thereafter, I was exempt from the draft. So I just really lucked out.

NORRIS: You mentioned that—wait, so that would have been after you graduated, you would have gone to war? Or you declared when you were in school, instead of doing student deferral.

SORLIEN: Yeah, I'm still a sophomore. Instead of as a student, I think it was a 2-S [Student deferment]. And so as a student, I had a 2-S deferment. If for any reason, I left school, stopped being student, I'd lose that instantly. And boom, I'm off to Vietnam. But because of a

lottery, [indiscernible] the very first lottery, I lucked out. And so I was able to avoid the draft.

NORRIS: You mentioned that you took the stance of freedom of speech when interviewed by *The Dartmouth* after the protest. Was that something that came to you in retrospect? Was that something that you thought of before that wasn't your initial intention but that was something that...

SORLIEN: Oh, it was part of my original intention. I felt that that ROTC had no legitimate role to play on any college campus. And just did not belong in a college setting. And it was the height of hypocrisy for a college to tolerate it, that it was a betrayal of the basic purpose of a college to allow military recruiting on its campus. College didn't see it that way [laughter]. But there were other people who were far more eloquent than I on saying what was wrong with the war. Here, I was saying "no, there's something wrong with the college."

NORRIS: So you do the protest in late February [of 1968]. Winter term runs through late March-ish. So are you on campus for your spring of freshman year? Are you going abroad then? When do you...

SORLIEN: Yeah, so that was actually the summer of that year, I was on the Merchant Marine. I sailed the Merchant Marine that summer.

NORRIS: What is that?

SORLIEN: I became—I was just very fortunate, a neighbor got me a ticket, he got me a, sorry, a license. I had got a coast guard license as an ordinary seaman, which requires no skill, so I got a summer job on an oil tanker, working as a deckhand on an oil tanker. 48 Watch (4 to 8 watch; 4pm to 8pm and 4am to 8am) which was...

NORRIS: Where was that?

SORLIEN: So, I actually joined the ship in Boston, I think it was the only time she [the ship] was in Boston. The ship was a Texaco, Illinois. It was a World War Two tanker that had been cut in half and lengthened. They call that "jumbo'd". She was about 800 feet. And we went between southern ports: Port Arthur, Texas, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the New England ports. We went to Portland, Maine, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, carrying mostly home-heating oil, diesel, stuff like that.

We did one load-- we loaded up in the Caribbean with aviation gasoline, half jet [Av jet, the high octane gasoline used in jet

airplanes.] it was called. And we so we had a load of half jet and went through the Panama Canal. And then I thought I was really in for it. I'm on a tanker. I can't-- legally, I cannot leave. If I jumped ship, that's really... I'm going to jail. That's really bad. But I'm thinking we're headed for Vietnam.

NORRIS: Oh, you the thought that the ship was going to Vietnam?

SORLIEN: [Thought the] Ship was going to Vietnam.

NORRIS: What did you initially, what was the initial job posting?

SORLIEN: As an ordinary seaman. But when you sign on to a ship, you sign your life away. You are subject to the discipline of the ship, the discipline of the captain. And it's really a big deal if you do, if you leave the ship unauthorized. So we're going through the Panama Canal with a load of aviation gasoline. It's like, this is not good. And we anchored off Panama City and sat there, and we're all just like, if you think about it, an 800 foot tanker full of aviation gasoline is a very large bomb. Any spark on deck. For example, a [indiscernible], they hit the deck, we're pulverized. So we sat off Panama City for more than a week, waiting for tanks to open up. And then we unloaded and went back through the Panama Canal. Big, big relief.

NORRIS: Did you just sign on to this job summer job, just because of a[n] interest in the ocean for like, maritime stuff?

SORLIEN: Yeah, there's two parts of it. But yes. And it was it was an opportunity that this neighbor made available. It's like, wow, this is a great opportunity. And yeah, my dad had been the Navy. The uncle I'd mentioned, Uncle Jim [James H. Wilson], he built my first boat, which I had... and I'd been various forms of boating since before I can remember. Mostly powerboating, and I didn't take up sailing until I was in my 20s. [Indiscernible] But yeah, I was always very interested in boating and had a fair amount of experience with it. So being on a big ship, that was... What a great way to spend the summer.

NORRIS: So you were at school in the spring before that?

SORLIEN: Yeah.

NORRIS: Ok. Were you doing more anti-war stuff during that too?

SORLIEN: Yeah, was doing a lot then. Just trying to get stuff, make stuff happen. Just trying to get more people involved and make the...

generate protests and make the protests bigger and put a fair amount of energy into that. And then so [I] went away for the summer and came back and went back to it.

NORRIS: In the fall?

SORLIEN: In the fall. Yeah.

NORRIS: When did the Foreign Study Program in France begin?

SORLIEN: Let me think about that. Actually you know what? I did come back to campus. So I guess I must have [pause] gone to France, went to Strasbourg, guess that would have been for winter term...

NORRIS: The winter of '69?

SORLIEN: Yeah [pause]. Yeah, that would have been... I think it would have been winter term rather than spring, yeah, winter term. And I was in France for, I was in Europe for... I was in France in Strasbourg until June [1969] then I was in Bad Reichenhall [Germany] till September [1969]. And then I'd say [I] travelled for several months after that. So I think it was probably December of '69. Before I came back to the U.S., by which time things have changed very dramatically here.

NORRIS: So you're starting the abroad in the winter of '69? And then you did you take a term off for the spring to travel?

SORLIEN: In the fall, I took the fall term off.

NORRIS: Did you come back to campus in the spring of '69?

SORLIEN: No, so it would have been... would have, given the schedule at that time, I would have been back on campus in January of 1970.

NORRIS: For the first time since winter [of 1969]?

SORLIEN: Yeah, since winter of '69. I was gone for almost a year.

NORRIS: So you're just traveling all that time?

SORLIEN: In Bad Reichenhall [Germany], it was a school to learn German, so I was getting credit for that. And then in Strasbourg [France], another foreign student [Robert Lambe '70] and I, we each rebuilt a motorcycle. And so in Bad Reichenhall [Germany] I had the motorcycle, and then I just toured for...

NORRIS: Summer?

SORLIEN: No, in the fall. No, the school, the German school was in the summer. Okay.. So it was in Bad Reichenhall [Germany] I think through September, as I recall. And, and then toured for a while and ended up meeting my wife. By the time I came back, she came. We didn't get married till some years later, but she came to campus.

NORRIS: Where was she from?

SORLIEN: She was from Chautauqua, New York, so that's the very... Do you know where that is? Very, very western end of New York state. You're almost in Pennsylvania.

NORRIS: And it's a great group of country. Welsh Foods is, was at that time, was centered in that part of New York State because they make grape jam and grape juice. And she had gone to college in Franconia, Franconia College.

NORRIS: Where is that?

SORLIEN: In Franconia, New Hampshire. Franconia is the town on just the north side of the White Mountains [NH]. And the main pass through the White Mountains, which is now interstate 93, is Franconia Notch. And there was a small private college there just on the north side. And she had, she was going to college there and left college to come here to be with me. And so thereafter, we lived off-campus.

NORRIS: So did she drop out of school?

SORLIEN: Yeah, she dropped out of college, dropped out of college to be here.

NORRIS: What'd she do?

SORLIEN: She got a job at the hospital making salads. She was good with it. My parents would pay the tuition, but they would not pay for any of our living expenses. [They] of course did not approve. Being unmarried was...

NORRIS: Did you have a job?

SORLIEN: No, I did not. I did not work.

NORRIS: So are you back on campus, coming back to campus in the winter of 1970?

SORLIEN: 1970. Yeah.

NORRIS: And we're coming back to campus, you're living off campus now [in the winter of 1970] with your girlfriend. And...

SORLIEN: And all my friends been expelled.

NORRIS: Really?

SORLIEN: Yeah, oh you don't know about that?

NORRIS: Yeah, I know about Peter [David H. Green '71]... Parkhurst...

SORLIEN: They all occupied the administration building and were arrested and expelled from the college.

NORRIS: Green.

SORLIEN: David Green [David H. Green '71], yeah, David Aylward ['71].

NORRIS: Yeah, Peter Green [of Fleetwood Mac] [laughter]

SORLIEN: There were... Oh, Jake Guest ['66]... There were two dozen of the people I knew who were all arrested and expelled. ROTC was still here. But by that time, the tide of public opinion had turned on the war as well. This is now Walter Cronkite is beginning to show footage of, real footage of the war. And what was really going on over there. This is when that very famous still photograph of the monk on fire ["Burning Monk" by Malcolm Browne]. That was widely, widely distributed. And the equally famous photograph of the massacre at Kent State University [1970]. So those really turned... they say photojournalism made a huge impact and that it really turned public opinion about the wisdom of conducting this war. So by the time I got back here, it was very different campus.

NORRIS: That was all taking place... So the Parkhurst [Hall Occupation] and Kent State [Massacre] were both in May... or Parkhurst was in May of 1969 and then Kent State was in May of 1970. Were you aware of what was going on when you were overseas?

SORLIEN: Not Parkhurst. I didn't hear a word about that, I had no idea, but Kent State I knew about because I was back here. And by then, just to show you the change in the administration, rather than wait for

the campus to be shut down by protesters, which surely would have happened, the—I'm trying to think if [John G. Kemeny] was president. He was a brilliant man. But anyway, the administration shut down the campus.

NORRIS: The classes were canceled.

SORLIEN: Classes were suspended. The whole campus engaged in forum discussion.

NORRIS: Were you there for the...

SORLIEN: Yeah, I was there for all of that. Discussion about why we had gotten there, why we had gotten into a war in Vietnam, and what this meant now and what this is going to mean going forward. Some very good discussion went on. That was in May of 1970. Trying to think was it the first or second Earth Day was in the spring of 1972. And that was a bit of an event too.

NORRIS: Earth Day?

SORLIEN: Earth Day, yeah.

NORRIS: What does that mean? I mean I know what Earth Day is but what do you mean by an event?

SORLIEN: I'll just tell you about my part in it, which is, of course, I didn't have any money. But I talked a friend into giving me a pound of marijuana. And I dutifully cleaned it because I wanted the seeds, and then repackaged it. And into smaller bags, they weren't an ounce, less than an ounce, and sold the bags to friends of mine, so that I could repay him and then had one bag, that I kept back for myself. I rolled the entire bag into joints and, on Earth Day, walked around campus. And every group of people that I found, I would just go into the back of the group and light up a joint, pass it around.

And the army was there for a big recruiting day. And so I had to go. I went into this room which was crowded with both people who were thinking about joining the army, and people who were firmly opposed to ROTC being there at all. Yeah. And in all other instances, I had just lit one or two joints and then [I was] on my way. There, I stayed long enough to make sure that the room was really filled with smoke.

NORRIS: Do you remember where, what building, like what room this was?

SORLIEN: It was, God, I'm afraid I don't remember the names of the buildings very well, but it was like the second building up from the corner. It wasn't the dining hall... It was

NORRIS: So either McNutt or Parkhurst

SORLIEN: It wasn't the dining hall. It was probably, very likely Parkhurst actually. Yeah, it was very likely a room in Parkhurst. [laughter] So by that point, that was my way of subverting the Army.

NORRIS: Yeah, that was your form of protest.

SORLIEN: And I think the whole thing broke up. It was not very, you know, [sniffing noises] the Army's like...

NORRIS: I guess, was smoking cigarettes inside okay at that point?

SORLIEN: No. Oh, no no no no. And everybody recognized the smell. Remember this is Vietnam. There's a cloud of smoke that hung over the country of Vietnam all the time the Americans were there. It was wildly popular. Yeah, that was a funny thing. That was yet another form of protest.

NORRIS: So do you think that, is it some sort of backwards blessing in disguise that you were... do you think you would have been expelled had you not been abroad?

SORLIEN: Oh absolutely. Oh, yeah. I would have been there in Parkhurst and I would have been expelled like all my friends.

NORRIS: So are you living off campus, like I know there are the off campus houses here [in Hanover] and these are still in town. Were you farther away?

SORLIEN: Yeah, we rented houses in in Vermont. And I think it was the last house we rented was in Cornish, New Hampshire. Across the street from [pause], the author... JD Salinger. Just happened to be across the street from JD Salinger and just down the street from Saint-Gaudens National Park [Cornish, New Hampshire].

NORRIS: Did you see JD Salinger?

SORLIEN: Nobody saw JD Salinger.

NORRIS: Okay [laughter].

SORLIEN: He was extremely reclusive. We did see his wife. We saw his dog a few times. His dog was in terrible shape. It's like this poor dog, it's really sad.

NORRIS: So you're back on campus in '70, '71. Are you involved in the anti-war movements?

SORLIEN: By that point, it really dramatically changed. So no, I was not at that time. So by then, I'd kind of discovered my major [art history], and I really poured my energies into pursuing my major. And learning as much about art history as I could, like now I know what I want to do. And so when I say when I graduated, it was like, still, no idea what I was going to do, except that I knew it would not be politics. I really admire Dave Aylward ['71], who has devoted his life to public service in the alternative sense, who is still fighting for peace and justice. And I'm so glad that people like Dave that could do that, but I can't do that. So I traveled for a year and then landed in Chautauqua, New York, which turned out to be something of an artist's colony. And the artists had no exhibition opportunities. So I started a nonprofit organization with a gallery. A real shoestring operation. And that's what I've done ever since: I've worked for myself. Well, I worked for four years for Mystic Seaport Museum because it's a wonderful museum. I really believe in the museum and its mission.

NORRIS: Where's that?

SORLIEN: That's in Mystic, Connecticut. It's on the Long Island shore. And it's a collection of historic ships and historic buildings related to life by the sea. But four years is all I could stand in a large institution. So I've worked either by myself or with one employee, or one partner ever since. I could not, just could not work for an institution. I just couldn't trust them. Institutions have their own, acquire their own priorities.

NORRIS: Did you hear anything from your brother when he came back from Vietnam at all?

SORLIEN: No, not much. He could not talk about what he'd experienced. And he came back and went to visit some friends in New Hampshire, and we all thought, "Well, okay," and we didn't hear from him. And it turned out that what we didn't know was that these friends had a small cabin back in the woods. And he lived basically the life of a hermit for six or seven months. And finally, he just kind of shook off

enough of it to get a job. And he lived in Boston for a couple of years.

NORRIS: How did you hear about all this stuff? Was it just through friends or...?

SORLIEN: Many many years later, he told me about it.

NORRIS: You didn't hear from him at all?

SORLIEN: Didn't hear from him at all. He just disappeared. We thought he was living happily with friends, and that it was okay. We didn't know that he was all by himself.

NORRIS: Did you know that he had come back or was this...

SORLIEN: Yeah, I knew he was back. He had checked in. He had actually stayed in my parents' basement for at least a couple of weeks.

NORRIS: And was that in the New England area?

SORLIEN: Yeah, that was in Wellesley, Massachusetts. But he couldn't stand that for very long, and then was off by himself for months. And then got a job in Boston, job working for Blue Cross. And did that for two years, worked hard, became the property manager of the building where he was living so that he got a big discount on his rent, just saved a lot of money. And after two years, he had enough money that he could leave and initially he bought a farm in Arkansas. Why Arkansas? Because land was cheap. That didn't work out, he resold and I guess got his money back out. And then at that time, there had been... my great grandfather had been a relatively wealthy man and had bought shares in a gold mine in California. His estate was a total mess. And my uncle [Richard C. Sorlien] was a lawyer and this is his grandfather's estate he's working on [laughter], and he finally got-- sort of bought out the other investors in this gold mine, all except one, who was also a family member. And the miner died so there was just one man living alone there, extracting barely enough gold to make a very meager living. And so he [Sorlien's uncle] went out there and invited my brother to go with him and said, "I need somebody to be here and look after this property, would you like to do it?" Now my brother's been there ever since. It's the quietest place I've ever been. It's remote. No cars. No airplanes.

NORRIS: Around what year? What time did he go?

- SORLIEN: That would have been about, that was around 1970. Trying to think, so he went over in '68. He came back in '70. No, that would have been around '72 then. That's right. That would have been around 1972, which [indiscernible] I was living out in Western New York.
- NORRIS: I read that he, in that interview he did for the [Class of 1967's 50th] reunion [magazine, *Living in a Time of Momentous Change: How the Dartmouth Class of 1967 Met the Challenges of Vietnam, the Human Rights Movement, and So Much Else*], like that he came back and he was on the west coast for a little bit.
- SORLIEN: A little bit. [He was] really sick. [Indiscernible] basically holed up in a motel in Los Angeles until he ran out of money.
- NORRIS: And then came over?
- SORLIEN: And then came back. Yeah. [pause] Do you know what malaria's like?
- NORRIS: Fortunately no.
- SORLIEN: It's a parasite. You never get rid of it. And it waxes and wanes mostly according to your physical robustness. So if for any reason, your physical system declines, the malaria comes back. I asked my brother once "why did you become such an athlete? Why are you in constant training?" And he said if I don't, the malaria comes back. He said pain, his phrase for it was "pain is a wonderful motivator." Yeah, so he hasn't actually had a bout of malaria in some years now. Because he's really learned how to ward it off.
- NORRIS: So after school [Dartmouth], you're in Chautauqua [NY], you're doing all this stuff within art history. You and your girlfriend eventually get married?
- SORLIEN: Yeah, we did. We got married because we had really thought about immigrating to Canada.
- NORRIS: Because of the war?
- SORLIEN: No. But I had... well, yes and no. In my mind, actually, for both of us, we were sickened by what the US government did and how the US government was morally bankrupted by the military industrial complex. And Canada was a much more democratic and moral society. And we traveled across Canada. We bought a Canrail pass and that gave us 30 days to travel from, we traveled from British Columbia [Canada] to... ended up in Cape Breton Island [Nova

Scotia, Canada] where we stayed, where we spent the winter. We spent six months there renting very, very modest quarters [laughter]. And then, when the Mounties [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] started looking for us, we came back to the U.S. As an American citizen then, you could get a six month visa without question. So at the end of six months, the Mounties started asking around about us.

NORRIS: Were you married at that time?

SORLIEN: No, so we got married so that we could go back to Canada, as they wouldn't let us in if we weren't married.

NORRIS: What year was that?

SORLIEN: So that would have been, let me think, 1973.

NORRIS: And then you guys move back to New England area.

SORLIEN: Yeah, first we first came back to Boston. And actually, we went and moved in with my parents for a little while. [pause] And then, pretty quickly, at that point, my parents had, we had built a house on Squam Lake here in New Hampshire. And so, Ann [Ann Rogers] my wife, Anne, and I, and my sister Pat all lived in my parents' house on the lake. And I became caretaker of Belknap College [Center Harbor, NH] which had gone bankrupt. And so I was just there looking after the buildings to keep them from being broken into and stuff. And then so for about a year, I actually lived on the campus, Anne and I lived on the campus rather than in my parents' house.

NORRIS: Do you have any children?

SORLIEN: No, we decided to not have children. That too was a decision influenced by my total disillusionment with American democracy. It's like, I can't raise children in this environment. You know, this is just so cynical, it's so corrupt. Who can you trust?

And all of which, by the way, is still true. Vietnam, followed by a whole succession of wars in other countries in which we had no business. God, you can name them one after another. Most recently, Iraq and Syria, you know, sort of in the Middle East, and, of course, Afghanistan, which went on for years and years and years. And now, the war in Ukraine.

When Putin annexed the Crimea in 2014, I could not understand why he got away with it. And now I do. Because that was small potatoes. And everybody knew that if they didn't stop Putin there, he was going to do it again, on a larger scale. And the war in Ukraine is the perfect setup for the [United States] military industrial complex. There's no feedback, no backlash because American lives are being lost is, Professor [Edward G.] Miller said, it's all being fought on a credit card, we're just borrowing the money, so that no American household is having to ration gasoline or ration food, it just has no domestic effect at all. And we're spending billions of dollars over there on weapons that they get destroyed, and we make more weapons and send them over there. You know, it's the perfect setup. And so in 2014, everybody had to see that coming. And we didn't stop Putin, because it was a great opportunity, a great business opportunity. How cynical is that?

NORRIS: Do you look back at your protests at Dartmouth and all the activism you did at Dartmouth, how do you feel looking back at it now?

SORLIEN: Oh, that totally changed the direction of my life. It actually didn't really hit me until Dave Aylward ['71] called and then I started talking to Edward Miller [Professor Edward G. Miller]. That really changed the path of my life. That really made me a very different person than I had been up to that point. And I took the aptitude tests like every high school student, I was ideally suited to be a lawyer, or a librarian. And no point being a librarian [laughter]. My uncle was a lawyer, very successful lawyer. So I had a good role model there.

NORRIS: Is that the one who was...

SORLIEN: He's the one who settled my grandfather's estate, and yeah. He was essentially a trust and foundation lawyer, with offices on Broad Street in Philadelphia [PA]. I don't know if you've heard about Broad Street lawyers. Broad Street in Philadelphia is to the legal professional what Wall Street is to the financial professional. It's the big league. He's Broad Street lawyer. And a tennis champion. Yeah, that's the other thing about my brother and actually, like, Jesus, I don't have any excuse. Both my uncles life, the uncle that was a lawyer was national doubles champion in his 50s, and he had both hips replaced [pause] in his late 70s. Man, he was playing tennis again in six months.

NORRIS: What was his name?

- SORLIEN: Richard. Dick. Dick Sorlien. And then my father's other brother, Sparks [Sorlien] was a track and field champion. He had competed in track and field for Harvard. And then stopped. After graduating, he was an English professor, English literature professor at University of Rhode Island. And when he retired as a professor, he began training again. So at his 80th birthday, I asked him, "Sparks, how does it feel to turn 80?" He said "It's great. I don't have to compete against those 75 year old's anymore." [laughter].
- NORRIS: Yeah, now he's in 80-U.
- SORLIEN: Yeah. [laughter]. So they're just... he has a wall full of trophies because at his age... He was winning everything.
- NORRIS: So what does your sister do now?
- SORLIEN: She's the manager of the family excavation company. My brother-in-law is an excavation contractor with one employee. I've had the same employee for 30, more than 30 years.
- NORRIS: You and her close in geographic...
- SORLIEN: Yeah, she will she lives an hour away. She lives in North Sandwich [NH] and I live in Alton [NH]. So except for the pandemic, we'd see each other a fair amount. The pandemic put a hurt on everybody. But we've been seeing each other a little more often now.
- NORRIS: And are you still working? Are you semi-retired, are you still working a lot with Accredited Appraisers?
- SORLIEN: Yeah. I was actually just saying to Jim [James R. Borchert '72], my roommate with whom I had lunch, he's only a year younger than I am. He's working here at the college, he has a big job at the college [Clinical Instructor in Community and Family Medicine]. And I said to him, he was talking about, "gee, maybe another two years or three years," he might retire. And I said, Jim, "you're gonna find, like me, you're going to find that it's very hard to give up work that you enjoy doing. You go to sleep pretty fast when you stop.
- NORRIS: What's his full name?
- SORLIEN: Borchert, Jim Borchert ['72]. B-O-R-C-H-E-R-T. Great guy, really great guy. Very smart, very talented. I was actually kind of amazed that he wanted to go to work for the college. The College, it's very lucky as he's a very bright guy. And so yeah, so I'm still turning

away most work. But some things, they're just too much fun to pass up.

NORRIS: Restoration [of boats] and all that?

SORLIEN: Well, that's a different one. And that is a hobby, and actually one that I've come to reluctantly, because we had hired professionals. And the professionals just weren't doing the job. So I'm having to pick up all the pieces and pull them together. So that's been pretty intense for months now. Another two weeks, and the boat is leaving.

NORRIS: Where to?

SORLIEN: Further east in Maine. Southport, Maine. But that's the deadline I'm giving all these contractors, "you guys got 10 days."

NORRIS: It looks like we got most of everything covered. Is there anything you'd especially like to note before we wrap up?

SORLIEN: I think we kind of have covered everything. You've done, you did a good job, Connor.

NORRIS: I try. We appreciate you a lot coming here and, yeah, it was totally wonderful talking to you.

SORLIEN: Glad to do it. Now do you intend to pursue journalism?

NORRIS: I'm not entirely sure. I'm an English major here. I might be minoring in film and history. So that's just a smorgasbord of different interests.

SORLIEN: I just wondered if knowing how to conduct an interview, learning how to conduct an interview is a skill.

NORRIS: It's definitely something that I enjoy. So maybe.

SORLIEN: It's essential for a documentary filmmaker.

NORRIS: Yeah, I agree. So who knows. Maybe.

SORLIEN: Yeah, the film program here, I don't know if it still is, the film when I was a student that film program was superb.

NORRIS: Right, there was Bob Rafelson [Robert J. Rafelson '54] was... I feel like he graduated sometime near...

- SORLIEN: Meryl Streep [exchange student] was not much far... not much behind us. My class ['71] was the last one without women.
- NORRIS: In one of the books, one of the last alumni... the 25th or 50th reunion books [of the class of 1971], when I was flipping through, kind of reading up on you, she was just three pages after yours. I thought that was a fun fact. [laughter]. It's Sorlien then Streep.
- SORLIEN: It's alphabetical right?
- NORRIS: Yeah, her headshot was there.
- SORLIEN: The film program was terrific. For me, it was art history, but I watched a lot of films.
- That last semester my senior year, we did not rent a house. We lived in the woods and commuted to class by canoe.
- NORRIS: Really?
- SORLIEN: Yeah.
- NORRIS: Wow. What was the actual living quarters?
- SORLIEN: Pine tree. Big pine tree.
- NORRIS: Wow. So were you living in a tent?
- SORLIEN: Camped in a tent under a big pine tree. Only got rained out one night.
- NORRIS: So that was your senior my senior spring?
- SORLIEN: Yeah, senior spring.
- NORRIS: This is spring of '71. That's incredible.
- SORLIEN: And I was taking a film history course so we watched a lot of movies.
- NORRIS: Where would you watch them?
- SORLIEN: Oh on campus. There were movies everywhere, both as part of the courses, part of the film history courses, but then the program was so good that it made films available to anyone. But they were the

great films of history, [indiscernible] film history. So saw some great films. [pause] Sorry, just remembering, don't know if you've ever seen Jean Renoir did a film of *Joan of Arc* [*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* by Carl Theodore Dreyer, 1948].

NORRIS: I'm not sure if I've seen it.

SORLIEN: Worth looking up. Yeah [pause] it's very slow paced. Because it's long shots of, regret I don't recall the name of the actress, long shots of her face as she's contemplating her fate. Because, as you know, she was eventually burned. And it's incredible, because you, it's that good. There's no dialogue, but you know what's going through her mind. You know how she feels, it's just an amazing masterpiece. That's not often known, is why I mentioned. You know, it's one of those films that's kind of now, the modern tension attention span would have a hard time sticking with it, it's really worthwhile to burrow in and stick with it. And watch the directorial techniques, because Jean Renoir is the son of Auguste Renoir, the Impressionist painter. So he grew up in the avant-garde art world, the best of the avant-garde art world. So this guy has an eye. As a filmmaker, he really knows what he's doing. And it was groundbreaking. Yeah this is early in the history of filmmaking.

NORRIS: Sounds good, I'll check it out. Well, Peter, again, we really appreciate you coming through.

SORLIEN: You're welcome. Thank you for your interest. It would be very easy to say, "Vietnam happened, it's done." I'm a real believer in that, that dictum of Winston Churchill's.

NORRIS: What was that?

SORLIEN: "Those who are ignorant of history are doomed to repeat it." And we are repeating that one over and over and over. And I frankly, I think, until the rest of the world stops loaning us money, and then we'll be bankrupt. I really see this being the root of the collapse of American democracy, and perhaps democracy altogether, because we, America is really the, I hate to say it, but it's the leading... it's the leader of the democratic world, it's the leading example of how democracy works, and it's not a good example. Because it's so corrupt. And Supreme Court decisions, like *Citizens United* [*Citizens United v. Federal Elections Committee*, 2010] made it much more corrupt. Terry Gross is one of the best interviewers on radio, national public radio.

NORRIS: Is he on NPR?

SORLIEN: Right. And she interviewed Jimmy Carter years ago. This is, you know, two decades ago. And asked Jimmy Carter, "why does the Carter foundation not monitor American elections like it's monitoring elections all around the world for fairness," and he said it's because American elections do not meet one of our basic standards for a free and fair election, which is equal access to the media. In America, the elections are controlled by buying access to the media. And you cannot have a fair and free election in those conditions. He's absolutely right.

American democracy is for sale. Now, what's the point of having an electoral college in the beginning, as the Electoral College was supposedly... people who would be their land and nobility, they're above that. That's not happening.

It's very sad. It's very sad, and I'd say, I think at some point we're going to exhaust the patience of the rest of the world and will collapse as a civilization, we will collapse. Bleak, isn't it?

NORRIS: It is. It's not pretty.

SORLIEN: Yeah, so, that all came out of 1968.

NORRIS: Exactly! On that note! You're welcome back anytime. Thank you again.

SORLIEN: Hey, you're very welcome.

[End of interview.]