Interview with William "Bill" Southwick

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INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM SOUTHWICK

(Cut off chatter)

NANCY SALTO: (laughs) So you participated in the civil rights movement?

WILLIAM SOUTHWICK: Uh, right, I did, both my wife and I did. And also in the anti-war movement during the Vietnam war stuff.

NS: What was your first experience as an activist?

WS: Oh gosh, jeez, I don’t know. I kind of right from the beginning—I mean, I remember the coffee house—we’d been working on the set up, which was really staffed by volunteers, which was my job, (laughs) and we opened in 1963 in Lakeview, the day that Kennedy was shot, in November. So, I don’t know, I’d always been involved, I guess. I came back from Edinburgh and the civil rights movement and SDS and SNCC and things like this that were on the south side. And the antiwar movement as well.

NS: What were some recurring issues that you found in your community?

WS: In the community itself?

NS: Uh-hmm.

WS: Well, it was always everybody was trying to figure out who they were and you didn’t have the same pressures that kids have now, in terms of trying to find jobs and in an economy that’s really—it’s quite an active economy, so I remember more time spent with people wondering what they wanted to do that was meaningful and what kind of jobs they wanted to have and things like this. It was not just a question of having a job. It was a question of having a meaningful job that could have some impact in terms of the community.

NS: Why did you decide to participate in running the local coffeehouse?

WS: Sounded fun. (laughs) Y’know, and, you could meet interesting people and were involved in the movement in some way. Or were cabdrivers (laughs).

NS: (laughs)

WS: Yes, it—it was just fun. I thought it seemed like the kind of thing that I’d—actually I had started when I was in Edinburgh, the second time, working at the church, my job was really as a youth minister, I suppose it would be called now, and worked with a lot of university students because the university was in our—in the parish over there. And one of the things that we did in the youth group—in the church—in uh, the cathedral—at the cathedral, got some space in the basement of an office building near the church and we opened it as a coffeehouse. So we had a
lot of folk singers (laughs), if you will, and y’know, general political roustabouts (laughs). So that was kind of fun.

NS: How did you get involved in the anti-war movement?

WS: Oh, I don’t really know. Sort of all my friends and people that I knew, y’know, in one way or another were involved in the movement, and, and, I remember very early on in the—in the coffeehouse in ‘64 or something, 1964, uh, one of the guys who was a volunteer with one of the churches in the area, an Asian-American, in the Japanese community, the very large Japanese community in the Lakeview/Uptown are in the time, but anyway. He had heard, or I mentioned or something, that I’d really like to go to this demonstration in Washington but couldn’t afford it really, so he came in and said, ‘Here’s an airline ticket, I’ll at least cover that.’ And so he covered the cost of me going to that—that conference or whatever it was in Washington, D.C. Yes.

NS: Why do you think he did that?

WS: Beats me! (laughs) He probably—he was pretty involved in all kinds of movements and things, and was really a leader in some respects, in terms of reparations for Japanese-Americans who had been in camps—

NS: Mm-hmm

WS: —in the U.S., who came from California and were in the camps here. He worked for a number of years with—an attempt to get reparations for the people who grew up there. I remember one night, an incredible instance, where my wife and I went to a Christmas party in somebody’s house that, y’know, we knew. And we were—pra—I guess, probably, maybe even the only Caucasians there, everybody else was—was Japanese. And somebody had a guitar, as everybody did in those days, and was playing a—one of the people who was there said, one of the women said, ‘Play such and such, some Christmas song,’ she says, ‘Cause I remember we always sang it for the guards,’ and it just blew me away. And I—I—they never really talked about it, but all of the people at the party had been in the same camp together during the Second World War. Just blew me away ‘cause I had no idea of that at all. Amazing experience.

NS: How were you involved with that community?

WS: Just I knew them, a lot of—there were—there were several Asian churches in the Lakeview area at that time, there were probably three or four. And, uh, one of the—one of them in particular from the Methodist church on Sheridan road volunteered at the coffeehouse. So I met a lot of people who both just lived in the area and who happened to have attended that particular church. So.

NS: So, starting into 1968.

WS: Okay.

NS: How did the start of Tet Offensive in January of that year change your work with young adults in the neighborhood?
WS: I don’t know that it really did in some senses, I mean, it was certainly an important event in, y’know, in the war in Vietnam, and was viewed as—as, I think probably, as a success for the anti-war movement, really gathered many other people into it, when they began to realize what was really going on in Southeast Asia, but y’know, as—I—it was just part of a number of instances of—of—of the war.

NS: Right. What do you mean by success—of the—of the anti-war movement?

WS: Well, just, I think it brought a lot of new people and brought another level of, y’know, of experiences and another level of understanding in terms of what was going on in Southeast Asia. By that time, there had been so many American casualties and certainly lots of casualties among Vietnamese themselves, through various groups. I know recently there’s been a TV show about the last days of Vietnam and stuff and it was incredible. All the people that we left behind there. But, in any case, that’s another issue.

NS: How did you feel when you learned Martin Luther King had been assassinated in April of—

WS: Oh, terrible.

NS: —1968?

WS: I mean that whole, y’know, year was an astounding year and I remember my wife was volunteering down at the SNCC office on the southside of Chicago and heard about it, drove down there and picked her up. In a beauty parlor, we all—they all went downstairs to a beauty parlor to watch TV. Everybody was kind of glued to their TVs for oh, a week or so there.

NS: How did King’s death affect your work with youth services?

WS: Well, I think for everyone—what, that was in ‘68, was it? I forget.

NS: Mm-hmm.

WS: Yes, I think 1968 was a real critical period in terms of, uh, uh there was the convention in August and King was killed. I think for many people, they had decisions to make, some of them joined the underground, that were more committed to bombings and stuff like that during that period, a more violent approach. And others, other groups, that formed during that period or had been in existence during that period were more in terms of King’s experience, with Dr. King’s experiences with nonviolence. So th—they—that—so after the convention in ‘68, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, I think a lot of people who were involved in the movement had to decide, y’know, how do you—how do you go? Where do you stand with respect to violence in the movement? Even the—even though very few people in all the bombings that occurred among the—were instigated maybe by some of the Weather Underground and stuff like that. There were people killed but they were members of the, y’know, the underground at that point. It was in a townhouse in New York where they were building a bomb. But they were very careful, y’know, bombings were generally on off-hours in universities and things like that, so there were no, as far as I know, there were no civilians who were accidentally killed by these bombings. But they were dramatic.
NS: Were you ever worried about something like that occurring in your neighborhood?

WS: Oh, not really. I mean, we’d gotten used to it by that time. I mean, it was an occupation army, y’know, and prior to the ’68 convention, Democratic Convention in Chicago, there were tanks and they were going up and down our street, y’know. We all knew that there were spies around and things like that (laughs) so we were kind of used to it by that point. No one was really scared. There weren’t so many guns available now, except the police (laughs).

NS: How did you react to learn of the student protests at the Columbia University in the spring?

WS: Well, there were a number of them that went on, certainly at Columbia Co—y’know in New York, and certainly Berkeley, the most famous in San—uh—Berkeley (laughs). And, uh—so, and y’know, I think the biggest shock during that sort of period, as I recall, and I may have the sequences all mixed up here, was at Kent College in Ohio where there were students who were shot by—and killed by National Guards who occupied that campus. So I think that was in some ways more moving, but there was a general movement among students at universities all over the country during that time.

NS: Did you see that in the neighborhood in any way?

WS: Um, not particularly. Y’know I think Chicago, y’know with the University of Chicago and Northwestern, which are all kind of upper-class institutions—(laughs). That’s a terrible way of characterizing it, but, if anything probably Columbia College was in the forefront of having students that were involved in one way or another, in y’know, the movement.

NS: Where were you when you learned Robert Kennedy had been assassinated in June?

WS: Jeez, where was I? We were on—we were visiting some friends in Ohio, as I recall. We didn’t hear about it because it was in California, and they were time differences, so really, I remember this friend, whom I’d gone to seminary with, and his wife kind of knocked on our door—on the bedroom door and said, ‘Kennedy’s been shot and killed.’ As I recall, that was my experience there. Bobby. He gave an amazing speech in Indianapolis, before he was killed that still quoted a lot. It was amazing. In a black neighborhood.

NS: Right.


NS: Tell me about your time in Lakeview during the protests in the summer of 1968.

WS: Oh, well, there was a lot of preparation, y’know, beforehand among the churches in organizing the churches to provide housing. Usually on a basement floor somewhere, y’know, and to do—prepare for what everyone understood would be demonstrations that went on during the convention itself. But, it was a little scary because—during that period because there was a clear occupation of not only the Chicago Police and the Red Squad, but, uh, a lot of, I remember, Naval intelligence even. Y’know, there were—that don’t get a lot of publicity, but there were lots of other groups in addition to the FBI, that prior to the convention itself where trying to get some handle on what was going on. What were the possibilities that might happen. And they
kind of focused, in some ways, on the Lakeview and Lincoln Park area on the north side. Partly because that was where many of the students lived, it was also many out of state demonstrators. Some of the Yippies and whatnot and Jerry Rubin and some of the people were, y’know, were staying there with people in that neighborhood, in Lakeview at the time. So, there was a lot—there was just a lot of stuff going on and of them, people coming into town who were part of the demonstration or would be part of the demonstration, and organizing what went on among—among young people and middle-aged people too. I can’t (laughs) not say that. So, yes, it was a very—on the one occasion that I remember, and this was before cell phones of course, we had a pay phone in the coffee house that y’know, hung on the wall some place. Every night, we closed up about midnight or eleven o’clock, every night, something like that, and we had arranged—we had organized with local ministers, ‘cause we knew the phone was tapped. You could hear it; it was so clear—obvious that it was being tapped by whoever. And so they would come in about closing time and drop a dime in the phone and say, “Well guys, you can go home, we’re closing up,”—

NS: (laughs)

WS: —and they’d give a little semon-ette, sort of on the phone, and read a little scripture and say, “See you around, talk to you again,” and hang up, right? (laughs) To send the FBI home to their wives and children or whatever they went to.

NS: (laughs) That’s thoughtful.

WS: (laughs) It was pretty funny.

NS: You mentioned that the Red Squad was operating in Lakeview. I’m not familiar with that organization—

WS: It was part of the Chicago Police department; it’s been discontinued (laughs)—maybe—now. But it was clearly designated, y’know, their—their mission was to serve as kind of a undercover intelligence gathering segment prior to the—prior to and during and after. It’s been disbanded since then.

NS: Umm—

WS: But it was part of the Chicago Police Department.

NS: Right. So did you encounter any trouble with the police department at the coffeehouse or in your work during that summer?

WS: Not really, I mean, we, you could—you could always tell the FBI guys by their shiny shoes, but (laughs) there were some others that we never suspected, who ended up being, y’know, people who reported on us, but nobody cared. (laughs) It was part of the business.

NS: How did your work impact your family that summer?

WS: Well, I mean it was tough on them, I mean the whole time really that—that I worked, but particularly that summer and we were—we lived on Bryar, which was the next street up from—
from the coffeehouse. My wife was pregnant at the time with our second child, a daughter. I remember we had a really great apartment, it was terrific and it faced south. The big opening demonstration was the night in Lincoln Park before the—the convention got underway. She was—and helicopters were flying over and tanks were going on the neighborhood and stuff like that, so she got very paranoid. She was pregnant, she was about ready to deliver, and she did in September. I had one child. So she said, “You gotta stop going to this stuff, y’know,” and she got a little nervous by it. So, kind of after that first night or so, I worked in a kind of triage—I volunteered in the triage unit in the local church for the people that were injured or beaten or whatnot, as a part of that demonstration and the other demonstrations as well.

NS: Did—

WS: It affected me.

NS: —working in the triage unit affect your—your ideology in anyway?

WS: I don’t think so really, it was just part of—(phone rings) Excuse me—

NS: Sure


NS: (laughs) I’m just going to shut this door.

WS: Oh, okay.

(door closes)

(phone slaps on the table)

WS: It’ll take me nineteen minutes to drive home (laughs). Swell.

NS: Umm— oh right, your triage work.

WS: Um, I don’t think it affected it in anyway except it was—I got a little antsy because it wasn’t, y’know, it wasn’t right in the middle of things for a few days there. But, did some—went on some demonstrations during the day. Marches and whatnot—through the—we were never y’know, you could never get very close to where the convention was held. But I remember one with Dick Gregory was leading it and we sort of marched down the street and police turned us back (laughs).

NS: How did you feel about Nixon receiving the Republican dom—nomination at the Republican National Convention early August?

WS: (laughs) Oh we were very depressed by that. Wasn’t exactly who most of us had voted for if we voted, so.

NS: Tell me—
WS: But it was tough, between Nixon and Kennedy, it was difficult. Anyway, go ahead.

NS: Were you interested in anyone in particular receiving the Democratic National—the nomination?

WS: Well certainly, Gene McCarthy was running, y’know, at that time. So I think most of the support was there. But he didn’t get far with it (laughs).

NS: Tell me your story of your experience during the Democratic National Convention in late August of 1968.

WS: Well, it kind of started out with that first demonstration between the—and confrontation between the police and the protestors in Lincoln Park. There was, I remember a story, I didn’t know him or anything, of one seminary student who tried to get in between the police on one side and the—the demonstrators on the other in the park that night. That he was injured, quite badly I think, when the police charged against the demonstrators. It was fairly scary. I remember standing, talking that night with Mike Royko from the Daily News, at that time, a reporter, and Nick van Houghman who was with, I don’t know, the Washington Post or some New York—I don’t know, on the East Coast. And Mike Royko’s dead now. But standing around talking and then suddenly, y’know, the police charging (phone chimes) towards everybody and— so you know, we just ran (laughs). I mean, they were coming with clubs and all, gas—tear gas and all that stuff. So it was a big night at the triage center, I remember, ‘cause a lot of people were beaten and stuff like that, and clubbed. I wasn’t particularly, I mean, maybe a swing at me, but everybody just kind of ran off into Old Town and into the streets in Old Town, so. (laughs) But then, during the convention then, as I said, I worked there, and much of the action kind of really was focused more on Balboa and Grant Park and that area. So, y’know, went to some of those things. The Church Federation in Chicago was pretty much open twenty-four hours a day—that had—they had offices on Michigan Avenue, I think, some were in the loop. So a lot of people scattered to there when things got rough but there were a whole series of demonstrations, mostly during the daytime or early evening that focused out of Grant Park or other areas in the downtown area. I went to some of those, but (shrugs).

NS: What was your position during the protests?

WS: Oh well, I was still working at—at the—the coffee house in Lakeview, so I had to go to work every night, that’s the thing (laughs). That’s why I remember the daytime marches. But, y’know, it was kind of a place where people felt was safe. Some of the demonstrators would hang out there and certainly a lot of sympathizers with, y’know, with what was going on. Looking back on it, I probably should have been more scared than everybody way, but it seemed just kind of—it was crazy, I mean it was—y’know, people were going through your garbage, looking for, y’know—mem—I don’t know what they were looking for! (laughs).

NS: (laughs)

WS: But y’know, there was stuff going on that was just crazy. But, yes.

NS: At what point where you most afraid to get involved?
WS: Oh gosh, when I got beaten! (laughs) No, Lincoln Park—that first night in Lincoln Park was my only experience of seeing people getting beaten really, and clubbed by police. So, I don’t know that—well, obviously, I ran away like everybody else, so I guess was scared, but I don’t know. I don’t remember at the time. Yes.

NS: Did you fear for your family?

WS: Not really, no. I mean, my—my wife, y’know, God bless her, was, y’know, at home during this whole period because we had a son who was a couple of years old and she was pregnant. So, she couldn’t really participate in much of the stuff that was going on ‘cause she was, like I say, our daughter was born in September, and so she was pretty close at that time. So she really didn’t go out much but I think it was hard on her, clearly, because I was working nights for a long time, in movements that were not the most popular in the general world, y’know. So— who knows?

NS: Right. When the tensions were coming to a head what was going through your mind?

WS: Oh gosh, I don’t know, just wondering, how, if we could get a little closer to the, y’know, where the convention was being held, but. I don’t know that I—I don’t recall having many worries, y’know, in that sense, y’know, maybe there were. Maybe there should have been if there weren’t (laughs), so. But I don’t really recall, it was part of—as I say, it was a chaotic time. Y’know, I never really experienced, y’know, an occupation, an army in a sense, which it felt like at the time, in the neighborhood and in the community and stuff. So, that was a little—little unusual, and a little scary certainly. But, y’know, whatever (laughs).

NS: How did the protesters respond to the presence of religious leaders?

WS: Um, well, I don’t know. I mean some people chose to wear clerical collars and things like this to be, y’know, as a signal as they were from the clergy or something. Others didn’t. So, I didn’t experience any, y’know, problems with that. I think probably the clergy were a lot more, in terms of followers of Dr. King and non violence and stuff like that. So, from the more violent protesters, there may have been some—some uncertainty about the role of ministers, but for the most part, they were simply non-violent participants like everybody else. I didn’t experience, personally any problems.

NS: Did you wear the—

WS: I did not.

NS: —collar?

WS: I did not. No,

NS: Was there any reason behind that choice?

WS: I just never did. Except to traffic court (laughs).

NS: (laughs)
WS: But no, I didn't. I just never did wear one, y'know, I worked with kids and stuff, so.

NS: Why did you decide to leave the Northside Cooperative Ministry after the DNC?

WS: Got offered a job that paid more (laughs). No, I don't know, y'know, like I say, it was a time when everybody was going through some—some compatriots of mine joined groups in Uptown or in the Lakeview neighborhood who tended to be more inclined, toward, y'know, violence. I also at the time committed to the issue of trying to deal with substance abuse 'cause I had seen, y'know, street people and friends that I knew who came in the coffeehouse who, y'know, who were users, and young people and young adults. So I was interested in finding a way and I didn't think the coffeehouse was the best place to really—and so I ended at that time. Rightly or wrongly, became more engaged with substance-abusing young people and treatment forms for that. The program in the YMCA that I came to was very small and was based upon an early experiment of street workers, working with kids on the street and in parks and whatnot. I remember this was a period before a lot of guns were available to everybody, so, it was much tamer in some respects than it was now—than it is now, but y'know, I think that was part of my decision, so it wasn't just for more money, 'cause it wasn't more money (laughs). But it was working—continuing to work in the Lakeview community, and uh, with, starting a Methadone program that began as part of a—of a—of—Masonic Hospitals stuff. Also we got funding to open up—that I was more involved in, with a treatment center for young people called Flash Tire on Halsted, just north of Broadway that worked, y'know, with some of the early days of development of drug treatment and stuff. It was a time of LSD and stuff like that.

NS: Did you see a lot substance affect the protests or the protestors?

WS: No, not really. At least, I didn't see it. y'know? I was working more, y'know, in the evenings and with kids on the street in the Lakeview neighborhood, where the coffeehouse was, rather than in Lincoln Park, so. I don't know, could well be, i have no idea.

WS: What new issues arose in the community after 1968?

NS: Well, certainly the drug issue at that time became very hot, in terms of publicity and what—largely because it had hit the white community. Up until that it had been mostly jazz musicians or African-American people, y'know, but then it began to hit the white community, y'know middle class kind of, upper-middle class kind of.

NS: How did your role change in the community after 1968?

WS: Umm, well, I don't know. I'm really not sure because after, like, I was with the YMCA started. y'know, late '68 and at the end of '69, I got fired from the Y 'cause I hadn't raised enough money or something. 'Cause I working for one particular region at the YMCA that covered Lakeview, but the director of the program, Stan Davis, who started the program, who you may or may not know, but he was running the program on the northwest side of the city with more blue-collar, working class Italian and German people. So, he hired me to move out there, y'know, it was really the same program but I moved down. So most of my work in '69, started out of working in the northwest side of the city, which at that time was very conservative. It was one of—in Portage Park, where Dr. King led a protest, as he did when he lived in Chicago for a while, so.
NS: Um, did you find that issues were different in that community?

WS: Yes, considerably different. (laughs) One of the interesting things that wouldn’t happen now, maybe, was that—one of the things that we did was we would take kids on what we called retreats, which were out of the city, in a place over in Oregon, Illinois. But retreat, we discovered had really a bad word—was a bad word—not a bad word, but was thought of differently than we thought of it, because it was largely a Roman-Catholic community, and they were very suspicious of the YMCA and some of the parishes wouldn’t let any kids participate in programs that we had. We found out later that it was partly because we used the word retreat, where we take kids off into the country. Because for them, a retreat was a religious, y’know, kind of thing, where as for us it was more of a religious kind of thing, whereas for us, it was not particularly—it was really more therapeutic kind of thing. So, attitudes changed.

NS: Mm-hmm.

WS: I remembered when we hired our first African-American counselor. We had a big discussion as to whether it was a—a good thing to do, not—not so much for the community, but because the community’s attitudes might put him in some danger. Y’know, taking the bus and what not in the neighborhood, ‘cause there were a lot of garage burnings and things like this to try to keep black people out the northwest side of the city. But we ended up hiring him and he was so successful that within two weeks, all the little old ladies, y’know, Italian ladies from the neighborhood were bringing him cookies and cupcakes and things like this because he was such a good counselor, in family therapy and stuff so. It turned out well (laughs), he was great. Anyway, I forget what the question was, I kept rambling.

NS: Um, you mentioned family therapy and you worked with—

WS: Right.

NS: —substance abuse at that time. What kind of issues did you see that were different from the community you came from?

WS: Well, it was really quite different. It was very interesting and working at FlashTire for some period of time, it was part of a guy who was named Dr. Jerry Jaffey, at the University of Chicago, was an a sort of, I don’t know, an assistant professor or something, was very good at raising funding and he actually went out to New York and there was a big split going on within the—the—the drug treatment community at that time at Synynom (?) in New York, which was one of the first drug treatment programs in the country. It was really divided by those staff members that were more political and those who were simply into drug treatment, period. And so, y’know, he went out there and hired a whole bunch of people from Synynom (?) staff, who he brought to Chicago and they started, really, a gateway house in various kinds of modalities of treatment, ranging from in-patient—or in-sort of cottages, sort of thing, down at the Tinley Park mental health center to gateway house, which was a therapeutic community. And various other programs, probably four or five other programs around the city that were—that were treating that. As a part of that, uh, I told or mentioned earlier, about a Methadone program—

NS: Mm-hmm.
WS: —that was sponsored by—at Masonic Hospital in Lakeview for drug addicts, usually heroin users and whatnot. We were able to also put together FlashTire because a big problem, in terms of hallucinogens and whatnot, we put together crisis teams who worked with—in—y’know, in emergency rooms at hospitals in the area. That kind of stuff—that, so. But it was very different, oh, I know (laughs). I started into this because, as a part of that, because we received some of the funding through the University of Chicago program and the state of Illinois program, was on one day we would meet for a T-group, which was a group of—and they were staff people, and we would meet every day. It was basically a confrontation group sort of thing. Most of the people that were staff were ex-addicts and things like this, a lot of street experience. I was the naive, y’know, young ministerial student, y’know.

NS: laughs

WS: So they came after me, I tell you. So—but it was great, it was really a good kind of—that we would meet once a week and learn from that, and the processes. Everything was very confrontational with T-groups and things like that, during that process.

NS: How did your activism change after ‘68?

WS: Well, I don’t, I mean it took a different form. I mean, things were very different after ‘68. (phone rings) Sorry, excuse me.

(Pause) (Phone slaps table)

WS: Okay. Um, things were very different, I think after the ‘68 convention in Chicago. Nixon was now the president with a focus on—on—on, y’know, street demonstrations were really kind of shut down in a lot of ways. People were frightened, I think, y’know. The drug situation was kind of where the action was in some respects, but it was seen always as a—as a (phone chimes) criminal issue (phone chimes) as opposed to a—to a medical issue. I was used to having spent a couple years in Europe, in the United Kingdom, where it was really dealt with at more as a medical issue as a opposed to a criminal issue. So, y’know, it was just changed a kind of—I’m not sure it really changed, it certainly didn’t change my ideologies much. But it did methods and motives for, acting, within the drug community rather than in the outreach community, with kids on the street.

NS: What were you most proud of as an activist?

WS: Oh geez, I don’t know. (laughs) Being an activist, I suppose, I don’t really know. I mean, there were lots of, y’know, events. I remember, and this was much later, y’know, in terms of the working. I volunteered for a while with the American Friends Service Committee, here in Chicago, the Quakers. I remember one time we were on a—having a demonstration against the Iraq war, and we marched from a Federal Plaza to the North Side. One of the women I was with was tired and so I said, “Let’s get a cab and we’ll take it back.” So we just flagged down a guy and he took us back to where our car was parked. We—he and I got talking and stuff; and he—we came to the end of the thing and he said, “I’m from, y’know, Iraq originally, I’m an immigrant.” He wouldn’t take any money for the cab ride. He said, (phone chimes) “You guys, demonstrated for me when I couldn’t today—couldn’t today get off work.” So that was kind of moving in terms of that experience, and uh—
NS: What was the most regrettable consequence to come out of ‘68?

WS: I think it toned down everything a lot, in some unhealthy ways. I think people, the people, were, y’know, talking about the—this is a real generalization, but I think that the median became more important for a lot of reasons. I think it was the tenor of the—of the politics during the period after the convention. It kind of put a real left among the general population, a feeling that the protesters were just kids, and they really, they weren’t serious. And many of them became conservative (laughs), y’know, they really did, and the whole tone of the country changed at that time, they didn’t really want to talk. You had to have balanced news, y’know, and stuff like that rather—rather than, apart from democracy now, which, still is there (laughs). Amy Goodman was a tremendous reporter, but on—for the most part, the newspapers were collapsing and moving to social media, and took people into a very individualistic kind of mode, as opposed to a collectivism.

NS: What was the most positive consequence to come out of ‘68?

WS: Well, I don’t know, y’know? I mean, voices were heard, changes were made, things—some things are much better now than they were prior to ‘68. I think there have been things even though there’s been a damping down of some of the more radical events. It did bring about some changes. It certainly ended the war in Vietnam in some ways. I think that the demonstrations were, in the long run, it took an awful long time, but it did result in changing attitudes of people towards war in Vietnam. Didn’t change them much when it came to wars in Iraq, but (laughs), but, y’know, it did have a significant grouping like clergy and laity against the war in Vietnam. I think it did have an affect towards ultimately changing attitudes of war towards that.

NS: What parallels do you see between society in ‘68 and now?

WS: I think, well, at that time people really believed that there was going to be—protesters—I really believed that there was going to be a revolution within a few years. That kind of attitude that motivated a lot of people. I think that changed significantly. I think people realized people who were activists and parts of the movement saw, y’know, the status quo as very powerful among the general population. But (laughs).

NS: Do you see that now in society?

WS: I do. Yes, I do. Y’know, I think a lot of it is very easy, common sense solutions to guns—

NS: Mm-hmm.

WS: —stuff, and the liberalizing some of that drug stuff, in terms of marijuana now being available, as opposed to then you got arrested and thrown in jail or something, I don’t know.

NS: How did you see the role of religious leaders change?

WS: Oh boy, that’s a good question. I—I’m—I’m not really sure. I think the church has always been pretty moderate in many respects. I mean, if you look at Dr. King’s statements when he preached into Riverside church in New York, when he moved into poverty, he lost a lot of followers who thought there should be just a anti-war movement, y’know? People began to see
there was some underlying roots in the society, that, they moved away and got a little nervous about that.

NS: If you could give one piece of advice to modern activists, what would you say to them?

WS: Oh jeez, hang in there! (laughs) There aren’t many of us. That’d be it.

NS: (laughs) Um, could you tell me why you decided to participate in this interview?

WS: Oh, I don’t know. I got to talk a lot (laughs). No, it sounded interesting. I think it was a real turning point within things, and it changed a lot of people for a long period of time. It was—I still see it as myself, personally, as a watershed, in terms of/of/of progressive politics and the general mood of the country. (laughs) What can I say?

NS: Is there anything you would like to add?

WS: I don’t think so, I’ve talked a lot, man! (laughs)

NS: Well, I’d like to thank you so much for participating

WS: Oh sure

NS: And helping us out.

WS: Well, thanks for doing this, this is—I think it’s interesting. There’s a new book out in terms of the Weather Underground and the underground movement that followed ‘68. It’s kind of interesting.

NS: Sure. Thank you so much.

WS: Sure. Glad to do it.

(Post-interview chatter)

[Recording ends]