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Interview
Eugenia Kaledin
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*Interview conducted by Norma McGavern-Norland
Videotape length 61 minutes*

INT: How did you and your husband come to be involved in the actions on the Battle Green on Memorial Day weekend in 1971?

EK: Only because his mother was visiting for the weekend, so we had a babysitter. And therefore we joined the veterans. My husband was a disabled veteran. I felt some outrage, because I'd spent a lot of time in veterans' hospitals over the years while he was sick. I saw veterans die. And I knew that being a disabled veteran was a horrible fate for most people, and that they should be treated with sympathy and compassion, and they were not. At this time they were being treated rudely. I felt outraged by that myself.

INT: Did you spend the night on the Green? What was it like?

EK: We did spend the night on the Green. We met people from other towns. I remember meeting people from Newton that we knew. And talking to them, it was a spirit of camaraderie. We felt that we were doing something. We all wanted to see what could we do to stop this war. And even though it may have been a kind of fake gesture in some sense, we felt that we were doing something by being there, by joining in this great group again. Democracy has power only through numbers. There were so many people there that we felt that we were doing some good. In fact, our son was there and we didn't know it, because there were so many people we couldn't see him. He was listed among the juvenile delinquents, because he was still very young, about fourteen, I think. He knew that we really didn't want him to take risks—that we would take. But he did it nevertheless. And we didn't chastise him. We were somewhat proud.

INT: Somewhat?

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EK: Well, worried also.

INT: Were other people you were with talking about this in the terms you've just described it?

EK: I think they were. I remember meeting one friend who was a new American citizen. He was an immigrant. And he was a father of one of my children's friends. He said that he felt it was a very rich opportunity for him to make a democratic gesture. I was very moved by that.

INT: Tell us a little about what it felt like to be on the Green that night. And what you thought about being arrested. What were your feelings?

EK: I felt very pleased to be arrested. Because I'm a teacher of American literature, and I have always been thrilled by Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience." The myth is that when Emerson asked him [Thoreau] what he was doing in jail, he said, "What are you doing out?" And in fact, it's a myth of course. But the idea that when certain things are so outrageous it pays to break the law morally, and to become the one who is behind bars and not the one outside. I thought this is the only chance in my life I'll have to imitate Thoreau and take this dare to be civilly disobedient. I have to say also that when we moved to Lexington—my husband is an American historian—we moved here very self-consciously. Because we wanted to live in a town with a history. Not because of the schools. But because we wanted to live in a place with a dimension of historical weight that we felt was very important. I grew up in Philadelphia in an area where there was history. I feel that it does enrich the texture of American life for all of us to be aware that things happened in certain places, and that we are passing them every day and can stop to remember what happened there. I think it keeps us from being as superficial as we may otherwise be.

INT: You've been very specific about why you wanted to be there. What did you were think were the reasons that other people were there?

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EK: Other people I had to take responsibility for. I think everybody was angry about the war. I never thought about town politics. I mean, Bobby Cataldo was nothing to me. I had no personal grudge against him or any of the Selectmen. I feel they were trying to do their job. But I felt very strongly that they had given us a chance to articulate the anger that we all felt about the fact that young men were being destroyed both in—not just young men, but men and women and children in Vietnam—and the men that we talked to that night were clearly very damaged by the war. They were very disturbed, a lot of them, and upsetting.

INT: So you saw it as both a national issue and a local issue?

EK: It was a local issue insofar as the town fathers precipitated it. But it was much more a national issue to my mind. I certainly didn't think much about the grass [on the Green]. But I certainly didn't think anybody wanted to hurt the grass.

INT: Can you go back a little bit and explain what you're referring to? What's all this about the grass?

EK: Well, there was a sense that to have so many people on the Town Green were desecrating a sacred property that—the same thing I was just talking about—it was sacred because it was part of American history. But if American history is not alive ideologically, then what difference does it make? It's not a thing. That's what I keep thinking about. History has to be connected with things. I do believe that stones speak. But I think that history also has to be alive. Democracy only has meaning when we can reenact the things that brought us all together that night. It was a gesture of democratic community. It was a sense of community. We lack community so strongly in this country. That was a moment when we all... I think it may have been two communities—the community of the people who disapproved of us, and then the community of those of us who were arrested. But somehow those of us who were arrested seemed to be making

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a very strong statement about the war, whereas those who were against us were talking about the grass. And it was on a different level completely.

INT: What did the Vietnam veterans do as they marched in and that night? What did you see?

EK: I didn't see them actually marching in. I did see little corners of some guerilla warfare¹ that I never saw actually acted out. It didn't make sense to me. I mean, the little pieces that I saw weren't coherent enough to be scary the way they might have been if I had seen the whole drama. But certainly they were very nice to us. I remember they were glad to have us there. They were glad to have us supporting them. And they were always very friendly. When we got to the snowplow barn [Department of Public Works building] I remember some of them being especially friendly and eager to talk. But I don't remember much of what they said, I'm sorry to say.

INT: Tell us about the sequence in the evening. How did it progress? How did you get from the Green to the barn?

EK: I think we were on one of the last buses that went. Actually, because my husband is disabled, he is...

INT: Go back just a little bit. What do you remember about how the police arrived, how people were organized? What orders were you given? Were you scared? Walk us through.

EK: No, I was never scared. I think that may have been stupid on my part. I think it comes perhaps also from being educated by Quakers, because they always taught us never to be afraid, that people were all good. Life has taught me otherwise. But I was too naive to be scared. Perhaps one of the reasons especially I was not scared—and this is a wonderful story I think—is because I was teaching policemen at Northeastern at the time. One of the policemen who was sent from out of town to arrest us was one

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of my students. Seeing him there, club in hand, was very comforting to me. Because I knew he knew that he wouldn't get a high grade if he hit me on the head with a club, right? [Laughter.] So I took some pleasure in his presence, and I always felt he was there to protect me, not to hurt me. He was a good student, too.

INT: So you went along to the...

EK: To the "jail." But what I remember about going to the "jail" was that we were all singing "American the Beautiful." That's the one piece of music I remember from that night that seemed very real. I especially remember hearing Noam Chomsky, whom I didn't know, sing. [Laughter.] That was a special treat, maybe the last bus that we were all getting on.

I was afraid also that we might be left behind. I really wanted to be arrested. I think it was because of Thoreau more than anything else. Thoreau still means a lot to me. I know people ridicule him [for] being unaware of families and personal needs. And he is pretty cruel sometimes to the people in Concord. But on the other hand his high ideals still have meaning. And I think they had meaning to some of the veterans there. The ones who wrote about it in their book about the long march from Washington, a couple of them said that Thoreau meant something to them, and sustained them. Ideas do mean a lot to people. We're not just a materialistic culture, especially in New England. These ideas really speak to many of us still.

INT: So you went along to the town barn. And what happened?

EK: I fell asleep on the cement floor. I remember, because I did put earrings on and the earrings poked into my head on the cement. Actually, a friend who lived on Meriam Hill had gone home and taken blankets. So maybe I was privileged in that he brought enough blankets for my husband and me and some other friends because he lived nearby. We didn't actually

¹ She means "guerilla theater," a kind of street theater employed by the VVAW to demonstrate to the

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go home before the arrest. But we had blankets. The floor was very hard, but we did snooze from time to time. We didn't stay up the whole night. We sort of walked around and talked to different people we knew. There were a lot of people we knew there. Which probably says that it was an exclusive group, on one hand. But if you read the list, there were many outsiders there, too. There were people from other towns. It isn't just the town "radicals" who were arrested. There were people from all over there, absolutely, that night. And there were a number of young people, too.

INT: So what happened next?

EK: The next thing I remember is the people bringing coffee and doughnuts from Concord in the morning for breakfast.

INT: They brought it to Lexington?

EK: They brought it to the snowplow barn. Yes, somebody said they were people from Concord anyway. Afterwards I thought that that was very nice, because Concord and Lexington have this phony rivalry about the American Revolution, about where it really began and who's the more patriotic. At that moment, just as in the real American Revolution, the people in Concord were working with us, clearly. A lot of people were there to help us. And they were there to help the veterans. Because when we went to the "jail," they had collected fists of five-dollar bills to help pay the fines for the veterans or for those of us who didn't have any money. So that there was that sense, again, of a broader community, not just the community of people who were arrested, but a community of outsiders who thought we had done the right thing. Which was nice. It's always nice to feel that people approve of what you do. I think that was always a problem for people who were against the war, because you seem to be against the government. And you were, on some levels. But on the other hand, it was because you were ashamed of what the government was doing.

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INT: So morning came to the snowplow barn, and...?

EK: And we were toted off to the court. It was the old town hall [Town House] in Concord District Court, not the new one. It has a real charm as a building. It's a beautiful color now; I think sort of pink and gray or something. We were, I guess, pushed up the stairs and one by one—hundreds [of us]. It should be repeated over again in this film that it was the largest mass arrest in Massachusetts' history. We don't keep saying that enough. It was an extraordinary moment in our lifetimes.

INT: And then did you line up, or how did they organize this?

EK: It was done alphabetically.

INT: And what was the judge like? Did everybody get arraigned separately or in groups?

EK: I didn't remember that the judge had any personality. I mean, people said he was tough and some people said he was witty. I didn't have any experience with him other than having to hand over my fine. But I did remember that some people had to pay ten dollars instead of five. And I was very curious about that. Somebody said it was because in looking up their records they had a lot of traffic violations. Which has inspired me always to pay my tickets after! Not that I didn't anyway. I have to say, I'm a very law-abiding citizen, and I have always paid tickets. This wouldn't have had meaning if I had been perpetually a scofflaw. I remember saying to my son, "If you are going to get arrested at this period of your life, do not get arrested for smoking marijuana. Get arrested for making some civil disobedient gesture against the war—if you must." But I'm thinking that one has to have values even in arrest. What you're willing to go to jail for has to be something worthwhile.

INT: So how did you get back to Lexington after?

EK: I don't even remember. I think somebody brought a car. When we got out I remember having a feeling again of being isolated in the

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world. You know, for a time we were part of an intense community. It was kind of wonderful that we were helping each other, and we were standing for something good. We thought we were stopping something evil. And then suddenly off in the American world we were the free-spirited individuals once again without the community behind us to help. I remember feeling that and thinking, now I know why convicts commit crimes over and over again to get put back in jail. Because there is something in jail that is comforting about being in a group of people together and having a sense of community and spirit together. We're very lonely people always. And we have to be. But I think it's also painful.

INT: I'd like to know what you think was accomplished both in terms of the national scene and in terms of Lexington itself.

EK: In terms of Lexington itself, I think it probably just exacerbated a lot of town tensions. The other people have articulated this better than I can, because they know the groups of people who were resentful of, say, new professionals moving in as opposed to old people who grew up in the town and saw the professionals changing things.

In terms of the war itself many gestures like this all over the country certainly did help turn the war. When Johnson refused to run, it was clearly because he sensed that there was so much hostility in the country at large against this war. I think the fact that so many of us were willing to be arrested and to speak against the war, and through the veterans who were among the veteran's groups to speak against the war. They were very brave, those young men. And they were badly injured. I was thinking about those veterans. We have by no means done justice to their suffering or what they've contributed to American life. I remember also another of my students at Northeastern was a helicopter medic. He used to disappear from class for about ten days every month when he would be flown to Vietnam to pick up people in his helicopter, to take them back to American

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hospitals. They only let him stay for ten days because it was such an intense and grueling job. Of course, what that meant was that many veterans who would have died in previous wars were rescued and saved. But they were also terribly injured. The Vietnam War may have produced more horribly injured veterans who survived than any other war. If you think of the Civil War which was another war of horrible amputations and disasters—most of those people died. But in the Vietnam War we had all sorts of medicine that could save them. But it didn't save their spirits. And it certainly didn't save our sense of what we owed to them. They were very brave people.

INT: Would you talk a little bit about the other casualties—the people who suffered emotional, psychological damage? In one of the meetings, you referred to hospitals full of people with psychological damage. And you referred a little bit to this tonight. Would you like to take the opportunity to talk generally about the costs of war on soldiers?

EK: I don't think we've done enough of that kind of exploration. We have a new name—what is it, “Stress Syndrome” or something²—we just keep renaming the pain that they go through. But I think the suicide rate—I don't know the statistics—but the suicide rate of Vietnam veterans is appalling. They did do things that they felt... Movies have been made [that] have clarified that as well as anything, the Oliver Stone movies about how they were doing things that they knew were wrong, especially in terms of killing women and children, which may have also been different in that war. Where you're bombing people from afar, even if it's an H-bomb, you don't see the suffering. But when you're burning villages you see the horrors. I think that's particularly damaging. How could it not be? I don't know enough to be able to talk about that, but certainly we can imagine what it was like.

² The term that was coined after the Vietnam War was “post-traumatic stress.”

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INT: It's been twenty years. How has your thinking evolved about that particular protest in general?

EK: I felt that it was so important that we should do something to commemorate it. So I started to take action. One of the things that happened during those twenty years was that I went back to graduate school. Inspired by my students at Northeastern who were all older students, I went back to graduate school myself to get a Ph.D. One of the things that I discovered in getting my Ph.D. was the history of women, because I was never trained to study women in college. I went to Harvard, unfortunately, and they didn't mention women at that school. Except for Emily Dickinson. I think she's the only woman I ever studied. But one thing I realized about the history of women which is very important is the very omission of women in history says a great deal about what our moral obligation is to bring them back.

What is omitted from history became a big issue with me as I discovered women, as I discovered Afro-American history, as I discovered Native Americans had something to say. In fact, when I studied the westward movement we were told that Native Americans really weren't worth studying because they didn't have a written history. Their history was anthropological but not historical because it wasn't written. What I came to see was that the definitions of history are redefined all the time. And the fact that I became very aware of what is left out of history made me start thinking about this protest movement and how this was going to end up in history. Because this was the largest mass arrest, as I said, in Massachusetts' history. How was it going to be cited in Massachusetts' history books?

Then I started to try to get people to do a little something to commemorate it. I looked at the Town records. I feel I should read what

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was in the Town records, just to have it on file on [this] video, so that people know what the Town Yearbook wrote about the arrest. They said,

“Our proud heritage of April 19th, 1775 is blurred by those who forget that the Battle Green is not only a historic shrine but that it is also the cemetery of the honored dead of April 19th, 1775.

“When the Battle Green was set aside as hallowed ground, the Town passed a by-law restricting its use except as permitted by the Selectmen to a quiet and orderly behavior in keeping with a respectful regard and reverence for the memory of the patriotic service there so nobly rendered. This was the reason for the action of Selectmen in denying to the Vietnam Veterans Against the War the use of the Battle Green as a camp site for the night of May 29th.”

This is the only mention of this largest arrest in Massachusetts history in the town records of the year. If you went back a hundred years from now to find out what happened in terms of protest against the Vietnam War in Lexington, that's what you would find for the year of 1971. And that seems to me just as distorting as the fact that women are not mentioned in history or Afro-Americans or Native Americans. We have to restore those incidents that people don't find palatable to what I think of as the “Brady Bunch” vision of American life that most people want to cherish as what America is. America is much more a matter of ironing out conflicting opinions, of dealing with dissent in intelligent ways. Therefore to deny us our heritage of dissent, to deny us the fact that this was a legitimate protest, is to deny our children and our grandchildren a history that is complex and rich. We were not just flag-waving parades and mock battles on April 19th. We were real people concerned with real ideas. That's one reason why this was such an exciting event. It was testing an idea. The idea of dissent is, to my mind, one of the real things in America that still moves me very much.

INT: Do you think Lexington has changed at all? Do you think it's more tolerant of dissent today?

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EK: I don't know. I know that when the [Cary] library finally decided to offer me a little case outside the Thoreau Room to put in an exhibit, I was going to put in the tax forms that we sent, I was going to put in a poem that John Walters wrote about this arrest which was wonderful. And I was going to put in Thoreau's Essay on Civil Disobedience which they had bought in a beautiful edition and had a little comment by David Godine at the end, trying to say that Thoreau had written this to move his neighbors to understand why he had been arrested during the Mexican War, and to make them see that it wasn't just a whimsical gesture, but a gesture in protest of the extension of slavery which the Mexican War represented.

I was going to put all that in a little case outside the Thoreau Room on the twentieth anniversary of this arrest. When the War in the Gulf broke out the library wrote to me and said that it would be inappropriate to put on an exhibit of dissent. To my mind, it was all the more important to put on an exhibit of dissent at such a time. But clearly, I'm still very much a minority. And the people still do not understand how dissent is one of the characterizing strengths of democracy. I think that we have to fight for this right, or we will end up losing the right to dissent. We have to make people see that it is dignified. That's what was so distressing to me. The people who were Selectmen at the time—some of them I think grew up in Lexington although I think that's a very interesting point to describe, if they would ever talk to us—they learned in the schools in Lexington about the Revolution—[so] why is it that they can't—could not at that moment—see that dissent was a valuable part of our tradition, and that the Vietnam veterans especially deserved to be honored for their bravery in making dissent against the war? I don't know how to do this. Because clearly, it makes you very unpopular. I did know people during the Gulf War who still had bricks thrown their windows in certain [areas]—not in Lexington, but outside the town. Then there were people like the protesters who just

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throw red paint on the Minuteman [statue], and just disappear anonymously. Those are cowards, as far as I'm concerned. If you're going to take a stand against a war, you have to be willing to be arrested, and not do things that are just pure vandalism. I don't think any of us that night did any kind of deliberate vandalism. We were very careful to keep the Green clean, as much as we could with so many people.

INT: You've told us a little bit about your efforts to honor this event and to publicize it. Tell us more. When did you get the idea that you wanted to commemorate it and disseminate information about it, and sort of celebrate dissent? When did you get that idea? What were the responses of various institutions and newspapers and so forth?

EK: As I said, I've always been a kind of dissenting personality, who knows why. Maybe that goes back to my Quaker education. But I was thinking also [that] I lived in China for a year, and I taught a course in dissent in China. It made me think much more about how much dissent meant to me as an American. I could see in China dissent was considered something completely outrageous. As I thought about the way my students sort of gobbled up all the wonderful sayings of Emerson, about being a revolutionary, and what it meant to be different as a value, as an individual—that that really was what defined America for me a lot. If I ask myself what I love about America—and I do, I don't ever mean to say that I don't love it, although I seem to be more of a dissenter than an approver most of the time—it is the fact that I have the right to dissent. It is the fact that even though Lexington [Cary] Library would not let me put a case describing dissent during [the period of] the Gulf War, when I put a letter in *The Minuteman* I got a call from the local public access television station who said, “This is a great idea. Why don't you start filming these things?” And that's why I'm sitting here now. Because there are alternatives for dissent in America. If you can't find one magazine that will publish your

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idea, you can still find another. And if you have anything to say that people will listen to, maybe you can find a little group of people who will join with you to protest, if not to affirm what the government wants or what most people want. We still have a tremendous amount of freedom of the press. It terrifies me when I hear [Russian premier] Boris Yeltsin say, "Pravda is banned." Pravda may be stupid, Pravda may have nothing worth listening to, but if that's so, let the Russians discover that. That was always Jefferson's idea. Let any idiot say what he wants, and in a true democracy people will see that it's stupid. You don't ban it from on top. You let the people see that anything people want to say should be judged by them. Therefore, everybody's ideas should have access to the public in some way.

I really do believe that the right to dissent, the right to have your own idea, to have some access to some magazine is still a very important part of our country, and one of the things I really value. Of course there are moments, as in the [Senator Joseph] McCarthy period when the worst kinds of people seemed to be in control and shutting up other people. But even then there was a lot of protest. There were people complaining. It didn't take too long to censure McCarthy. It's true for about two years he was an outrageous power—maybe more. Maybe I'm just...no, it was really about two years when he had strong power. Even the Congress censured him after a while. So that even if you see evil and irresponsible accusations of people being made, you can see that in a true democracy they won't last. There'll be some people who will speak up against it and be brave. I think that that is one of the great things about this country.

INT: You've had a series of rebuffs from other institutions: the Massachusetts Archives, the Museum of our National Heritage. I'd like you to just briefly describe those. Also talk generally about why some people in Lexington are so hostile to exploring and memorializing this event, the

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Selectmen who won't talk to you. Or why do so many people want to forget it? Why was it so divisive? Why is it still so divisive?

EK: I think it is because they're embarrassed. I did try. I don't think that the Museum of our National Heritage deliberately wanted to deny us the right. We can ask them again. They said they were too booked up to have any kind of celebration of this in time for the twentieth anniversary. We might ask them again, if we're aiming for the twenty-fifth. I think the First Parish Church minister was very receptive. But she said we had to have both sides of view represented. I did write to every Selectman asking if [he or she] would speak, and they would not. I think we might try again. I think maybe some are more willing by now. Now that the Gulf War is over, they might be willing to speak more readily.

I think that people are embarrassed by not speaking. There is such a tradition of being free to speak in this country that people are embarrassed even when they refuse. So if we keep after them and show them that they have nothing to lose by debate, and get more people involved, we might be able to have a genuine debate on what it means.

I don't know what it means in terms of the divisiveness of the town. Surely the town has changed. It is certainly much more professional than it was when we first moved here and lived on a farm with forty-two cows. But I'm thinking that—and of course it's nice to romanticize those days—the hardware stores and the cows and the Woolworth's and Mr. Doodlesack's Rexall Store—those are all gone. In place of them the town is maybe more vital. I like the benches where you can sit and have coffee in the main street, and the fact that there are so many Chinese-Americans living here. I think the ethnic diversity of the town is much richer now. And it's a good place to live, still.

INT: Moving from the town to the nation, you referred to the Brady Bunch, "Brady Bunch mentality." What do you think is going on in a

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country that considers itself number one and is theoretically so secure that dissent is so disturbing?

EK: Because it isn't really secure. That's always the painful reality. It's not secure economically at the moment. So many people are out of work. We have no decent health plans. We treat the old and children horribly. If we were really more secure about all the things we were doing, if we spent our money more wisely, now that we don't have to build as many missiles it will be interesting to see what will happen, whether we can spend our money to do social things that will make people see that it is a democracy that's worth maintaining for the quality of life instead of just for gaining money. That's what is so sad. I think we've lost touch with the good things. The Brady Bunch might be a good idea. But the fact is that most of our families are not whole and they're not functioning the way they should be. People are not finding the fulfillment in the society in terms of what the pursuit of happiness means. That's another thing that the Chinese always used to ask me. Talk about the pursuit of happiness.

A lot of people think the pursuit of happiness means making money. I don't think it has ever really meant that. I think it has really meant having a personal fulfillment. I used to tell my Chinese students that the most interesting thing to me about Benjamin Franklin is that, although he always was tremendously successful and full of these painful axioms about how to be a success, one of the most interesting things about him was that he threw over his business when he was forty years old and decided to lead a life of public service. That's something that you don't find many businessmen today thinking about, that they owe anything to the country in exchange for making a lot of money. People just seem to get greedier and greedier. And it seems to me that that's one of the failures. We do not spend our money wisely enough to help the people who really need it. But I'm not in charge.

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INT: How do the gaps in society at large tie into the fear of dissent? Make that connection.

EK: That's an enormous problem, question. I'm not sure that I can really do that.

INT: Well, let me ask it another way. You were teaching policemen at Northeastern American Literature, and all the books were about civil disobedience?

EK: No, they weren't all. But one of them...no, that was a general World Literature course.

INT: Well, start that at the beginning and tell it.

EK: One of the policemen once said to me, "All the books in this course are against law and order." And I thought, "By God, he's right." Because they were all books that questioned the nature of society, you know. Even Madame Bovary which we were reading that term—one of them thought she was a bad moral influence on the town. And they were right, of course. She was. I think that literature, if it's any good, makes you question society. It doesn't give an affirmation to the fact that this is the best of possible worlds. It makes you look at all the things that are the matter with the world because it tries to capture reality. Maybe sometimes the most luxurious lives still can be very painful in terms of inner conflicts, in terms of the struggles that people go through. It's why I really have always loved teaching literature. I feel very lucky to be able to teach literature and not history, because history you have to deal with painful truths no matter what. But with literature you can see possibilities and ways that people sometimes triumph over difficulties and make the most of their pain. They're inspirational people, I think. There are lots of inspirational people.

For the policemen at the time, they were very thoughtful, the policemen who said these things because they were really thinking about what the

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literature was doing. They had never been exposed to literature before. They were not able to conceptualize it the way people who are trained to use abstractions would. But they certainly saw that a lot of the literature was questioning the society, questioning what was right. Whereas politicians never do that. They just assume that they have the answers, or that they know what is right. It was a great period at Northeastern when they paid to send police to school.

I gather now that most police have Bachelor's degrees anyway, because it's a more competitive thing to get on the police force. That's been a great improvement in our society that we have police who have been exposed to other kinds of thinking. I think more businessmen could read literature today. Certainly a place like M.I.T does make a point of giving scientists a lot of exposure to the humanities. But most schools do not. They're much more eager to just get what they think will bring them a moneymaking degree. That's another great topic. But not for this.

INT: Let's go off in another direction. What have you observed or surmised about gender differences as you've been exploring this phenomenon? Family dynamics, tensions between husbands and wives, what people were willing to do, what meaning it has held for them? Were there differences in what, for example, women contributed, what it meant to them, than for men? Have you got any generalizations there?

EK: Certainly women have had a different use of time. I was very interested in the people who said that they could do volunteer work because their time schedules were different from people who worked nine to five, and I think that's true. They were able to contribute more on that level. Through this, through a lot of their volunteer efforts, they have improved the quality of life. I really believe that all these volunteer activities—the political action groups, the amount of time even that you give to political parties—many times people worked on political parties on specific

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issues—a lot of women who left the League of Women Voters did improve some of the things in the government that they studied in the League of Women Voters. I was always very snobbish about joining the League of Women Voters because I felt they never took a political stand on something, and I was too transparently political to feel I could be objective on anything. But I also worked. I also always taught at Northeastern. And I didn't really have time. But the point is that as I grew older I came to see that I was wrong about that. I think that the League of Women Voters really was a training ground for many people who learned a more tactful approach to dealing with the political system. I'm not in the least tactful, and I probably couldn't say a word to Robert Cataldo. I would be, if anything, like [state representative] Lois Pines in China saying what she thought. There's a real need for people like that and I think she played a very valuable role. That's the role that I would choose to play. But I wouldn't be able even to get elected, because I'd be so tactless that I'm sure that I'd insult most of the people. So I know my role is not in the political arena. But I think that the women have played that role very strongly. I did work on a book on women in the 1950's, and I was very impressed to see that people like [Governor of Connecticut] Ella Grasso and [one-time Presidential candidate] Shirley Chisholm had belonged to the League of Women Voters. They had said that it was a training ground for them to learn how the political process works in America.

That's what I don't really understand enough about. The political process works slowly and is complex. Things don't change overnight. They change from women who work behind the scenes a lot of times. Women used to be willing to work behind the scenes. They're not anymore. Whether they accomplish more by being up front is still an interesting issue to look at. I think women play a very important role in our culture on every level, especially in terms of dealing with children

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because men still are not willing to do that. And whether it's really a matter of men [being] willing to do [that]. I'm not sure that women are intrinsically better. There are always vicious women like the Gang of Four who loved to assassinate people. I think that it's very hard to make a statement that women are more peace loving than men. Because they're smaller physically, they get it more. There's no question about that. They're certainly not able to fight back as well.

INT: Looking at this particular event and this project, do you see any differences [between] the sexes?

EK: Well, all of us sitting here tonight are women. Maybe we're more committed to trying to get these kinds of truths up front. Maybe the fact that there were so many women making spaghetti sauce that night tells something about how women contributed to getting an idea of dissent across. A lot of women were there working behind the scenes. A lot of women didn't get arrested because they had to go home to stay with their children. But I did call one man who said that he stayed home with the children so that his wife could be arrested. He felt that that was a kind of shift toward a new appreciation of women's role in society; that there were always men who tried to help their wives do these things. But many of them were patronizing or condescending about it. I always think of those terrible John Updike stories where he ridicules his wife as a reformer. I think that it's really cruel. Because she was doing a lot of good things. It's easy to make fun of women who are reformers.

INT: ...?

EK: As I said, I just feel that veterans deserve very special respect, because they have risked their lives for us. To make them unwelcome is outrageous enough. But to arrest them is just unspeakable. I don't know whether any of the Selectmen were veterans. But I did reread some of the letters and statements when I was looking at the newspapers this afternoon.

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I was moved by...it was Larry Grossman who picked up, he said, his own Purple Heart [and carried it] when he went off to be arrested. [He] was making a statement of what we would call solidarity with being a veteran. When he was arrested he said, "Does this mean anything?" And the person who arrested him said nothing. It should mean something. It should mean something that people have been willing to risk their lives for us.

INT2: But what does it mean when people who went and risked their lives come and protest that very act?

EK: It means even more; that we should listen to them. These Vietnam veterans had a lot to say about what they thought was wrong with this war. They were there. They really knew. They weren't the television news. And they weren't General Westmoreland. They were people who were out in the fields burning villages and seeing their buddies murdered. We really have to respect them for that. But we seem to have lost our sense of compassion. I don't know why that's true with people who do things that we wouldn't do. I felt that was a particularly terrible war. I don't have any profound insight into what we should be doing. But I feel that these veterans are still treated terribly. And the veterans from the Gulf War are now heroes, right?

This business of winning and losing. What does it mean to win or lose a war? It seemed to me that we lost the Gulf War as profoundly as we lost the war in Vietnam, if you want to call it losing anything. But that's another story. I'm not an expert. You need experts for this kind of thing. I can talk about Huckleberry Finn, but...

INT: You've been working for a while now on this Oral History/Battle Green project. What have you learned as you've been talking to people who were involved? What do you hope for? What do you hope will emerge in the final project?

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EK: I hope what will emerge most clearly is that the tradition of dissent is alive in the twentieth century. That we don't have to keep it back in 1775. That it is still very much a part of our lives, and it is one of the wonderful parts of America that makes me pleased. I don't like the word "proud." But I suppose there are moments when I am proud to be an American; that we do have this tradition that we allow people to say important things that are different from what our government believes. I think we'll keep it alive if we can stress that, if we can even quote from the speeches at the time. And I think eventually we'll be able to get someone like John Kerry to come back and talk about these things, and maybe give us a copy of the speech he gave—if he has it—at that time. That's the most important thing—that our children and grandchildren know that we have a proud heritage of dissent, and that that means a lot. It means a lot. That's one of the things we can give people. Not just McDonald's and Coca-Cola, but the importance of allowing people to be individualistic. It really is very important. And it makes me ashamed that our Selectmen didn't see that. But then I always ask, what's the matter with American education? That's another issue. And someone else can carry on. I think I've said enough.

But it's important to do this. Because otherwise it will disappear like the women and the Native Americans who didn't have written history. What progress we've made—if you think of "Dances With Wolves" and the other visions of the Indians that we had in the 1940's—it really has been a sense of awareness and sensitivity. I think we can be proud of that, that we are able to criticize our own history. That's really great.

END OF INTERVIEW