

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

**Interview**  
***Bruce Gordon***  
**August 24, 1992**

*Interview conducted by Nancy Earsy*  
*Videotape length 57 minutes*

**INT:** Bruce, would you introduce yourself to our audience, and tell us a little bit about yourself.

**BG:** How far back do I go?

**INT:** Probably just start with when you...

**BG:** I've been in Lexington about twenty-six years I guess. We had lived in Brookline before that for about ten years. I originally came from Medford, Massachusetts, so I'm a local boy actually. And I graduated from Boston University, got a Master's degree in English Literature. Then I went in the Army, to Korea. Came back, got my Master's degree in Guidance Counseling, and I worked as a guidance counselor in Arlington. I resigned from there that very year.

**INT:** In 1971 you resigned?

**BG:** Yes, that's right. And I haven't worked a day since. I'm serious. Not for money, anyhow.

**INT:** So you were teaching, you were a guidance counselor for a long time?

**BG:** I was a guidance counselor, that's right. I was at Arlington High School for a couple of years, but I spent most of my time at the Junior High.

**INT:** You mentioned that you had lived in Brookline and then you moved to Lexington twenty-six years ago. What made you decide to come to Lexington?

**BG:** Because back in the time when I was a kid in Medford and pedaling through Lexington and looking at the Green and so on, I said if I ever settle down anywhere, it's going to be in Lexington. Then when we

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decided we were going to move out of a basement apartment in Brookline, we started looking around it seemed like a very logical place to go anyhow because I worked in Arlington. Eva worked in Needham, you know, but she could get down Route 128 pretty easily. So it all fit nicely together. It was inevitable this is where we'd come.

**INT:** What was Lexington like twenty-six years ago when you came here?

**BG:** Well, physically it hasn't really changed dramatically. A few old buildings are down, some new houses on previous natural land and so on. Other than that, I have the feeling that politically it has changed. I had the feeling when we came here that it was primarily a conservative town. Although that may have been a misconception, because I've read something since then that indicated that there was sort of a fluctuation there. But certainly the people who were on the Board I think tend to be conservative.

**INT:** You're talking about the Board of Selectmen?

**BG:** Yes. And so I guess early on we were interested in low-cost housing. We went to a couple of meetings on that. But since then I think it has become quite a bit more liberal. I think that's obvious from the voting patterns.

**INT:** And when you're saying conservative/liberal, what kind of issues are you talking about?

**BG:** Well, for instance, low-cost housing. I'd say the conservatives were more or less against it. They were against more taxes to pay for services, education and so on. In other words, they seemed to be against most everything that we were for.

**INT:** So you would characterize yourself as a liberal?

**BG:** Absolutely, yes.

**INT:** And how did that affect your views about what was going on the end of the 1960's and 1970's in terms of...?

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**BG:** Well, when I was in Korea I had an experience which converted me from a strong advocate of a U.N. action into more or less an anti-war person, from what I saw over there. I don't think you want me to go into details about that. It's a long story in and of itself.

**INT:** We would love it if you are willing to tell us.

**BG:** I was up in the front line; I was in the Tank Corps. And the tanks were being used as pillboxes up there.

**INT:** What's that?

**BG:** A pillbox? It's like a fortified gun placement. The tank was just sort of dug in up on the hilltop. And there was a big valley. The enemy soldiers were Chinese in this case, opposite us, opposite the valley. And the war had already settled down. I had gotten over there March of 1953 and the war was to end about three months later. But I was sent immediately up to the front line. There was intermittent fire. There were no large attacks or anything. It was just a matter of randomly shooting at one another and sending out patrols and things like that. Consequently I had to shoot the gun. In two months they made me tank commander. It was more or less because they just lacked personnel, I think, more than anything. But I became tank commander so I had to make the decisions up there. And we were shooting at fortifications. We didn't know what was happening. You knew you hit the fortification but you didn't know whether you killed anyone, or what. So one day one of these fools on the other side, one of these Chinese, was standing up in plain sight. I had him in my gunsights. I was also in radio communication with the artillery up there. And I said to the artillery guy, "I'm not going to shoot this guy. I mean, this is crazy." My company commander was on the line, and heard me say that. He ordered me to fire. And I aimed the gun right over the guy's head. Strangely enough the gun didn't go off because there was something wrong with it. But anyhow, the company commander was up the next day. We

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had a big discussion about that. And I said, "I just don't think I want to kill any more people." And he says, "Well, we'll see about that," and so on and so on. I thought I was going to get court-martialed. But somehow they didn't. They sent me to headquarters. They had the colonel ask me, "What do you want me to do?" And I said, "Well I'd just as soon be in the military police." My brother had served in that in World War II. And they moved me to the military police, believe it or not.

**INT:** That's great.

**BG:** So I was already set. My mindset was that I had changed about things, and I was definitely anti-war. I'm not a Quaker; I'm not against all wars. But I just didn't think the conditions warranted continuing fighting up there. Especially when they were arguing about the shape of the table, the peace table, you know. People were dying. It made me very angry. So then I came back and became a guidance counselor which was a matter of trying to help people to solve problems in a more peaceful way. We worked for the World Federalists for a good number of years. Eva was secretary, I was treasurer, in Boston.

**INT:** What was that?

**BG:** The World Federalists? They were called United World Federalists in those days. Promoting world government.

**INT:** So you put your principles to action in the World Federalists and in what you were doing in your job. When you were in Lexington, were there channels for you as well, or were you...?

**BG:** At first I don't think we got involved. We were interested in the counseling profession. So we were interested in mental health, and going to things to do with mental health at that time. Then we took a trip to Mexico in 1965. We spent a whole year in Mexico, 1965 to 1966. That's when Johnson was escalating the war. I was reading about it from afar and feeling quite annoyed about it. Then it was just a matter of coming back to

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Lexington, and getting more and more annoyed. Just looking at the news and reading and just feeling very, very angry about what was going on there. Especially [since] I had had these experiences both with Koreans and Mexicans. And I think I understood what poverty was. I felt that it's just terrible what they're doing to this poor country. So I was gradually working myself up to doing something, and I think it was 1969 when there was a Peace Action Day. Governor Sargent spoke on the Lexington Green.<sup>1</sup> I think at about that time I was getting pretty much around to saying, I've got to start doing something. The first thing we did was May 9th, 1971 that there was a march to Hanscom. It's probably in your records, right, march to Hanscom?

**INT:** And what was that? Tell us.

**BG:** It was put on by some MIT students—or was it some division of a national coalition or something?—but it was MIT. It was a very peaceful march, from Fiske Hill to the gates of Hanscom, and speeches, and burning of effigies and stuff like that, and the Air Force. And we were coming and set up a platform out there, and everything was great. A girl named Emily Bass gave a great, very inspirational speech. So at that time I decided I ought to get going with those people. I didn't know anything was going on in Lexington. So I said, well we ought to get going. So we got there when they met, and we found out they meet at MIT. The next meeting we went. Frankly I do not remember what we talked about or decided in that meeting. It was a get-acquainted meeting. I think Roger Trudeau was there, too. Otherwise I don't think anyone else from Lexington was [there]. That was just a few weeks preceding this major event, wasn't it?

**INT:** That's right. So you were ready to participate?

**BG:** Yes. And then some way, somehow I found out there was a CPP [Citizens for Participation Politics] in Lexington. I hadn't even heard of it.

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<sup>1</sup>The occasion was Moratorium Day, October 15, 1969.

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I immediately called Norma McGavern [McGavern-Norland] to say I was very interested in belonging; I'd like to be really active. She said, "Well why don't you come over to my house? I'll give you the membership list." I then had the membership list, and I began to think, okay, I could really be active here if something happens. And then we're getting into the events.

**INT:** So this was in May also, is that right?

**BG:** I'm pretty sure it was May. It would have to have been. It would have to have been before May 24.

**INT:** So now we're in May and we're in Lexington and you've begun to get involved and want to be involved locally. And something happened in terms of the Lexington Green. How did you hear about that? What do you remember from that?

**BG:** It's a good question about how I heard about it. I don't know whether it was from the newspaper, or whether I got a call from somebody in CPP. I don't know. Somehow I found out that there was a meeting on May 24—that was a Monday, I think. So I went down there, and I was late for some reason. I don't know why. I couldn't find it or I got a late start or something. It was pretty much near the end of the meeting, so I didn't really get the full flavor of that.

**INT:** This meeting was at the Town Hall, was it?

**BG:** Yes, at the Town Hall, the Selectmen. They were deciding not to allow them [the Vietnam Veterans Against the War] to camp on the Green. The group that was there was pretty dispirited. We came out of there and stood around in the Town Hall there. The only ones I remember there were the Joneses [Bonnie and James Jones] because I never knew them before, and it just struck me. There were several other people there that I remember. I don't know what we decided either.

**INT:** So you don't recall any particular action?

**BG:** No, I don't.

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**INT:** Do you remember if there were veterans there?

**BG:** No, I don't recall any. If there were, they didn't participate in our group after the meeting.

**INT:** What do you remember next?

**BG:** Let's see. Well, there were some things that went by. I don't really remember any involvement. But somehow again I found out that the march was going to take place the next day, and the veterans were going to try to camp on the Green, as I understood it. So then I got out my names and I tried to reach anyone in the tennis community—which I was very active in—anyone that I thought would be sympathetic, like Gary [Margolius] and Bob Sproat who's since died, and Herman Epstein, Gerstenfeld. I can't even remember all the people I called anymore. I think I probably called people from that CPP list. Although it could be that I found out that they had already been called and I gave it up. I'm not sure about that.

**INT:** What was your message to them?

**BG:** That the veterans want to camp on the Green. I think that's a great thing, because this is such a historic, important place and it's going to get a lot of publicity, and it's going to help a lot to end this war. I think it was very important for the Lexington citizens to show support. So far we were looking awfully bad.

**INT:** So you were trying to get them out, get them...

**BG:** Absolutely. I was trying to rouse them. No doubt about it. Get them excited.

**INT:** Did you meet with any...?

**BG:** Oh, absolutely. Bob Sproat came. I don't think he marched in the town though. I think he had some problems, something he had to do or something. He couldn't come. But Gary Margolius I believe marched.

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Then I called my Federalist friends, Stillman and Liz Williams, if they didn't already know it. But they were there. They marched in with us.

**INT:** So you remember marching. When did that occur? This must have been Saturday.

**BG:** That was Saturday, right. But we had lunch out there on Fiske Hill. And then we marched on.

**INT:** So you had lunch on Fiske Hill?

**BG:** Yes.

**INT:** Did you bring your own picnic?

**BG:** I think we did, but I really don't remember. They were supplying food there, I think, but we probably brought our own.

**INT:** And were the vets there?

**BG:** Oh, that's right. It was a mixture of vets and citizens.

**INT:** And did you talk to any of the vets?

**BG:** Sure. We all mixed. I can't remember any conversations. Gary Margolius said that when he talked to vets in his letter here he says that he was inspired and it reminded him of the early Christians. But I don't remember any impression like that. So we walked in single file, walked into Lexington, into the Center. It kind of reminded me of my army days when you'd go out on the road for maneuvers and so on. They'd have you walk single file on each side of the road in case you get strafed or something. But this was finally a peaceful march. All I can say about it is it was a great feeling to be involved.

**INT:** Do you remember as you came into town from Fiske Hill, were there people on the sidewalks or the neighbors or along Mass. Avenue there? Do you remember?

**BG:** There were people along the way. I don't remember any significant hooting or the other way, of cheering. I think there were some cheers. But there wasn't any antagonism or anything that I can remember.



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**INT:** It was a nice day?

**BG:** Yes, it was. I guess it was pretty warm. It was warm, everyone in shirtsleeves.

**INT:** And then you got down to the Green?

**BG:** I know we walked along Worthen Road. I'm not sure. I know we walked down Mass. Avenue, the early part. And then we must have veered and walked along Worthen. I don't exactly remember that too clearly.

**INT:** So this was after lunch then?

**BG:** That was after lunch, right. We spent a lot of time out there. I think we dawdled for some reason or other and didn't get going...probably somewhere between two and three, my impression was. Because I think it was close to four...a demonstration in front of the Town Hall. Some of us decided we would go down there and see if we could persuade the committee [Board of Selectmen] to change their minds. It wasn't a large group, but we have pictures that give you an idea of just about how many people were there. We wanted Mr. Cataldo to come out, and he holed up in that trailer looking at us out the window. Mr. Kenney [a Selectman] stood there and talked with us. I was just so angry that he wouldn't come out, that he wouldn't come out and talk with citizens. Who was he that he wouldn't do that. That really made me almost as angry as the war. We were told that there would be a meeting later on that night. So I went home and I guess we had dinner and rested and came back for that meeting.

**INT:** Moving back to the trailer and your encounter, do you remember anything about what the conversation was between your group and Kenney?

**BG:** I wish I could. He was very friendly, and he tried to understand our position. But trying to give his position too. And he was very amicable. But other than that, I can't remember. I was so fixated on Cataldo looking out his window at me that I wasn't really paying that much attention to what was being said.

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**INT:** And why did you—did you particularly want Cataldo? You had one of the Selectmen.

**BG:** Well, he was the Chairman. I think I had heard him—maybe I got in the tail end of that meeting; maybe I heard him speak then and I didn't like his tone.

**INT:** You mentioned a trailer. Do you remember why there was a trailer there, or do you remember anything about that?

**BG:** I have a feeling there were renovations going on. I think there were renovations. He was using it like an office.

**INT:** The trailer was their office?

**BG:** Yes. But there was no excuse for him not to come out. It wasn't a mob. There may have been thirty people there, I'm not sure, but it wasn't a mob.

**INT:** The position that Mr. Kenney was trying to explain, do you recall what that position actually was?

**BG:** I don't remember words. It probably was the history of the Green—we don't allow people on it. What if we did, and what'll happen. You know, the usual arguments, the more narrow arguments about it, not seeing the bigger picture, and the responsibility of the Selectmen and that kind of thing. But I couldn't swear to anything he said.

**INT:** So you went home, got some supper, and then you came back to the meeting?

**BG:** Then came back to the Green. No, to the meeting first.

**INT:** Let's talk about the meeting. You might remember the tone or the number of people there—just whatever you remember.

**BG:** Oh, in the main Cary Hall. I'm afraid now it's mixing up with things I've read since, so I'm not sure. I understand the Selectmen spoke first, gave their position and then gave townspeople a chance to speak.

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Gary Margolius says in his letter that he spoke twice, and I don't remember him speaking once. So that's how much I remember about the speeches.

**INT:** You don't remember speaking yourself?

**BG:** No, I certainly didn't. My feeling was that I was a Johnny-come-lately both to the town and to the movement. And I ought to let those people speak first that I considered the leaders of this movement. CPP got started long before I got interested in it. So I didn't—I just didn't think it was my place. If I felt that something was not being said that should have been said, I probably would have tried to speak. But it was. They were voicing my thoughts. So there was no need for me to speak.

**INT:** So this was the meeting and this was an after-supper meeting?

**BG:** This was the after-supper meeting, yes. Right.

**INT:** Then what happened after the meeting?

**BG:** We dispersed. The answer was still no. We dispersed and we said, okay, we're going to have to go down and join the veterans on the Green. So we went home and got our stuff, whatever, our blankets, coats, maybe something to drink. And came back down on the Green.

**INT:** What was the mood on the Green when you were down there with your gear?

**BG:** Oh, great camaraderie. There was some singing and hand holding, sitting around in circles and things like that. As Eva said, passing a bottle around. I particularly remember there was a girl singing folk songs. I just loved that. I had been since then trying to find out who was she. It was so wonderful.

**INT:** She was leading other people or performing?

**BG:** Well, and she was singing solos too.

**INT:** Do you remember what she sang?

**BG:** Oh, the usual. “Where Have All the Flowers Gone,” “Blowing in the Wind” and all the great folk songs of that period.

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**INT:** That's nice. So what time was it getting to be then? Was it dark yet?

**BG:** I can't remember. We probably got there somewhere after eight, between eight and nine. And then ten o'clock came, and we figured the police were going to come and get us at ten o'clock because that was the deadline. But they didn't.

**INT:** Besides the folk singing, do you remember if there were any speeches or anything formal that happened while you were on the Green?

**BG:** I believe there were some kinds of speeches early on, I think when we were settling in, just first getting there. But again, I'm a little fuzzy on that. I remember the latter part better.

**INT:** Do you remember any announcements, or how did you know to expect to be arrested? Do you remember that?

**BG:** There were a couple of announcements. I know there was an announcement that the police are now getting ready to come. I think there was an announcement earlier that nothing has worked, that we're still not going to be permitted to stay on the Green. Then I think Mr. Cataldo came and offered the dump site [former dump on Lincoln Street]. And the vets voted on that and rejected it.

**INT:** How did you feel about that?

**BG:** Somewhere along this line—I'm not sure where it was; it might have been at the Town Hall I began thinking, I hope they don't let us stay on the Green. I'm beginning to get the feeling that, let's cause a big commotion here. This will do more to end the war than if they just went through their routine exercises. That's the way I was feeling at that moment.

**INT:** So you did stay?

**BG:** Oh, yes.

**INT:** Then what do you remember next?

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**BG:** Getting cold. And wondering when they were coming. Let's get this over with. If you're going to arrest us, do it. Other than that, just chatting and sitting there. That's all. It was a nice atmosphere, really, until it got cold. In the early morning hours there we began to get cold. We weren't expecting that. So we were glad when the buses pulled up—very eager to get on there, get warm.

**INT:** What do you remember? What pictures go through your head when you think about that, those moments when the buses first came?

**BG:** It struck me how orderly everything was—wonderfully orderly.

**INT:** What kind of buses? What did they look like?

**BG:** Gee, I think they were yellow. I think they were yellow school buses, weren't they? I think so. Eva would be much better at remembering the details of this.

**INT:** Well, we'll go with Eva later. So were you among the first?

**BG:** No, we were sort of back from where the buses pulled up, so we had to work our way forward. We had to wait a bit to get on. We weren't near the end. We were in the middle somewhere.

**INT:** So you got on the bus, and then what happened?

**BG:** The bus went directly to the town garage [the Department of Public Works' storage garage or barn]. And Raboin was on the police force was there taking names, taking information and so on. So we kidded and so on. It was all a great atmosphere.

**INT:** So you got booked in?

**BG:** Yes, we got booked in.

**INT:** What was the name of the police officer?

**BG:** Tom Raboin, yes, Tom. He had roofed our house.

**INT:** Is he still on the force?

**BG:** Gee, I think he is. Last I knew he was.

**INT:** It might be interesting to talk to him.

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**BG:** And everything was very friendly.

**INT:** So there you were at the Town Barn, the temporary jail?

**BG:** Yes.

**INT:** What do you remember from the people who were around, or what happened inside the Town Barn?

**BG:** Again, not much. I think we were all very tired. We tended to want to sleep if we could. I may have slept, I don't even know how, on that hard floor. I'm not sure. But it seemed as though the time went fairly fast. I don't remember going through long stretches of being bored, being awake and bored. Either I was sleeping or maybe chatting a little bit with some people.

**INT:** And were the vets there as well?

**BG:** Yes, sure. I remember John Kerry there certainly.

**INT:** What do you remember about John Kerry?

**BG:** I remember he sort of was sitting up on something. I remember him holding his knee or something. And he seemed to be sort of setting himself apart at that time. That was the impression I had of him, that he was setting himself apart. But he stayed. He didn't get bailed out. He did go to court.

**INT:** Then did you go to court from there?

**BG:** Yes, then we waited and went to Concord Court. It was a routine thing. Paid our five dollars. Got cheered as we walked in. Everyone got cheered when they walked into the court.

**INT:** Who was cheering?

**BG:** I think maybe lots of them were husbands and wives probably of the people who were arrested. But I don't know.

**INT:** Your spouse was arrested with you?

**BG:** Yes, my spouse was arrested with me.

**INT:** Do you remember why did you have to pay five dollars?

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**BG:** Yes, we paid five dollars, pleaded *nolo contendere*, is that it?

**INT:** To what?

**BG:** I think they reduced the charges. They reduced them to just trespassing. I think that's all it was. They could have charged us with more, I guess, but they didn't. There was some compromise made. We had good lawyers [laughter]. So then we went home. We were still very tired, and I think we slept that morning, maybe into the afternoon. And then I had the feeling that I wanted to get back to MIT and let the people out there know what was going on. So there was a meeting that night. I could be wrong, but I think it was that night, because they didn't know about it. They would have known about it if it were the next day. I described to them at the time, probably a lot better than I'm describing it now, what had happened. I volunteered at that time to be sort of an intermediary between what was going on at MIT and CPP in Lexington. I thought that would be a very important role for me. I thought then that it was going to develop into a big thing. I'm still mystified why it didn't. I'm thinking maybe it was because students were almost through with their year and they stopped having meetings. I think that's what happened. Then when we got into the fall I got very involved in the McGovern campaign. So that really didn't develop. I think also maybe people in Lexington, like CPP, probably didn't want to stir things up any more at this point. I'm just guessing.

**INT:** I'm wondering if you were involved at all in any of the meetings in Lexington that occurred soon after.

**BG:** There was a meeting soon after. I think it was in First Parish [Unitarian Church]. And that's where I think I first met you [the interviewer]. I'm not sure whether you chaired the meeting or you just volunteered to get up and speak. And really impressed me. I said, "This is a woman who really knows what she's talking about," and so on. And so I think ever since then I've been calling you and asking you who to vote for.

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[Laughter.] But again, I can't remember what we decided. I don't know whether we decided at that point that we were going to work for the defeat of Mr. Cataldo in the next election—that would be my guess is what we decided to do. And I certainly participated in that. I was very active, ringing doorbells, writing letters. I did everything I could to get him to lose.

**INT:** Were you successful?

**BG:** Yes, we were successful. It was a delightful moment in my life.

**INT:** Do you remember anything else about that campaign, like who was running against him?

**BG:** Of course. Sandy Brown, who has since died. I guess he died not too long after, didn't he? He died sooner than I would have expected him to.

**INT:** What did you perceive the reaction of Lexington people to be after this event, soon after, and then as you moved into these two meetings?

**BG:** Of course there was the big meeting at the Town Hall after that. Just about everybody was there, and all the speeches. I was pretty proud of my town. I think the speeches that favored the vets certainly I think drowned out the others. There certainly were strong speeches made on the other side, but I think if you added it all up and the total picture was that the town was positive.

**INT:** Positive in support of the vets?

**BG:** Yes, right.

**INT:** What did you feel were the core issues here?

**BG:** The core issues? I certainly wasn't thinking of things like freedom of speech or anything like that. I was just thinking that there was a broad issue here about the Vietnam War, and not about some parochial thing about use of property and that kind of thing. This was too big an issue. People were dying, and so if there was something being done here in



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Lexington that could stop this dying, we should all be in favor of it. We shouldn't be hiding behind these little rules, and so on. That to me was the issue. Beyond that the issue was these Selectmen are people we elected, people who are supposed to be serving us. And they were acting, especially Mr. Cataldo, as if he was like a dictator, like he was going to decide things. He didn't really want to listen. He didn't really want to compromise. Didn't want to try to understand. He was very unsympathetic. I understand he had some authority. He had a job to do. But he didn't seem responsive. He didn't seem to want to meet us halfway or anything. That really disturbed me.

**INT:** So was the war and the democracy issue...?

**BG:** Yes, both. I wasn't thinking about that at the time, the larger issues. I just knew what I thought ought to be done, and I was working to get it done. That's really what was happening.

**INT2:** Can I interject? If the Selectmen or Mr. Cataldo were hiding behind a small regulation, why were they hiding behind it? What were they hiding? Were they opposed?

**BG:** I really think they were opposed. I really think they were pro-war, pro-Administration because they offered some ridiculous excuses. "You couldn't use the playground area because you might disturb the neighbors." Well, anywhere you go...I mean we have carnivals down there disturbing the neighbors. "You couldn't march through the town," although we've had parades through the town umpteen times. "There might be violence." I mean, these things were all ridiculous. It seemed to be a disguise for just not wanting this thing to happen.

**INT:** Did the other Selectmen talk at all in that early meeting that you went to?

**BG:** I think they all had something to say, yes.

**INT:** But they sort of gave into Cataldo as you saw it?

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**BG:** I think Mr. [Al] Busa was certainly—definitely—on his side. Probably their views didn't differ at all. Mr. [Fred] Bailey seemed like a person who could be influenced maybe the other way, but he was sticking with those two. Same with Mr. [Allan] Kenney. And Natalie Riffin wasn't there that weekend, as I understand. I don't remember her anyhow. People told me that she was sympathetic to our point of view, but she wasn't there.

**INT:** Looking back, do you think this has had any kind of long-lasting impact on the town?

**BG:** I'm not as aware of town affairs maybe as other people. I don't follow things that carefully. I would have thought that they would probably develop some polarity there following that. Although I think it was happening even before. Probably increased it. But I don't know whether it was lasting. I really don't know.

**INT:** Did it have an impact on you?

**BG:** I felt a lot better. A lot better. And I did feel, you know, especially like reading in *The Traveler* [*Boston Herald Traveler*] front page, really a big spread on it; I thought okay, people are paying attention.

**INT:** Did you ever get the impression that these Selectmen were really patriotic as they defined patriotism?

**BG:** Yes, well, I would give them credit for that. I assume from their point of view they were doing the right thing. That they were patriotic—yes, sure. I think it's misplaced, but that defining is still going on today. What is patriotism? My idea of patriotism is not to always compliment your country and always think that it's great and it's the head of everything else, but it is to find the things that are wrong with it and try to correct them because you really care about the country. That's my definition of patriotism.

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**INT:** In terms of the effect of this event, how does it fit into the war itself, the Vietnam War and the termination of it? Do you think it had any role there?

**BG:** Sure. I don't think you could isolate any one event. There was an impact. Gradually it was getting to the Administration. An incident here, an incident there—all over the place. Something happening in Lexington had a little bit more contribute. Because it was Lexington. I can't prove that. I don't know whether Johnson read the paper or anything. I don't know. It was Nixon at the time, wasn't it? Yes, it was Nixon. So sure, I think it had an impact. I feel the same way about that I feel about everything I do. I try to participate in various things, what I think is a good cause. I know what I'm doing personally is not making a big difference, but I feel it's like a little pebble, and they'll all contribute to some better thing eventually happening.

**INT:** If you could, I would simply like to hear you talk more about how you came to feel such indignation about the killing in Korea and your frustration with peripheral issues like the shape of the table or, in this case you were talking about all the excuses they made up. Any of those areas that you want to add to?

**BG:** I don't know—it's an interesting connection you just made. I hadn't really thought about that, you know, making shallow excuses for something that's very important. There is a similarity there. I don't know whether they were emotionally connected or not. When I was in Korea from the day I got there all I saw was poverty and suffering all the way up to the front line. I tried to give some food to a Korean once, and the American cook nearly killed me for trying to give them some food. That kind of thing really disturbed me. A lot of people in the U.S. Army were making derogatory remarks about these people. And it really bothered me.

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**INT:** Do you want to describe that in detail, that circumstance where you tried to give some food?

**BG:** I was halfway up to the front line. There was a depot there, a stopover, and then the mess hall. I saw them outside the barbed wire surrounding the camp. And I went in. I took extras, and I just ate some. Then I walked out. The cook apparently was watching for people like me, you know, wanting to give away food, so he followed me out. He actually followed me out. Of course I was just a buck private, I just got out to Korea, and he was a sergeant or something. So he ordered me to throw that food in the trash barrel rather than give it to "those people." American Army. So that's one thing. I began to lose faith in what we were doing over there. And I was getting news from home. I had people sending me magazines. I was reading constantly what was going on in Korea. I knew all about the peace talks. So while I was on the line I was reading about what was going on. And I was just thinking how crazy this is. Day after day patrols are going out, people are getting killed. And they're dithering. You know it's going to come to an end. You know they're going to finally settle it so why not get over these little picky things? Then you'd read that they only came and met at two o'clock and adjourned at four, that kind of thing. People are still dying while they're doing this. It was very unsettling, very, very unsettling. I was just darned if I was going to contribute to somebody's death under these conditions.

**INT:** But they didn't court martial you, which is impressive in some ways.

**BG:** Brought me back to the camp area and just had me stew there for several days. I just didn't know what was happening. I wrote letters home saying I'm probably going to be court martialed. And people back home could not fathom...what did you do, how could you do something like that?

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It was completely inexplicable I guess. This is what majoring in English in college does to you, you see.

**INT:** What didn't they understand? Did they think you had done something flagrantly unpatriotic? I would like to hear more about what exactly was in people's minds when they didn't understand the court martial. What was their thinking, what were their fears about what was going on?

**BG:** I think it was more just conventional thinking, that people just did what they were supposed to do. You just did your duty, that kind of thing. My family wasn't super-patriotic. But I came from a family of nine, and I was the youngest and I had three brothers and two brothers-in-law that served in World War II, even though none of them saw any action. That's the incredible thing. None of them saw any action. My family is brought up and there's kind of a tradition of serving your country and so on. So this was sort of a strange thing to happen. And I was always such a good boy too. Never gave them any trouble in school or any of that stuff.

[Laughter.]

**INT:** But they did understand why you did...?

**BG:** I'm not sure they ever understood why. I'm really not. I am not sure they ever understood. They've never given me any trouble about it. It's just buried, it's just forgotten. I think several years later my mother said, "Now why was it that you got [that]?" She just couldn't understand it.

**INT:** What do you think might have been in your background, in your experience, that attuned you to respond to the situation in Korea the way you did when there were so many people who were not responding like that?

**BG:** It's probably a very complicated question. As I said, I was the youngest in the family. I got a lot of attention. And a lot of love I guess. I had four older sisters, quite a bit older and a mother, all who seemed fond of me. I just think I was predisposed to like people, to want to help people

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and not kill people. That was my predisposition. My brother, my oldest brother, he loves hunting. I can't understand him at all. It's just so alien to me. He's second oldest in the family. I was the youngest. My mother just believed in the good old virtues of honesty and friendliness, all those things. Going to college and majoring in English certainly had a big impact on me. All the reading that I did, reading an enormous amount of novels, short stories, plays, and so on. Generally you'd say that these are humanitarians who write these things. And so I was already predisposed. That just magnified it.

**INT:** You said you gave up your job soon after that?

**BG:** It wasn't really connected. All my life I decided I'm going to quit working around age forty, spend a year in Mexico. I delayed it a year. I was going to do some things that I wanted to do, not for money. I wasn't going to work for money. I was going to do things that I really liked doing just for the fun. So I started painting. And gardening. And I was very active playing tennis. And political action. All those things. So my life became very varied after I retired. But no income. My wife provided the income.

**INT:** You said you went on to do political action?

**BG:** Any political campaign that came along. The McGovern campaign, of course, both the nomination and the election. I worked for John Kerry. I put a lot of time in for Stephen Doran a little later. And Paul Tsongas. Not so much for Udall, but some. And just about any liberal candidate that came along.

**INT:** John Anderson?

**BG:** John...well, see, now there's something. In that election, when John Anderson ran, I decided I was going to leave the Democratic Party temporarily and register as a Republican so I could participate in the John Anderson campaign. In fact, I became co-chair in Lexington of the John

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Anderson campaign. And John Anderson won the election,<sup>2</sup> too. But I felt that his views reflected mine more than the other candidates. More than Jimmy Carter and certainly more than Reagan.

**INT:** I have questions that are about today and whether in the Lexington that you're living in now if you think an issue arose, could something similar happen here again? Do you think it could happen right now, or what it might be like if it did?

**BG:** Boy, that's a real speculation.

**INT:** Speculate for us.

**BG:** I think there's more of a sentiment probably for that kind of thing, I would think. I think you'd get a good turnout for something like that. I mean I have a lot of faith in Lexington now. Having lived here for a number of years, I think it's basically a liberal town.

**INT:** What are your interactions now in town that give you that sense, the kind of groups that you're in contact with?

**BG:** I did become a member of First Parish Church a few years ago. That really has an impact. And we've worked with other churches on various issues, helping raise money for the refugees from Central America and the homeless problem, and so on. So we've been working with other churches. Just from reading the newspaper, the letters to the editor. What else could it be?

**INT:** In the Gulf War the protest movement was minuscule.

**BG:** Minuscule. It was. And I was part of it, by the way. I was out there holding a sign. I wrote a letter to the editor in the Lexington paper. Eva and I both went down and held signs down Mass. Avenue in front of Town Hall. One side of me is saying this is a U.N. action, this is good, we need to stop aggression, absolutely. I was a hundred percent in favor of that. When George Bush sent those troops over there I said good, that's

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<sup>2</sup> John Anderson won a third party presidential nomination; he *lost* the election, however.

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what we need to do. Good, he's going to the U.N. Fine. I was approving of everything he did. Up until the time that Congress was going to vote to give him the power to actually start the war. And of course I didn't want the vote to go that way, and it went the wrong way for me. Then sure enough, I knew he was going to do that. I knew as soon as he got that vote he was going to start the war, and I didn't think it was necessary. I think they should have held firm, kept up the embargo, made their point that you're not going to get away with this, and we got the patience, and we're going to hold out. It would have been awful if the U.N. did nothing. But all those lives that were lost: they estimated something like two hundred thousand Iraqis. Some of them were buried alive. And many of them were conscripts just because they couldn't find a job anywhere else. That's the only reason they're in the army. It's for money to survive. I was really against that. I can understand the town being for it. It wasn't as clear-cut in my mind. I was against it, but I could understand the people on the other side. I didn't blame Lexington for that.

**INT:** Did you find it difficult? What did it feel like to be protesting and be surrounded by yellow ribbons?

**BG:** Gee, I don't know. I wasn't particularly upset about it. I just sort of accepted it. Didn't agree with it, but I could understand it. Didn't think it was horrible. I felt all I can do is just make my point, say what I got to say, and that's it. I didn't have much hope from the beginning it would do any good.

**INT:** Were you ever tempted to run for Town Meeting?

**BG:** Not at all. I'm dreadfully afraid of public speaking of any kind. I'd hate it. Hate it. It's one of the reasons I moved from teaching to counseling, to get away from standing in front of a group and talking. No, not at all. Probably like being one of the soldiers; I don't want to be a



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leader. I'm not interested in doing that. Just participate, just make my contribution on the right side, and that's it.

**INT:** Do you have anything that you would like to add? Are there any visual memories that you had in connection with being on the Green, or the meeting? You described Kerry set apart, which is particularly interesting...so I was wondering, what else, when you think back to it, do you see?

**BG:** I really can't say. I did have a little uncomfortable feeling, but I certainly felt good about John Kerry at that time. Later on when he ran for office I worked for him. Then when it was a case of either [Congressman] Shannon or Kerry, although I liked Shannon very much and worked for Shannon, I voted for Kerry because I really thought he was very much anti-war. I cared more about that than anything else, that he was anti-war. Since then I was very disappointed. He made a comment on television supporting the Panama—no, it was the Grenada—invasion. I wrote him a letter saying, “I need an explanation for that—why?” I waited a long time. Then they called me for money and I said, “No, I'm not giving you any money until I get an explanation.” Finally I got a letter from him. All he sent was an explanation of why George Bush did what he did, and the reasons that were given. And I said, oh, he's changed.

END OF INTERVIEW