

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Woodstock, NY

Personal Experience

O H. 1300

RICHARD WATTS

Interviewed

by

Molly McNamara

on

October 24, 1989

RICHARD WATTS

Mr Richard Watts of 447 East Liberty Street, Girard, Ohio, is a Vietnam Veteran and went to Woodstock in 1969. Mr Watts discusses the 1960 era and the changes he observed in Americans' culture. He was wounded three times in Vietnam. Upon returning from the service in 1969, Mr Watts realized the dramatic changes that had taken place in his community. On a whim, he and several friends decided to hitchhike to Woodstock, New York. He described himself as looking like a "hippie". He claimed this was a way to blend in with the majority. At Woodstock, Mr Watts was overwhelmed by the number of people. He also discussed the conditions, and the lack of food. His experience at Woodstock is exceptional because he clearly recounts the events and recalls his own personal experiences.

Mr. Watts is a retired policeman from Girard. He is currently a councilman in the same city. He lives at home with his wife, Constance, and his two children.

M. This is an interview with Richard Watts for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Woodstock 1969, by Molly McNamara, at 447 East Liberty Street, Girard, Ohio, on October 24, 1989, at 1:00 p m

Tell me a little about yourself. Give me some of your background

W Let us see, a general description; a middle to lower middle class, white male, this is a self assessment Physical dimensions, five feet ten inches, close to two hundred pounds Typical, small town, American personality Still retaining the "American Dream" aspirations and two children and two cars Both of my parents work

M Tell me about your family

W My family? My wife, I have been married to for twenty years next month She is of Italian/German decent She is a wonderful person She puts up with me which means that she has a constitution and is dedicated to me My son is eighteen. He is a freshman at YSU My daughter just turned seventeen She is a junior at Girard High School I have two dogs which are nondescript I will not even mention them in this interview I hate them right now I think I am a typical small town family, structurally anyway.

M Tell me a bit about the 1960's What were they like for you?

W Oblique The 1960's, in my point of view, this is a very in depth question I am going to try and paraphrase it I graduated from high school in 1965 I was eighteen years old The United States, at the time, was in a state of transition I will try to give you my point of view now and then maybe my point of view then My point of view now is that we raised a lot of naive pre-adolescent or pre-adult kids and I was a typical small town eighteen-year old at the time We were imbued with patriotism The work ethic came from our forefathers, the European influence in my background any ways Our parents were concerned about our children getting an education, that was the biggest thing You either went to college or you got married If there was any in between ground, then you were considered "worthless" in that society anyway No one took time off to devote to their own psyche or their own intellect, to find themselves This is the pre-"Age of Aquarius," now I was typical in that respect I did not really want to go to college except to play football and I thought, "Well, so I did not want to pursue it beyond that " I got a job at Packard totally and in October of 1967, I got drafted

M How did you feel about the war?

W I was ambivalent as far as any type of resistance. I was not informed enough, coming from a small town The lines of communication were not as in depth in saturation as they are now You did not have all the cable access and all the news media involvement that you do now I was coming out of the Audie Murphy-John Wayne era I was still under

the impression that Communism was our biggest threat and that we had to fight the big red menace. I felt it was my obligation, without question, to go to the service and fight the war.

M So that was in 1967?

W Yes, 1967. I went to the service in 1967, October. The basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. It was convenient for me because I had gone to school in Louisville and I knew the area. I had friends at the University of Louisville in the downtown area. It was not bad for me. Physically, it was tough on a lot of kids. I had just gotten out of college football program and lead a very physical life athletically. It was not that much of a change for me. The country at that time, going through the strains of Vietnam, it was tough on a lot of kids, physically and emotionally. Where as it was not on me. I adapted to that aspect of the military lifestyle without any trouble. I did not like it but it did not bother me that much. There were a lot of kids, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-year old kids at that time, they really did not belong in the war environment. It was a cultural shock to them and a physical shock to a lot of them.

M Did your impressions ever change, though you were there for two years?

W No, I was not there for two years. Let us take this chronologically. I left Fort Knox and went to advanced individual training infantry in Fort Gordon, Georgia. That was in January 1968. That is where they supposedly trained you to go and be in combat, Infantry, which was my service job, my MOJ as they called it. Me, specifically, I went to Georgia, before I went in the service, I had an altercation with a local policeman and I sort of knocked him out in the back parking lot of the high school at my going-away party. It was a long running feud. It was over something trivial. Somebody had egged a guy's house. He thought that I did it. They surrounded the car. We had been drinking and they started to mace everybody so I just dropped him. And I was arrested for felonious assault or something. I was eighteen at the time, nineteen actually. So when I got in the service, everything was then clear. I went through basic, I got to Fort Gordon, Georgia, and certain things happened. I did not have a security clearance to participate in. One example was the Training of the Starlight Scopes, a night-sight device. It shows you a green picture of what you can see off of the moon or starlight, images, not in any great detail but you can see them. I was not privileged to attend this session on the starlight scope train because I had been arrested for this incident with the policeman. It was ironic, because the first item that they gave me to carry when I got to Vietnam was a starlight scope and I did not know how to use it. But the fact that I was not trained in it did not preclude sending me to Vietnam. So there was a little ironic twist there. We are in Vietnam, now?

M Yes we are in Vietnam, now.

W Vietnam Mixed emotions There were times in Vietnam that I felt were the freest of my life. The most unencumbered. It was like we were on an extended camping trip. As you got to be close friends with the people that you were with, there was a lot of comradery It was tempered with the fact that you knew these friends might not be there much longer

M That did not scare you?

W I made a statement when I came home from Vietnam that I did not get scared until I got home Then I realized what I had gone through and reflected back Fear comes into play and everyone copes with it differently I knew a lot of guys that not initially, but when they got into the later stages of their tour, had nervous breakdowns, to the point to where they would shit themselves and piss their pants to get out of going on patrol or walking the point I saw guys just lose it in the field, run uncontrollably We had to tackle this one kid from California and bring him back He just flipped out Let me go into that a little bit more in depth

After I got wounded the third time, my sister had written Congressman Curwin and my mother had called the President to get me out of the field I should have come out after the second purple heart. I did I got back into the rear area and secure area, where there was a lot of military decorum I have never been big on decorum I am talking about saluting, shining your boots, wearing newly cleaned, starched clothes everyday I did not like that aspect So I lasted not even three hours and I went back to the field They sent somebody else out

Then after being wounded a third time, they made me come out of the field They assigned me to, it was a transition company I was in charge of the perimeter and the Three Corps was the Lie Kay and my job was responsible for various personnel who were pending, what was termed at the time, Section Eight discharge It was a mental discharge They were put in this holding company and I was responsible for their safety and well-being until their paperwork was processed and they were transferred out I got to know a lot of people that ended up with major psychological problems from Vietnam to the point to where they almost killed each other in fights over trivial things They were very, very unstable people, overtly unstable Not that there were not people that came home that were, let us see the term, covertly unstable People that I would not have wanted to walk around in society, knowing what frame of mind they were in, and what they were capable of It is something that I never got caught up in That aspect of the war, the morbid aspect I saw the morbidity and some of atrocities but not to the point to where it affected me one way or another It was like an objective point of view I have asked myself why I never got deranged or went left of center psychologically, and I am not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, I just know how I approached it I approached it as an outsider looking in. And that is the way that I approached the whole time in Vietnam I knew just subconsciously that that was the way I had to approach it to make it through

M That makes sense

W It worked. No genius. It just was a reflex action for me.

M When did you come home? When did you finally leave?

W May of 1969, I came home. Really, it was a very strange period of my life because I came home to a small town. I came home to the anti-war sentiment. I remember getting jeered in San Francisco, in Oakland. I came back at Oakland Air Force Base. We flew home out of San Francisco International and I remember the first time I saw Hare Krishna's and the anti-war people and the hippies. I was shocked to the point to where I did not know whether it was something that was going on all the time and I missed it, being from Girard, or it was something that was a transitional period of the country. When I came home, I did not have much in common with my previous friends.

M Well, that is understandable.

W I had a faction of friends who were seniors or graduated from college and were off into their own little lifestyle. I always had a fraction of friends that were involved in the anti-war movement. More so for the intrinsic appeal. The sex, drugs, and rock and roll aspect of it as opposed to just the earnest objection of war. That left me in a fairly isolated situation. There was me. Who could I talk to? They say Vietnam Veterans still retain communication. It is the best thing for those guys to get together and tell their stories to pull them closer together. I have not talked to one person that has seen Vietnam through my eyes. So therefore, I feel that it was a unique experience and I think that everyone had a unique experience there. Some people just do not know how to feel about it. Well, I do not need that. I have always been an individual as far as my feelings about the war and my experience there.

M Tell me how you got involved with Woodstock. Why did you go there?

W It was on a whim. One of my friends, who is dead now. This is a very diverse group of people.

M So you went with a group?

W Yes, I went with a group.

M Tell me about that.

W The instigator, was the first hedonist I had ever known. This guy would do anything for a thrill, for pleasure; dive out of airplanes and do things like that. He was always plotting and scheming about what we were going to do next, where we were going to go at the time. I was uncumbered. I was not married. I had gone to work at Packard because I bought a car. I bought a 1969 MG Midget. My accumulated funds from the service had

not come home yet to pay for the car. So, I was forced to go back to work. I had worked initially in a fixed assembly area. The main plant for Packard Electric was downtown on Dana Street. I had not worked on conveyors or hatchet worked with the real long wires. Well the assignment they gave me returning back from the service was on a rapid speed conveyor with forty-four double terminal wires and it was a mess. I went back and lasted two and a half days. I could not cope with it. I was probably in some sort of type of shock or on the verge of a nervous breakdown at the time. I went from the jungles to the assembly line.

M Quite a difference

W Yes. I left and went to the doctor. I went to a local M.D. He put me on sick leave from Packard, which lasted seven weeks. I got no therapy. The guy, I remember him talking to me. When I went in, and I got mostly physical or physiological situations.

M You think this was a result of coming back from the war?

W I think it was the trauma in reference to me finding a comfortable niche in society. I did not know how to talk to people. I did not know how to communicate. I could not communicate about what was going on in the world among my peers, and in my age group. I had no frame of reference. I knew Vietnam. Everybody that was not a Vietnam Veteran was anti-Vietnam because it was fashionable to be anti-Vietnam and I did not tell anybody I had been to Vietnam. I let my hair grow long and went without shoes and did not wear underwear and all the normal things of that time period. In the initial stages of coming home, when I first went back to work, there was no way I could have coped. I would have gone crazy.

M It is like your whole world changed overnight.

W Exactly. That was the shock. So this doctor just put me on sick leave and kept saying, "Well, take another week, another week, another week." I received no therapy, not even counseling. Really, society was not prepared to take these people back into the main stream. I was very uncomfortable with a lot of segments of society. Did not want to be around them, did not want to talk to them. So I sort of shut myself out. I extended my sick leave to one week on my own. I was not prepared to go back. I was scared, actually scared to go back. I did not have answers for people. I did not know why I went to Vietnam. All I knew was that I went and I was home and now all of the sudden, what I did was evil and whatnot.

So, I extended the sick leave a week beyond. I went in for a physical to go back to work. I was taking my physical and I had just received an interview from Dr. Sudimak, who was Packard's doctor at the time. I got a call from Employment. Mr. Fidesca, I believe his name was. First of all, he asked me where I had been. I said, "Well, I did not feel I was ready to come back to work." I had missed a week,

unauthorized. He said, "Well, as far as we are concerned, we took you off the payroll when you did not report to work." I said, "Well, that is fine." I did not feel like going to work. That was it.

Looking back, I probably should have sought some help from the union or from someone, but I was still dealing from the ego and still unsure of what my niche in society was or would be. I did not know who to go to. So now we get into this time frame in June, July, leading up to Woodstock. I started to hang around with some kids. Like I said, it was a diverse group. We had some very intellectual people, some basically arrogant people, some thrill seekers, some legitimately interested in like people.

M How did you meet these people?

W They were former friends. They were all from the area. The big thing back then was marijuana, marijuana, LSD, mescaline, all the hallucinogens, the social drugs. Before I went to Vietnam, I was aware that there was marijuana, but other than that, who knew what it was? A friend of mine's sister who was in college got us a couple of joints so we knew what marijuana was. We smoked it. We smelled it, big deal. In Vietnam, we used it for camouflage. Everybody smoked it. And anybody that says that they did not, especially that was in Vietnam, it was everywhere. The Vietnamese would come out and sell it to you on a break between fire fights.

M No kidding?

W Oh, yes. Cleaned and everything. Well, you are talking about a society that reverses the use of Opium. I had been in Pappasons Den inside the house. In the traditional Vietnamese society, the entire house is nondescript. It is brown, thatch, mud, dirt, until you get to Pappasons room and it is multicolored silk curtain, with pillows on the bed and everything. The oldest man in the family is the revered person. He does not have to work. Everybody waits on him. He just sits in there with his Opium bowl and smokes Opium. I guess he trips out and hallucinates all day, looks into the future or whatever he looks at. So that was a society that was structured on the use of drugs. Religiously, their religion, and structurally through the availability of marijuana to grow in climate, to grow wild. So marijuana was a common denominator, alcohol and marijuana.

Some of the hallucinogens and I ran around people that were involved in the sale and use of these drugs. Also, it was a fashionable thing to do in that time period. It coincided with the hippie movement. Free love and self exploration and whatnot. Everything all tied together. This was part of, "We are the new society now." This was my first exposure to it. We were going to change the direction of America. We were going to take away all the pseudo-social and personality blocks. The plastic people. The plastic society with the plastic goals. This is where I stepped in with some of these people. Some of them were truly involved in this, some of them were just userous criminals. Because a lot of these guys ended up in the penitentiary for one violation or another. Or ended up dead.

I will get back to where I started. The organizer of this excursion to Woodstock He ended up dying in a drug deal. I found out later that it was a hit. He had been involved in a drug store robbery in Niles, as a matter of fact. Him and three other guys. These guys had found out that he squealed and the three guys that did time in the pen set up a hit. I will tie this in a little later because I got privileged information concerning this murder, later when I became a Girard policeman. I became a detective and I had occasion to talk with the Chief of Detectives in Youngstown in his office, Jack Lynch, who became the chief of Youngstown and ran into some problems of his own. Jack told me that this black kid had, indeed, admitted to killing this kid that had set up the Woodstock excursion, for a small amount of drugs and had taunted this Jack Lynch into proving it. We had been told it was so and so that killed him. I was told by my friends and why they killed him. They shot him in the head during a supposed sale of a watch or television, down in the ghetto in Youngstown. That was Shim. Now I will go through the other people that I went with.

One girl, a young girl from Liberty Township, wound up doing time in a Florida jail for drug related incidents and a robbery or two. She was one of the people that went. A young man who is currently a chemist in Columbus, graduate of Ohio State University, very intelligent person. He was from Girard, he went, another Vietnam Veteran. A kid that was a year younger than me who is currently in Oregon went. He works for Oregon Power and he chaperones the White Water Excursions in the Oregon River areas up in the mountains. Another individual, who I attempted to get over here for an interview today, is probably the most unique person I ever knew coming home from Vietnam. He was president of his class and was Homecoming King. He was a year younger than me and a football star. He came out of Vietnam with very little grip on reality except for several nervous breakdowns, has not been in prison, and has not been in psychological evaluation. Is very proud of the fact that he has been certified sane by a hospital in Colorado, a service center, and when they certify you sane, that means you are sane to the part of the definition of sanity. You can feed yourself and change yourself. He definitely is not totally there. A very unique study. That is the one. That is one that is on a constant diet of aloe and marijuana. He drinks half gallon jugs of aloe and smokes marijuana and thinks that everybody is in the CIA, including me.

M Oh, really?

W Yes. He has confronted me about it several times. Legitimately. He lives with a retarded, not retarded, dysfunctional adult. The guy is in his mid-fifties. This guy just moved into this kid's house and after the kid's father died and declared Eminent Domain. The police could not get him out and he barricaded the doors and everything. He now retains the house. Do not ask me how he did it through the court system. Somehow, these two people take care of each other. Okay, we are in the time period and the people that I went to Woodstock.

M Right.

W I guess it is time to go to Woodstock. I had been in New York City before. I have a friend that went to Rutgers and when I came home from Louisville, we went to Rutgers to see him. New York City appealed me. I like New York City. I said, "We will go to New York City, we will hitchhike." We had no money between the five or six of us. We packed some canned goods and some basic stuff. We started hitchhiking. It only took us a couple of days to get to the city and we stayed. We left here like four or five days before the concert. We got to Greenwich Village. We stayed in Greenwich Village in somebody's apartment. Do not ask me who's. It was okay to travel the country and look like we looked back then because everybody was doing it. You were not a vagrant or homeless.

M How did you look?

W I had let my hair grow as long as it would grow. My hair did not grow fast, very thin and it was starting to fall out at the time. I would say my hair was six to seven inches long. I had wire-rimmed glasses, a cut off fatigue shirt and bell-bottomed jeans. Occasionally we wore shoes but we preferred not to. We wore sandals or something like that. Not shaven, we would not shave. Not necessarily bathed. It was a traditional society where we would not bathe or shave. Everybody basically looked that way. Everyone had their love beads and their little adornments and bracelets.

M Regular hippie.

W Yes, in appearance.

M But you did not feel that way. I wanted to ask you, did you have something in common with these people? It seemed like you came back from the war and everything had changed. Your friends had changed, now you were with this group of people. Did you have anything in common or was it just a facade?

W What we had in common was, we did not question each other's actions. That was a common bond. There was no inquisitiveness. You were what you were and we did not care. You could have been a murderer and no one cared. You were accepted. Not necessarily because you were a hippie or you were an anti-American or anti-war or something. It was just a common bond. No questions were asked. So, there was some diversity in the group that I traveled with. I found that out when I got to Woodstock, that there were a lot of people that felt the same way. They were just searching. We did not know who we were supposed to be or how we were supposed to feel or how we were supposed to look but we wanted to look and feel like everyone else because it seemed to be what everybody was doing. It was a new move.

We spent a night in New York City and hitchhiked the next morning to Woodstock or was it White Plains? We got two rides. The second ride, an artist from New York City picked us up in his Rolls Royce. I rode into Woodstock for more than

twenty-four hours before the concert began, in a Rolls Royce I would say when I got there, there were several thousand people there We drove right into the main area We had to split up There were only four of us. A girl and two other guys and myself and the artist

When we got to Woodstock, it was a very laid-back atmosphere The organizers of the concert were attempting, at the time, to get the people to pay We did not have any money. I did not even know you had to have a ticket for the concert Supposedly they were around \$15 or something I never saw a ticket for Woodstock Like I said, we were there more than twenty-four hours before the concert so we just went in and there was no way, as the people started to filter in, that they could have gotten us out of there They would of had to move the concert sight So they had not gotten any fences or anything up There was nothing that they could do My first impression of the people that I first met at Woodstock, I was not naive of a lot of things back then In fact, I always had been open minded I accept situations I had seen a flaw in the supposed free society and the free love and the openness and I saw a lot of people making money A lot of people with the American spirit to collect the almighty dollar It was apparent early at Woodstock that there were a lot of people there to make a lot of money off the sale of the clothes era, the supposed natural look and the free look and the expressive dress The trinkets, the beads, the bracelets, whatnot, and especially the drugs. That was the first impression I got of Woodstock I said, "All right, it is still a venture "

M I did not know that

W It is a venture People that were a little more naive than myself let us say, were caught up in the appearance, the look. "Oh, is that not fantastic " All these people with the same goal in mind to change America and to eliminate our hangs ups All the free love people with the big eyes They were the ones that I have seen in these interviews from Woodstock that say, "Oh, how fantastic it was three days of love and peace and whatnot " I laugh at them, when I see these interviews, because I sort of watched what was going on behind closed doors

After the bulk of the people came in, we got through the first day and we went around and bummed food and bullshited with people and smoked a joint here and told a joke there and laughed and there was no pressure It was a nice environment in that way There was no pressure there After the bulk of the people got in and the place took on a structure, there were alleys, rows of tents and campers and whatnot, setup that were drug alleys You could trade off, you could barter if you had drugs "I will trade my drugs for your drugs." There were hard core drug users there, in the heroin vein, but there were also recreational drug users there that were legitimate They would just trade you for whatever drugs they had for what drugs you had and some people would just give them away There was an underlying fraction there that we were going to make money. I saw these drug alleys set up It was like you were at a flea market People were peddling their wares Artists who came from New York City were selling us paintings After all, there was a lot of money in the background there As it mushroomed, prior to the

opening of the first day, you had no movement. Restroom facilities, it was like Vietnam all over again. You got to go to the bathroom wherever you want to. Campfires at night

M Where did you sleep?

W Wherever you wanted. Wherever you wanted, with whoever you wanted, it did not matter. We had brought some blankets and I had a duffle bag but it did not matter. That first night before the last night before the concert opened was party night. Everyone was there in anticipation of the concert. The weather had turned foul on us but we did not care. We were all in the same boat. So, we took on a group personality in that respect, in that aspect.

The next morning they were finalizing the stage setup. The stage still was not totally done and everyone wanted to get into position to get a good seat for the concert. I was in a dozen rows back from the middle of the stage when I first started out. There was a lot of construction going on and we were just froze in. As the people just came, you could not move. You had no mobility. You could not go anywhere. Concert started. I do not even remember the opening acts. I remember Richie Havens and Robbie Shanger and a group, I do not know what group was the first day, but here is the thing that stands out in my mind. It was just ramped drug use, guys were up on the towers. They had climbed up on the speaker towers and they were passing on the crowd and the crowd did not care. Why this is great. When we were high, it is supposed to happen.

They announced that the concession stand was opened. Well I was starving. I bummed a couple of dollars and I took some orders and I was going to get some hot dogs and some popcorn and some pop. I started to walk back to the concession stands, they were back to my left on the little knoll. This was the first time that I had become aware of how many people there were. You could not move, you could not step without stepping on someone. We were just jammed in. It had to take an hour and a half for me to get back to the concession stands and when I got back there, they were sold out. I was starving. I had a terminal case of the munchies from lack of food. I had not eaten, you know, and we had run out of canned goods and that. I never made it back to the people that I came with until the next day, sometime.

M So what did you do in between?

W This is the unique aspect. You did whatever you wanted there. I walked around and watched the people swimming nude and I saw some drug overdoses and sirens were going off and I was on the fringe of the crowd now. There was no way I was going to go back up into where I was. First of all, I did not know where they were and it was just a sprawling crowd, the most people I have ever seen in one place at one time. The estimates were floating around.

M I was wondering what was the number

W There was a million there, you know, 500,000; 450,000 is the official estimate. It just seemed like everyone was there and it was a mess with the mud and the cars stuck all over the place. You were locked into time, right there. People had to abandon their cars, you could see them on the roadways. They just left them. I really did not run into anyone else I knew. The people that I came with, I did not find them until the next day. I spent the night with a couple from Akron, Ohio, and they had a little tent. I remember just sleeping under that tent soaking wet and miserable. Just existing. Like I said, I had just come from Vietnam so it was not a really great trauma for me. I had been through that for thirteen months. That is what I did. I was uncomfortable. So, I really was not uncomfortable, I was just, "Here I am, what is going on?"

For me, Woodstock turned into an endurance. I did not go to hear the music. Well, hell, I did not know a whole lot about the music at the time. As far as people relating, you related through drugs. You did drugs with somebody. Now, I did not have any money, so I could not buy anything off anyone. People were constantly trying to sell you things, whatever it was they were trying to sell you. I became a sightseer, on the fringes.

Then the next day, it must have been around 10:00 or 11:00, in the morning, I ran into two guys I had come with and they were starving. So we went up to a store, which was along the road, just up on the hill from the lake that everybody was swimming in. We swam, first, then we walked up to the store. When we got in the store, there was nothing left in the store but dog food and this Sterno. The guy had gotten an order of Sterno to eat canned goods, but he had no canned goods left. There was dog food. No one was paying for anything. It was just like an open door. The owner was sitting behind the counter, he said, "Hey, whatever you guys want. They have already taken everything in the store that you could eat, but whatever you want." So a friend of mine, the one that killed, took a bag of dog food and walked out and he was walking down the street eating out of the bag of dog food. He was kind of strange any ways.

M He must have been very hungry.

W Ultimately, we got back into the concert area and we ran into somebody that had some canned goods. There were people who were bringing food now. The word had gotten around that there was no food, there was no way to get food in, there were helicopters going in and out. We got some canned goods and we ate some baked beans and stuff. One night, that second night, one of the memorable instances, this friend of mine, who had the permanent mental disfigurement, the one I mentioned earlier, we were sitting around the camp sight. There must have been thirty people and a fire going in the middle and they were all passing joints and pipes and everything else.

Mike was always a little bit different than anyone. I remember watching him when he did this. He picked up a bug, it was an insect, it was about an inch or so long, and I am watching him, he breaks it in half and he hands it to me. He hands me half and he goes like this and then he looks at me and then we both ate it. I think we were ridiculing what was going on. I did not know what was going through his mind, but I

have tried to read what he was thinking. A very intense person, but it was hard to follow his thought process because you did not know where he was going to end up. You would be talking about one thing and then he locks out, snaps out and locks into something else and comes back talking about something that was not even in the conversation and I do not even know how it was related to the conversation. But I was trying to relate this action to what everybody was sharing. That was Mike's way of sharing.

My involvement with drugs . . . I was not addicted, I was just sharing. This was something to share, something in common. So here was Mike saying, "Well, if we were going to share drugs, we can share bugs." It was the same thing. We were sharing and that is why we were there. It emphasized the whole Woodstock thing to me. It was unique. That is the second night.

We left the third morning. We did not stay for the end of the concert. Like I said, nobody was into the music. We did not have money. We were not making money. The guys I was with were not selling drugs. We had whatever food we had been able to borrow. So we had some canned goods and we left. Two guys and a girl and myself. We walked for the longest time through rows of abandoned cars. It must have been ten miles at least. It was just unbelievable. We did not even know where we were going. We ended up, the next place I knew, we ended up in a burrow in New Jersey, arrested for walking. Somebody had just dropped us off and we were walking along a city intersection, the main highway coming through the city. Two New Jersey state policemen came up and shook us down. "Up against the car!" The whole thing. We were riffraff. We were hippies and they were former culture. They were society. We were passing through their small town and probably what happened in Girard, in fact, I am sure it did happen in Girard, to people of that appearance. So they shook us down and they found, I was carrying my duffle bag, so I was carrying almost everybody's personal belongings and we would take turns carrying it. I was not carrying it at the time. Somebody was carrying it, but they emptied the duffle bag and they found a hash bowl, no hash in it, some residue and a roach clip. So they arrested us. It was a justice of the peace. It was an old church and now it was a court room. They had shook us down, we did not have any money. It was obvious and we did not have anything of value to them and we went into the hearing with these two police officers.

An old guy, who was the justice of the peace, he adjourned. He opened the court and asked us who we were, where we were from, where we were going and we told him. We told him we were so and so and we went to Woodstock, we were trying to get home. "Do you have any money?" "We do not have any money." That is obvious. "Well, whose pipe is this?" I said, "Well, that is mine. There is no marijuana in it, no hash in it, it just happened to be in the bag." So they talked amongst themselves a little bit and turned around. They said, "Okay, get out of town, we do not want to see you here anymore." And I still, today wonder, well, why did they not bring it up.

M Yes, what was the purpose?

W Who knew? They may have thought we were escaped felons or something and it was

hard. This is another point that I am trying to make. When I try to summarize the composition of the people at Woodstock, that element was there. The criminal element was there. The money makers were there. The people that honestly wanted to start the new society were there. The sightseers were there, the inquisitors. So there were criminals there. No doubt in my mind. They let us go and we continued to truck home. We made it home in one day. We split up into groups of two, feeling that it was easier to get a ride that way, as opposed to four people. The rest of the trip was uneventful. We made it home, I do not even remember whether we had to sleep on the road one night or not. My memory is vague in that area. I came home and the following November, I was married to my high school sweetheart. We went together from freshman year, that was 1961, we got married in 1969 and have been married ever since.

M: What about these people that you went with? Do you still keep in touch with them at all? What happened to them?

W: Well, like I said, the one is dead, the other one is impossible to communicate with. He thinks I am in the CIA, probably because later I became a policeman.

M: Right. That is almost ironic though, that you became a policeman.

W: Well, I had some instances where I had to take him into custody, for his own protection, mostly. He would flip out. One day, he got into the middle of Belmont Avenue and started hitting cars with a baseball bat. Any car with a CB antenna, he thought was a CIA agent. The girl, the last I heard, she was in Florida, in jail. She was from Liberty. The other kid, lives in Oregon. I see him occasionally but we do not socialize. We will be out and he will be in town for a holiday or something. The relationship I have with him is that he is a Vietnam Veteran also. First Infantry and apparently he had some problems in Vietnam. He was wounded one time and he got out of there and I remember him saying that he wanted to go to be in the mountains. For a period, him and the other guy, the other kid, Mike, they assembled redwood tables in the hills of Northern California. I have three or four of them in the family. I invested some money into their scheme. It was unsuccessful but they just do not know how to market the business. Very nice piece of furniture also. That is one right there that the television is sitting on. They got the rights from the Federal Government to uproot the bases of the redwood tree that were left after the people cut them down. They cut them in slabs and attached driftwood legs to them. The name of the operation was Moria borol, Moria, meaning the wind.

M: Boroles are the things that they cut off trees?

W: That is the grain of the wood. It was a legitimate business and there were three or four guys that I knew from Girard that worked there. They were either spaced out to the point where they could not function anywhere else in society or they were hiding from the law enforcement officials. That is the extent of my involvement with those people as far as

beyond Woodstock

M I just have a couple of questions Looking back from your point of view twenty years ago, now that they had all the publicity and the anniversary and all, what was your impression when you saw all this going on? Was it a big deal to you?

W No, somebody, present day is making a lot of money out of the marketing rights You look structurally into the music industry and all the groups are making comebacks They are all on tour They have all cut new albums

M But there were some big groups there though

W Yes, there were big groups but to me, personally, I had no frame of reference Hell, I was coming home from Vietnam We listened to WLS in Chicago on transistor radios. They played the oldies That was the music that I knew. As far as the acid year coming in, I later became familiar with Hendrix and those people, but I had no aversion to their music at the time It was all new.

There was an aura of that change in American society of the American young adults That existed in Woodstock I did feel that, but it was tempered with the understanding that there were other things going on there It was a commercialized venture also for a lot of people There were a lot of bad people there There were a lot of people there to make money I approached it a little more realistic way I was never awe-struck by Woodstock. It was never the big, monumental sign of change of life If you look at most of the people that were true hippies back in that era, they were firmly ensconced in the economic aspect of life right now In their words, they would be total hypocrites They were attorneys and investment bankers So it was a childish stage of life and as our parents used to say, "They were just going through a phase " We were going through a phase as a whole segment of society, we went through a phase It affected people differently.

M This just popped into my mind, but you were talking about the drugs and some of the other things that went on there. If your children were involved in something like that today, how would you feel?

W Society takes a totally different look at drugs. Let us couple alcohol abuse with that When I was growing up as a teenager, you were not incorrigible, you did not need analysis or treatment if you went out and got drunk It was more of, "Well, they are sowing the wild oats " Or, "Going through a stage " It was treated as such Therefore, these are my personal feelings, again There was no trauma involved It was, "Okay, you did not know " You would get the lecture and you would get grounded and whatnot

M: And you grew out of it?

W It was time to grow in adulthood "Okay, you are going to grow up and these things are going to be in your past " Today, there is a segment of society that wants to treat this as some traumatic flaw in your personality and a lot of the times, they plant the trauma I feel very strongly about this They plant the trauma in the young adult teenager Things we did, God, if I were to grow up in today's society, I do not know if I would have made it through it without doing time in the penal institution for things that we considered to be juvenile Prankish A young adult type actions Now they want to lock you up and send you to therapy and whatnot I do not understand that type of treatment I think it does more harm in the long run than it does good

M Just off hand, what made you become a policeman?

W I needed a job In looking for a job, I asked myself, "What am I qualified to do? My government, my country, trained me to be a soldier" Well, there was no call for any of my acquired skills in normal society In assessing my situation, I said, "Well, the closest thing would be a policeman, or a fireman or something " At the time, I made up my mind that I would take the first Civil Service Test that came up, whether it would be fire department or the police department and it just happened that the police exam came up If you want me to elaborate on this, this was a very interesting period in my life You talk about transition

M Well, that is what this whole thing deals with is transition

W I went from the hippie culture, which I never was firmly ensconced into getting married, which changed my life, somewhat. I think I needed to be married at the time I really had no grip on direction at that time in my life I was twenty-two year old and still feeling my way through and trying to figure out who I was I ended up becoming a policeman So one day, I was with the guys on the street I raced motorcycles back then and whatnot I was in the bars with them, they were partying. I never really got hung up for drugs. I like to drink I still drink whiskey now but I do not do drugs I do not have any desire to do any drugs but I am not judgmental about people that do recreational drugs I do not know anything about cocaine So I cannot give an opinion on that I went one day from the streets to the next day being a policeman It was sort of like coming home from Vietnam, being a soldier and then all of the sudden, being a civilian, accompanying cultural shock there

I became a policeman then all of the sudden, everyone changed their attitudes towards me I did not change who I was I was still the same person, but I just had a badge on I had always had a gun it seemed like A gun was not unique to me and it did not give me any sensation of power. I had no Wyatt Erp complex But the people, my former friends, and fringe friends, automatically changed their attitude towards me You would walk into a party and, "He is a policeman " Guys are hiding their joints and hiding their beer I got a chuckle out of that, but it did change, the friends that I developed at

that time in my life, I ended up, and this is probably the standard, policeman hang around policemen. My lifestyle became that of a policeman. It evolved my whole life for six years that I was a policeman. If you want to hear a story as to why I am not a policeman I got a very interesting story for you.

I will try to retrace this. I liked to feel like I was a very good policeman. In ten months, I made detective. And there only is one detective in Girard. There is twenty-one guys on the force, one detective, a juvenile officer, so many captains, a chief and so many line patrolmen. Well, I apparently had done a good enough job to where the former detective got promoted to captain, they gave me the detective's position. I was intrigued by that. A little idealistic attitude at the time. I wanted to do a good job, I wanted to enforce the laws and that.

One thing that I really was not totally aware of was that a small town policeman has some guidelines that are not evident. First of all, on incumbence is you can kind of have a lifestyle, any personal life inside a small town. Well, I still wanted to be the same person that I was. I wanted to run around with the same people that I did. But I also wanted to be a good policeman. To that end, you had constraints. There were people that you could not arrest. If you did arrest, you would be in trouble or you would see that this arresting conviction was not pursued because of a political, or money involvements. During my time as a detective, I would go out and do good detective work, good police work, arrest people, possession of stolen property, various felonies, drug dealers who I have never liked. I really think that is part of the scum society. I really think the Federal Government should take over the dispensation of the use of drugs, to a point. I enjoyed the job for a while. Several things happened. I started to get told not to pursue a certain case, with no explanation. It upset me. I would see certain people I would arrest go to court and get a very stiff fine, jail sentence, because they did not have any connections, they did not have any money. The other people were taken care of behind closed doors. Either the case would never make it to court or there would be a minor fine with probation. I saw the seedy side of law enforcement, and on a small town level. I got into the county area of some felonies and I saw the way things were manipulated up there. It became very evident that politics controlled police work in this part of the country. So I got bitter about it, disappointed to the point to where I was real obstinate on the job. Someone had stolen a Thompson sub machine gun out of the police station and I thought it was the chief of police that had it. He has access to it, and he was the last one to see it. Well he had called me one day on my day off and told me to go to Johnstown, Ohio and to take a look at this Thompson-sub machine gun that department had recovered. Well, all I did was check the computer to see all the numbers were different and I told myself, "I am not going there for nothing." He said, "I want you to start a file on this, I want you to start an investigation on it." I tracked down to what I believed at the time to be the Thompson-sub machine gun that was stolen from our police department. I had a deal to buy this off of a guy at Satan's Inferno, it was a bar in Youngstown, out of the trunk of his Lincoln Continental. We had even staked out the house, two Struthers detectives who got the initial lead on it and two Mahoning County Sheriff's Department detectives, one of which, ironically, was the present, Sheriff Ed Nemeth, and another Girard policeman and

myself So there were six guys working on this detail, and we were staking out this house around the clock

One day we got a phone call The six of us from the Chief of Police in Girard, Buster Ross, and he told us, he thanked the other four guys for helping out on this case, but we are going to handle it on our own from here on, this was in his office, behind closed doors Those four guys left and we got a tongue lashing, this other policeman and myself "You do not take action outside this jurisdiction in any case, unless you clear it through my office " That was it That was it for me I was convinced anyway that he had somehow been involved in the theft and the sale of this very expensive weapon, it is a collector's item. It was from the Depression era. It was a Thompson-sub machine gun with the cylinder It was like the one Al Capone always used to carry Now, I was convinced at that time that, first of all, this guy was dirty and I could not do any efficient police work but that was my living at the time That was my livelihood, so I stayed on the job

I got another phone call on a day off, to come down and participate in a gambling raid at the local gambling club in Girard, it was on South Market Street So I went down and they told me they spontaneously set up this drug raid So we go over, we raid the place, we confiscate the money, the cards, make all the arrests, save these guys in the court They go to court, get a \$50 fine We had confiscated something like \$5,000 or \$6,000. The Chief of Police came to me the day these guys were up in court He says, "These guys are going to get off " He says, "Let us just take a couple hundred dollars a piece for me and you and so and so and so " Well, I had signed for this money and I said, "What am I going to tell them when I give it back?" He said, "Just tell them that they donated to the benevolent fund " I said, "No, I signed for the money I am giving it to them If you want to take it off them, you take it off of them " A week later I was back in uniform and I worked a job for another four years He tried to fire me, twice

The first time, I made him look like a fool He was running ads in the paper for anything I had illegal His office was open to anybody that would come in and he came in with a couple fabrications and we went to hearing He probably thought that I would never go to hearing on it I fought it The city was made to look totally ludicrous on the charges I was selling drugs I was pimping off a teenager They were total fabrications You will hear stories about any policeman on the street Well he took these stories, got the civil service commission to believe them, to suspend me and I had to go to court to get my job back I got reinstated Total reinstatement Record done away with. In the interim, I had purchased a bar with another policeman We co-owned the Alumni Inn in Girard. We were in the bar one night A knock comes on the door. It was closed It was a little bit after one o'clock They were some friends, my youngest brother was in there with them The person that came to the door said that one of the policemen in Girard was getting beat up at the Wonder Bar I said, "Well, let us go and help him out " We get to the Wonder Bar, he was in there, he had gotten beaten up and he wanted to look for these guys We were all drunk I am guilty of some things in this scenario but not of the things that I was charged with

We go and look for the guys that assaulted this policeman We go to a house on

South Market, down the VFW The kid, the policeman, that was involved in this all, kicked the door in, broke into the apartment, tore it apart, came back out We went up to State Street, my brother, Marty got into an altercation with this black guy It carried down to West Prospect Street I tried to break it up I got an axe handle broken on my shoulder My shoulder still bothers me I had a gun pulled on me I took it off of the father I punched the one son. We had to fight for our lives to get out of there

The next day, I got five felony charges against me Assault with a deadly weapon, breaking and entering The policeman who I went to help, signed a statement against me, that I broke into the house. I had two witness statements, taken by the Trumbull County Sheriff's Department, a friend of mine at the Trumbull County Sheriff's Department, that said this other policeman broke into the house. Two eyewitness statements! Then there was another kid who was beat up in the interim who I talked to personally afterwards, and he said, "I know you were not involved in this " I said, "Why did you testify?" He said, "My father " His father and the chief of police in Girard gambled together So they coerced this kid in He was beaten up pretty bad too They coerced him into testifying that I was one of the guys that beat him up I would have beaten every charge, every one

They got my youngest brother in Girard Court on a misdemeanor one, assault, fight with the black kid The black kid tried to run him down in a car He hit Marty with the front of his car, Marty rolled off and ran after him and they proceeded to fight and that is where I got hit trying to break them up They told me this is somebody out of the prosecutor's office in Warren, they said, "Yes, you could get off of everything, but if you do not resign from the police department your youngest brother is going to jail for six months, at maximum fine " My youngest brother was no more a criminal than you are I could not let him go to jail He was guilty of a fight, no doubt in my mind that in Girard's Court, he would have been convicted, gone to jail for six months and nothing we could have done about it So I resigned

M That is unbelievable

W A lot of things in society are unbelievable in small towns I would not know where to start That is a whole new topic

M Yes

W That is the finger of organized crime and overt political influence

M But, I can see how this has changed you You went from a soldier, to a civilian, into the police force and played three different roles

W There was a lot of bitterness, ultimately I was very, very bitter for the longest time after my involvement with the police department You know I am not an evil person I am fairly open minded to most situations because I have been through a lot of situations that board on the edge of criminality and fun But to see the way that justice is dispensed,

totally partial, it is the most disgusting thing in my life. The prejudice, and the ambiguity and the enforcement. Some of this is very distasteful and you try to look for some level that it does not exist. When I was going through pre-sentence evaluation, I got sentenced to probation. It was supposed to be a non-reporting probation. Part of the deal was that I resign. My oldest brother took this information I had accumulated.

When I was on the police department, I was president of the fraternal order of police. I filed thirty-three grievances against the chief of police in Girard. Seven of which were of felony violations. I even went to an executive session and the substance of this information of violations by the chief of police. Stuff that anyone would be locked up for. I took it to an FBI agent, who was the agent in charge of this area of North Jackson, who I had met through another police contact, and gave him all this information. Nothing ever came of it and I resigned from the police department and here, three or four months ago, this agent was just removed from his present assignment. I do not know what it was, and he is under investigation by the agency for organized crime. So where would you go? Who would I go to? It was very frustrating. It even caused me to move my family to Texas for a while to go and find him. I liked it. I had a job with security working for Brown and Root through the French DuPont Company. My family and I had a hard time adapting. Myself and my brothers moved down with our families and the women just did not adapt. My son had excessive allergies. We had a very, very hard problem. We ended up back here.

M: I just want to sum everything up. Just one more question. In a few words, how would you describe the sixties? You had started to talk about it at the beginning of the tape. Let us just end with that.

W: Well, my age of awareness came in the sixties. Starting from 1965, 1966, as I was exposed to real life, adult life and exposed to society, as it is. It was a rude period in several ways for me, but it was also a period where I learned most about my life. Not that I learned to cope with what I learned, it was the period where I learned the most and I am still, at forty-two years old, on the verge of going into the nineties, I am still adapting to the things that I learned in the sixties. Becoming more aware of why certain things happened. The substance of those things. It was a good period for me. I do not go beyond that because I try to cut it off from what I was really aware of when 1970 hit. I was aware but not aware of why. So the sixties laid the basis for my personality and my lifestyle into this present period. I am still fulfilling that groundwork. I guess we are always growing as adults and always learning something. Structurally, it was probably the most important period of my life.

M: Okay, I think that is about it. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

W: No, other than the fact that I probably need about three hours sleep before I am able to function probably as an adult again. It has been my pleasure.

End of Interview