LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Kenneth Hale
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Interviewed by Eugenia Kaledin
Videotape length 59 minutes

KH: I'm Kenneth Hale. I have been living in Lexington since 1967 when I came here from Arizona to teach at MIT.

INT: Can you tell us what you were doing at this time, what made you aware of this [event]?

KH: When I first came to live in the Boston area—in Lexington, in fact, to work at MIT—I got involved in a draft resistance organization, an organization called Resist that was established to help young men to the extent that they could by supporting them in their resistance to the draft. As a consequence I had a lot of colleagues and other acquaintances in the organization. So I was pretty much aware of what was going on all of the time. I heard of every action that was being taken. When this was planned I heard about it, and I took the opportunity to come back to Lexington from MIT to join in—I think I had been at MIT; I don't know whether I was at MIT that day or not. But the first thing I can remember, actually, is joining the procession of Vietnam veterans from a point on the other side of [Route] 128 to the Green. This is what I can remember, anyway. I can't remember the details.

INT: So you went with them to the Green. Then did you stay there on the Green?

KH: Yes. I think I stayed there from that time. I may have gone home to tell my wife that I was going to be doing this, and that you—I can't remember how, but you were also there, or perhaps you came on the march, too. I can't remember. But I did, for most of the time I stayed on the Green after we arrived at the Green.

INT: Were you aware of the controversy about spending the night on the Green?

KH: Oh, yes, I was aware of it. It was obvious, because there was a lot of... I mean, everybody was talking about the controversy, and a lot of anger against the people in the town who were against having the Vietnam veterans stay on the Green. And there were, of course, lots of townspeople that were very supportive of the veterans, too.

INT: Were you aware of any people around who were opposing them staying on the Green?

KH: I was right in the middle of people who were in support of them. So I didn't hear. I wasn't in contact with people that were opposing it. It was just what I was hearing from other people.

INT: Did you stay right on the Green, or did you go to other places in the town?

KH: A couple of times I went to the church, because that was the place where they had facilities. So I would go to the church occasionally, and then come back to the Green. But I wanted to be there all of the time if I could.

INT: Did you have any interaction with the veterans themselves?

KH: A couple of times I talked to veterans. There was one veteran who had been a student of ours at MIT, a linguistics student. I tried to talk to veterans several times, but it wasn't easy to talk to people that I didn't know. He was only the one that I knew that I could really talk to. There were also people who were not veterans that were there but who had opposed the draft. There were a couple of people in that category that were there, too.

INT: Who had resisted the draft?

KH: Who had resisted the draft, right.

INT: Were these young students, or...?

KH: Students, yes. There was a person who had been at that action, who had been in the sanctuary at MIT. I think he was there, but I'm not sure. I may have mixed up the people that I talked to. Because the thing about this Green action, or the occupation of the Green as I thought of it, was that it was one of many things that were going on. It seemed to me at that time, that there was something going on every day. It all became something of a blur in the past. Anyway, I can't keep things separate as well as other people in regard to this because it was one of hundreds of different actions that I was involved in.

INT: Was there a lot of tension on the Green about...?

KH: There was tension. There was excitement. A lot of the people I was with, for example, were very tense but in an excited sort of way because they felt that this was very worth doing. They were much encouraged by the fact that there were so many people there—I don't know how many, four hundred or so people—who were determined to stay there and to support the vets. So there was a certain amount of excitement as well as tension. It was interesting to talk to my own friends and colleagues who were all there. As a matter of fact, it was a good occasion for us to get together. It's very difficult in this area to get together with a number of people at once, people that are friends of yours and so forth and this was a wonderful opportunity to do that. There was a certain amount of apprehension because we knew it was possible—early in the evening, we knew it was possible—that the police could come, and we didn't know how the police were going to act. So there was some tension in that respect. There was a feeling of goodwill among the people who were staying there.

INT: Now, when the buses came up and the people—was it the State Police who made the arrests?

KH: I'm not sure which group.[1] But that was very frightening. When they came up they got out. The buses were on the street. I guess it was on the Mass. Avenue side of the Green. And when the police got out, they lined up and sort of faced us like a regiment, or something like that, some kind of real force that could really do us damage. They had these masks on—not masks exactly, but these plastic covers. I found that very frightening. But that aspect—someone must have told them not to take that stance, or something like that—that quickly dissipated, and it didn't seem so frightening after a few minutes.

INT: Did they move in among the crowd?

KH: My impression was, no. I don't remember exactly what they did. But my recollection was that people were simply being arrested and put on the buses. It was kind of a movement of people. It's not that the police came and grabbed people and hauled them off to the buses. That's not the impression I got. It was more that the people wanted to indicate their support for the vets. They wanted to be among those who were being supportive of the vets program or action. So they moved to be arrested. That was my impression because that was certainly the way I felt about it, that I wanted to be among those who indicated their support by getting arrested. I think lots of people around me did, too. There were some people, friends of mine, who were frightened because of experiences they had before. For example, people who were not American citizens, who came from countries where they have a lot of bad experiences with police. When they saw these cops, they were quite frightened. But I think they saw what other people were going and the attitude that most people had toward this whole business, and they calmed down very quickly. So it was a fairly straightforward procedure, in my opinion.

[1] Although State Police were present, they remained on the perimeter; the arrests were made by Lexington police.

INT: Were the vets being arrested as well?

KH: I don't know whether the vets were being arrested at that time or not. I don't know whether they actually got arrested. I'm not sure what happened to the vets. They weren't with us anyway.

INT: On the bus?

KH: Not on the bus that I was on anyway. I'm not sure what happened to the vets.

INT: So you then left the Green, got on the bus, and went to the Public Works garage where people were being arraigned. What was it like over there in the garage?

KH: Well, there was a lot of waiting. It was a long time, but it was an excellent experience for me because I was arrested with Noam Chomsky. You know that I am a colleague of Noam Chomsky's. I don't get to talk to him very much, because he is extremely busy, because he has many students. So this was an opportunity for me to spend a lot of time talking to him about the things we do, about linguistics. And I heard a lot of things about politics and lots of things so it was a fine experience for me. Probably not a very nice experience for him, but for me it was terrific. So, I just remember a long wait and that we were taken over to Concord, or was it Bedford?[2] I can't remember where we were taken. I think we had to pay a fine. I think it was a $20 fine. I think most everyone paid the fine. Maybe some people refused to pay the fine, but in the end, we were released.

INT: Did you go by the Green on your way home?

KH: I can't remember. Because I can't remember how I got back, even. This was some time ago. There was no one on the Green the next time I saw it, but I don't know what happened right after the court. That was the next day.

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[2] It was Concord District Court. A $5.00 fine was assessed by Judge John Forte. (See Judge Forte interview.)

INT: When you saw the Green, was it in close proximity time-wise to this arrest? Or do you think it was...?

KH: Do you mean after?

INT: Yes.

KH: Oh, I think I saw it the next day. But I don't remember after that. I just remember it being empty the next time I saw it.

INT: Littered or bare patches of grass, or...

KH: I don't remember. There may have been some scuffs and you know...but that's bound to be the case. There were lots of people there. It was not just the people who got arrested. I think something like four hundred got arrested, but there were at least twice that many, maybe more.

INT: Four hundred fifty-eight [got arrested].

KH: Four hundred fifty-eight people, yes. I remember something about four hundred. So four hundred fifty-eight people were arrested. There were the people that did the arresting, and there were lots of other people that didn't get arrested because you could choose not to get arrested. It was very easy not to get arrested. My impression was that getting arrested was something you did in order to indicate support. It was not something that was inevitable, because it was such a large group.

INT: Before the arrest, it must have felt kind of crowded on the Green.

KH: It was fairly crowded, yes.

INT: Crowded, not easy to move around, and...?

KH: I think it would have been difficult if you had to find somebody.

INT: Was it cold, do you remember?

KH: I think it was. I can't remember whether it was cold, but I think I remember you bringing me something to keep warm with. I think you brought me a jacket. It wasn't freezing, it wasn't *very* cold, but it was...

INT: A cold night.

KH: Yes, yes.

INT: I would like to know how it was that you initially became concerned and interested in the whole draft resisting movement, and something about the theory and philosophy, and so forth, and also what your thinking was as it pertained to this particular event?

KH: The reason that I got involved at this action really goes back all the way to Australia in the 1950's, late 1950's when I learned something that I should have learned before, but didn't really learn before. There are the people who are in power in whatever place you are [and they] are not necessarily interested in the welfare of ordinary people. This becomes, of course, very obvious in situations where you have a group of people like the Australian Aborigines, for example, who are the targets of a lot of oppression and even violence on the part of the population around them. When I was in Australia I took a trip to Western Australia to gather information on the languages in a part of Western Australia that I was interested in because the languages hadn't been recorded very much. There is one of the languages that I failed to record, because I didn't have the mike plugged in.

In the course of that trip, I spent some time—two weeks, in fact—with a labor organizer who had organized a group of about four hundred Aboriginal people to strike against the oppressive work conditions in the northern part of Western Australia. They were pasturalists in the cattle industry. He was, at the time that I arrived at his place, organizing a new group of Aboriginal people that happened to speak a language that I wanted to work on. When I arrived there initially I was very suspicious of him because people had told me he was a Communist. I came from Arizona and was a very good candidate to be a Goldwater Republican. In fact, those were my sentiments. So I had hated Communists. I told this friend of mine who was with me on

this trip that I didn't want to have anything to do with this Communist. I don't want to go there, and he said, "Well, don't worry. We'll just go because there are lots of Aboriginal people there, you know, lots of languages." And so we went there.

The day we arrived, the very time we arrived, he was talking to a group of Aboriginal stockmen and other kinds of Aboriginal workers. He was talking to them and that was the first time I had ever seen a white person in Australia talking to Aboriginal people as if they were people and not using some kind of pidgin, sort of imagined pidgin English, or something like that—that seems to be something made up, really something that came out of comic books or something like that. That was what you usually heard when people talked to Aboriginal people. Well, this guy was talking to these workers the way an organizer would talk to workers. That so blew my mind by comparison with the experiences that I had had prior to that in Australia that I said, "Man, this is something new, and I've got to pay attention to it."

I became quite close to this guy because he started telling me and asking me about the United States, and asking me about Native Americans, and so forth. He would keep me up all night because he was starved for conversation about that kind of thing. I remember at one point when he was talking to me in the evening I was so tired because I had been working on the language before all during the day and I fell off this swag. (A "swag" is a bedroll. They are big bedrolls in Australia.) And I was sitting on it. I fell off of it, just right into the dust. He picked me up and he said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I won't keep you up anymore."

Anyway, this experience happened about half a week after I got there. I drove in with one of the people working with him into a little town called Woburn where I was working on a language called Neruma. When I pulled up and stopped the Land Rover—I had a little Land Rover—I heard the siren

of a police car coming from a town across the river, the town of Woburn. It was where the police station was, across the river. And I heard this thing coming. I saw this [cloud] of dust developing all the way over. It was coming right to where I was. He pulled up [like] the Lone Ranger on Silver, something like that, creating a lot of dust. He got out and says, "Don't you know that you can't be within 17 chain of a…"—I'm not sure what 17 chain is, but it's some distance—"17 chain of an Aboriginal reserve without local police permission?" The Aboriginal person that was with me, the Aboriginal person who came from Don McCloud's camp—this man's name was Don McCloud, the organizer—he confronted that policeman and said, "You know, it doesn't matter. He's my guest, and I have every right to have him here. I know I do, because I know the law."

So, as I said, that was another mind-blowing experience by comparison to what I had seen elsewhere in Australia. I figured from that, that it's really important to protest. That is the gain you make by protesting. Whereas they protested for a couple of years, and then, beaten, and, you know, hunted, and so forth. But they had gotten a sort of new era, or a new world for a group of Aboriginal people.

I figured that turned me around a lot. I began to be suspicious of whatever the people in power were doing or the powerful forces in the world were doing including the U.S. government which was the most powerful force. I began to notice what was happening in various parts of the world, what the U.S. was doing. I was very suspicious and very angry about it. Eventually, after another trip to Australia I came back here to start working at MIT where Noam Chomsky was. That helped also for my way of thinking about these things. I said, "Look, it's just necessary to support resistance." I haven't got the kind of energy and so forth to actually be a strong resister myself or an organizer or something like that. But at least I

feel that it's important to support resistance to any kind of illegitimate authority. So, when I had an opportunity to work with Resist, I did that. I still work with Resist to some extent.

So this—the action on the Green—was a part of the whole thing. I saw the Vietnam veterans as victims of a terrible crime just like the Vietnamese that were being slaughtered and the Cambodians, and, in fact, in almost every corner of the globe there is something that the U.S. can be blamed for: Chile, Guatemala, Eastern Nicaragua, Eastern Timor, for example. Just everywhere there is something that you can look to that really must be opposed. So, opposition to the military—that is, opposition to the U.S. use of the military—is just absolutely necessary, in my opinion.

That's the reason I was interested in supporting what the Vietnam veterans were doing because they were opposing. They were probably the most important voice in opposition to the war and continue to be one of the most important forces in educating people in high school and so forth, people who are getting to the age where they are going to have to make decisions in relation to the military. These Vietnam veterans have organized educational efforts in schools all over the country—extremely important. The work of the Vietnam veterans which began in the period of the war itself is continuing. It's a kind of product of what began, in part, here in Lexington. So I think it's just inevitable that I had to be involved in it if I had these feelings. You couldn't avoid it. That's all I can say about that for the moment.

INT: I wanted to ask, because you went on the basis of sort of a personal experience that you had, and we always wind up asking this question about how it came to be in Lexington that this opposition was there, and what happened as a result of this whole event that happened here. Do you have any view on that?

KH: Yes, there are two factors, I think. Lexington historically is the logical place for a thing like this to happen, because it's a beginning. Lexington was a beginning in this country two hundred whatever years ago. That's one thing. The other thing is that Lexington does have a number of people—I mean, a number of quite important figures in this—how should I say it—resistance to legitimate authority. There is Noam Chomsky who lives here. Sal Luria [Nobel Prize-winning biologist] lived here as well. There were a number of other people in those days who were here. So it wasn't particularly difficult I would imagine to mount some sort of support for the Vietnam veterans' actions. So that's two things. Although there was a lot of opposition to what the vets were doing in the town because there were lots of conservative sentiments, elements, in the town there were lots of pervasive elements as well. It's the existence of the latter plus the historical importance of the Green. I think those two—that's the way I think of it. But there are other places where it makes sense, too.

INT: I had a question, but I don't know if you want to tell us how you feel about your experience in this country, within America, prior to going to Australia—did you feel the same kind of connectedness?

KH: Well, yes, I did. I was quite aware of the poverty of Native American people but I came from Arizona and I grew up in Arizona. I had the same attitudes about Native American people in Arizona as lots of people did. Except the only difference was that I was extremely interested in their cultures and languages. But I think the general attitude that I had was a general Arizona attitude—that there wasn't anything special about the fact that they were poor and we were not poor, or not too poor. That was sort of the way the world is. It wasn't until Australia that I began to see that it's not inevitable that it's like that. It's because I got a chance to see resistance.

I got a chance to see Aboriginal people who fought for their rights against incredible odds, that is, the people, when they set up a corporation. These labor organizers set up a corporation together with Aboriginal people; he sort of found these people. Amongst these Aboriginal workers he found people that were natural leaders. He even got them to the point where they were sort of talking. They had unit elements in the Aboriginal community who were not allowed to talk to one another because they had avoidance of kinships that made it impossible for, let's say, a certain woman to talk to a certain man. The mother-in-law can't talk to the son-in-law. But they would say well, look, that's our law. And we'll maintain it as our law. But we'll change our relationship and say semi-mother-in-law, semi son-in-law, and so forth, so that it would be possible for a woman who was a very good strong organizer to actually work with a son-in-law who was also a strong force in the thing. So there was culture change going on and all kinds of...

INT: Wasn't that violating the terms?

KH: Yes, they just turned it off. They said, right now we're not mother-in-law, we're semi-mother-in-law, or pseudo mother-in-law, or surrogate, or whatever—some sort of new term. So these exciting things were happening. I said, "Look, things that are supposed to be established and sort of fixed relations among people are not inevitable." I saw that over there in Western Australia, and I hadn't seen that before. And, of course, the necessary component is some kind of resistance to the situation that existed. And you have to struggle. Some people are good at struggling. I'm not particularly good at struggling myself, but I sure am good at wanting to support struggle, because it's absolutely necessary.

INT: Noticing it...

KH: Yes, noticing it. So later on, of course, there was plenty of protest and struggle among Native American people here. That is, modern struggle.

There had always been struggle, I just didn't notice it before. I didn't know. For example, something like fourteen miles from where I grew up there were great battles between Apaches and ranchers, right over there on the reservation. That is the military reservation now, Fort Wachuka, in that area. I just knew that as a kind of historical thing. But actually it was the same thing. It was a group of people who took charge of their destiny. Of course they are small. They didn't win, but that's because of overwhelming forces against them. But they resisted. I, of course, know that from hindsight.

But when I was a kid growing up they were the enemy. People talked about the Indian fights that there were over there and the people that were involved in them—some of whom were actually people that I actually saw. And they were old, old men, who had been involved in the capture of so and so, an Apache chief or something like that. I grew up with this idea that the Indian warriors were the enemy, and stuff like that. I didn't realize what it actually was. It wasn't until I went to Australia and saw the difference between situations where white people would talk to Aboriginal people as if they were nincompoops, as opposed to somebody who was talking to them as if they were men and women.

That was important too, that this was a situation where men and women, you know—I mean, no difference, as far as he was concerned. They were all possible workers in this—strikers, people who would strike against their oppressors. Eventually, he did such a good job of organizing that they just overwhelmed him and left him behind. He was happy with that because that was the whole point. I saw this happen and that was a big lesson for me, that what appears to be the state of affairs is not inevitable. That was the difference. When I came back and I saw what—Wounded Knee happened in 1973. I was really interested in that because that was something still

going on, the effects, the consequences of Wounded Knee going on and on and on—and they always will until Leonard Pelletier gets out of jail. Then, of course, it will go on from there, too, because there is a long way to go in the struggle for justice among indigenous peoples. There are domestic colonies in this country.

INT: It's been very fascinating.

KH: I can't say much about the Green, but I know why I went there. That's the only thing.

INT: Something that's interesting—but not everybody wants to speak to it—is the sociology or demographics of the town's politics. I don't know whether that interests you, but there were, I think, divisions, religious divisions, new town-old town, class. Is there anything around that that you think is pertinent?

KH: Let's see. When this was happening I didn't know very much about the town. This is something I feel a little bit ashamed of, that is, I did not really bother to learn what the town was like. You should always do that, especially if you're going to be in a place where you're going to be involved in some kind of political activity, even if it's sort of protest type of activity. You've got to know the place that you're doing it, and I didn't. I didn't really know, except vaguely. I knew there were elements that were very conservative in the town. And there was this old town-new town distinction because we experienced that. We were living not here [this house] but in another part of the town which I would say was completely "new town." That is, it was sort of a frontier. Because it was a part of the town it seemed to me at least [that it] was newly settled. People were young professionals. All of our neighbors were professionals our age in various professions. There were not many academics where we were living—but not business—usually research and stuff, mostly research type of people. It felt

to me that it didn't really belong, the place where we were living. It really didn't belong to Lexington because it was on the other side of Lowell Street. And it was a long way to the center of town. It was much closer to Arlington. So the center that you were attracted to—to catch a bus and stuff like that—was Arlington Heights, the Center. But when we moved here then we moved into a quite different place, next to people…I mean, you have diversity. We have diversity here because we have people who have been here forever right next to us up the hill, and the people who knew the people who built the house, and so forth on this side. And then on [the other] side we had a group of hippies or something, over on this side over there, you know—people, young professionals again, but very wild people on that side. So I just have this kind of vague idea about what the makeup of the town is. When we got involved much later in the effort to develop a sister city relationship with a little town in Nicaragua we got some idea of what the town politics are like. But that was a long time after the Green thing.

The one thing I really feel sort or guilty about—or I don't feel very good about—the fact that I didn't know who Cataldo was! I knew that he was against us but I didn't know who he was. And I didn't know the people who voted one way or the other when an issue came up about whether they could camp on the Green. I don't know who those people were. I should have, I should have known, I suppose.

INT: Did you have a sense of why it all happened? Even though you didn't know the personalities?

KH: See, I couldn't imagine what was wrong with the idea. It just seemed like...no, I really didn't, I didn't. Why is it so divisive? The only thing I could imagine is that it has to do with conservative versus not conservative. There can't be any issue about it. This is such a logical thing

to have happen— a wonderful thing to have happen, it would seem to me—for people to be on the Green. Who else should be allowed to camp on the Green for a night? What a symbol, what a wonderful thing. How could you be opposed to it? I simply can't understand it. So the answer is no, I don't understand what the issue was.

INT: Do you think the town is any more liberal today?

KH: No, I don't think any place is any more liberal than it was. I don't think so, no. I was of course surprised at the reaction to that, the Green action. But if something came up of the same sort it's quite possible that you would have the same kind of division. It's not an un-liberal town, really. It's reasonably liberal. A large number of liberal people live here, if that's what that means. I'm not sure whether to be liberal means that the the governing body in the town is liberal, then I can't really answer the question. But in terms of how much opposition you're going to get to, let's say something like the Waspam [Nicaragua] sister city project or something like that, you'll get some that are against and some that are for, right? But I don't know how anybody can be against that action. That seemed to be an opportunity, such an opportunity that was—it just boggled my mind. I couldn't understand it. So I figured there must be some deep reason why there was this opposition to it. I will say also that I wasn't really aware that it was that divisive. I guess it was, but I wasn't very aware...I know there was opposition, and that the... What is it, the Town Meeting? What is it that would make a decision about the...

INT: The Board of Selectmen.

KH: Selectmen, right. I know that they wouldn't allow it. And I simply couldn't understand that. It just doesn't make sense. But in terms of being divisive across the town, widely in the town, I just don't know. I remember on one of the trips to the facilities in the church I overheard these about

fifteen-year-old kids saying, one of them said, "I am so excited about this thing!" This was the greatest thing as far as they were concerned. "This town will never be the same." And I said to myself—I didn't say to him—I said, "You know, you wait. It will be the same." And it was.

It is, as far as I can tell, because it's bound to be. It's not a single unit that is always the same, that always has the same population in it. If you make a change in a stable population, maybe that change will persist. But you're not talking about that kind of situation. This town is fluid like most towns in the United States. So, if there is some kind of stasis or some kind of condition that the town has over the years it's going to be like that forever. You can't change a sort of fluid thing. It's like changing a stream, or something like that, but not it's basic sort of morphology.

INT: Do you think that the protests did have an effect, that protest in Lexington...?

KH: One of the reasons that I think it's so important to do it or to support protest was legitimate—protest against illegitimate authority and so forth—in part is because it does have an effect. Ultimately this did have the effect of stopping the war. It took a long time for the war to stop, but it did have the effect of stopping the war. I think that things like that are sort of empowering—to think that that is true. So I think that the government and the forces it serves can't really get away with just anything. I think they learned; in part the experience of protest against the war in Vietnam has made that more and more clear. The world is probably a little bit—not a hell of a lot—but a little bit safer. If we just keep doing that...that is, when we had protests against involvement in Nicaragua, that was good, too.

This could have been horrible. Ifthere were no protests against the Vietnam War—not just this protest; this is part of a big protest—if we hadn't protested you just can't imagine how bad it would be. It's a good thing that

people protest. It always has put a break on things. I think we have to be ready to protest.

There was protest against Desert Storm [the Persian Gulf War]. But if that war had gone on and on there would have been protests, and it would have been costly for them to pursue it. And that's worthwhile. It's important to try to make it more and more costly to carry out criminal activities. It's going to be harder and harder in the future, because one of the results of Desert Storm is that the position of the U.S. has become much more secure in terms of its ability to dictate what happens in the world. So I think we have to be prepared to confront situations, new situations, in which protests will be very necessary. That's kind of a long answer to a question about whether this had any effect. I think it did have an effect because it's a part of a large process that did ultimately have some effect. If I didn't believe that it would be very depressing.

INT: Why do you think civil disobedience is so threatening in our society which considers itself number one and sort of secure?

KH: I don't know. That's the kind of question that really has to be answered by someone who understands the psychological components of things. I think probably it has to do with here is a country which is now secure or strong and so forth. Civil disobedience kind of denies that the elements that keep the country, or keep the situation stable and so forth—that those elements are right. As a kind of denial of something that you think of as a situation which is secure and safe and strong and stable—civil disobedience is a direct denial of that. It takes a lot of emotional energy to engage in civil disobedience. That's the reason it's so important. That's the reason it can be accomplished by large groups because it doesn't seem to threaten you. The thing about civil disobedience is that the people that engage in it are also somewhat frightened. It's frightening.

So I can sort of understand, at least emotionally, why it's so—what was your word?—-threatening. You can see why it's threatening, even for the people that do it. Imagine the courage of people who do it alone, of which there are a number of people. Like, for example, Aung San Suu Kyi, [in Myamar, formerly called Burma] a person who just got the Nobel Prize. I've been following her sort of story for several years now and that's a person who has had to stand up by herself to do the sort of things that she's been doing. It must be very difficult. But it's a kind of tradition in India and Burma and that area, Southeast Asia. It's a tradition of single-handed civil disobedience.

Here we do it in groups. And it's really important to do it in groups because it seems possible to do it that way. But I think the reason it's so threatening to people in general is because it does directly confront something that you think, that you know, or you're led to believe by your education and so forth, to be a stable force, a stabilizing force in the country. Say the police or whatever—institutions that are sort of fundamental in society—that's probably the reason. I'm just saying it from my point of view. For example, going in to destroy draft records in the 1970's, like the Berrigans [two peace activist Catholic priests and brothers] did; that is a direct confrontation with a sort of an instrument or an institution in our society which has for many years now been considered central. That's a form of civil disobedience that really takes a lot of gumption, just two or three people go in and destroy records or something like that. And the people, there are lots of different forms of civil disobedience, all of them attacking some institution that is considered foundational in our country. That's why it's threatening. It's threatening for the people that undertake it very often because it's often difficult to explain it to other people, why you did it. Like people who, let's say, destroy nuclear plants and stuff like that.

They have to confront the rest of the population. That's difficult. Because it's not always [easy] to make a case for civil disobedience.

INT: What is it about human nature that makes our institutions need to be confronted? Why does power end up being abused? What's going on?

KH: I don't know, really, but power probably just carries with it…the whole business of power is obscene, in a sense, because it's power over things that are used by one group against another group in a way which is asymmetrical, in the sense that [one] group is victim. So power can be used to victimize. I suppose just the exercise of power, for example, has something in it, inherent in it. Although you can always imagine that everybody who uses power would be benevolent and you would never notice that power was bad. But it doesn't seem to be that way, because people that use power they don't have the other people's or our interests in mind. So there is inherent asymmetry that leads to victimization. I suppose that the reason the anarchists—people who believe in anarchism as a sort of governmental form or form of society—probably what anarchists would attempt to do, if it were ever possible to have an anarchistic society, would be to eliminate power. You don't have asymmetries. That is, whenever it's necessary for people to have authority...see, there's another thing. There is a thing called authority that is sometimes confused with power. Authority is sort of necessary because people have to do things. In a Native American society, particularly those societies that are represented by, let's say, the Pueblos in the southwest like the Pueblo of Jemez in New Mexico—the people who are in power are in power because they are put in power. That is, they are made to be in power. You know, like the Governor of the town of Jemez hates the job, but it's his duty. So they put him in power and there he is. So you have different kinds of bosses. You have bosses for the ditch, the irrigation ditch, or different sections of the irrigation ditch and so forth,

different bosses for different fields and so forth—ceremonial bosses. It doesn't mean that there aren't bad things that happen in the town of Jemez. There are lots of bad things, probably. But the thing is the structure, where authority comes in, the authority is shared. It's a duty. And you don't get to do it very long. You're in power for a certain time, and that's it. You don't go in there forever. You don't even have two terms.

INT: They don't have terms?

KH: I don't think they even have terms. I think just one. And you might have to go again because they run out of people, because it's not a very big town—but that kind of thing, where you try. The whole effect is to try to do something about this disparity or asymmetry that makes this the exercise that is inherent in the notion of power. So the answer might be…I don't know, this is kind of philosophy. I'm not into that. But the way I understand it is that power is sort of inherently obscene or inherently corrupt because of the asymmetry that is necessarily built into it. Since you have people who are in authority to get things done, you've got to somehow overcome the inherent disparity, or you have asymmetries. So that's what sort of semi-anarchistic societies seem to be able to do.

END OF INTERVIEW