

Interview of Daniel Ellsberg
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[mumbling unable to transcribe at 1:04 by Ellsberg]

Dennis: [00:01:21] The set up to Vietnam in meeting Howard you background as well, you were a marine right?

Ellsberg: Yeah

Dennis: During World War Two?

Ellsberg: No, no I was 14 when the war ended [interrupted]

Dennis: Can you just start by saying your name?

Interviewer F: Im just going to ask you one more thing, I [sic] I'm trying to get your eye-line a little bit more this way which i know is awkward but maybe Dennis you can pull in even a little bit more. [00:01:35]

Ellsberg: Ah how old is is Howard born exactly? (present day)

Dennis: '78 (1978)

Ellsberg: But when is his birthdate? Do you know?

Dennis: Oh I don't know.

Interviewer F: That may make it easier for him

Dennis: Born in 1922.

Interviewer F: Great.

Ellsberg: 22

Dennis: Right.

Dennis: You don't know that month?

Dennis: No. [00:02:01]

Ellsberg: Um now I'm born 31, I am 68. I don't know how that fits - that sounds as though he is 11 years older uh he must be his birthday must fall [mumble] 22 (1922), I am born in April '31 (1931).

Dennis: So you were in Korea?

Ellsberg: No so I was in during the Korean emergency uh in '54 (1954) to '57 (1957) and got in right at the end of the Korean war. And then I was in Vietnam as a civilian but I was in combat.

Dennis: [00:02:32] Okay okay, um [camera zooms in on Ellsberg then zooms out] How (sic) one of the questions that I'm intrigued about is that how did you go from (sic) you were part of the administration

Ellsberg: Mm yep yep

Dennis: And How did you go from policy making - or resisting policy making in the administration in the Johnson administration (sic) in Kennedy right?

Ellsberg: Mm [nods yes]

Dennis: to the Pentagon papers and releasing them, thats a huge jump

[Ellsberg and Dennis laugh 00:03:08]

Ellsberg: And are we starting? You haven't started? [Ellsberg points at camera]

Dennis: We are rolling.

Deb: Yep.

Ellsberg: Did you want to ask the question then? Or just

Dennis: Well I mean, could you just state your name then.

Ellsberg: [00:03:19] Okay I'm Dan Ellsberg and uh

Dennis: This is for like reporting - I know who you are.

Ellsberg: So Howard is just 10 or 11 years older and like my half brother who was in the Air Force like Howard in the Second World War, I was 14 when the war ended. I was in the uh (sic) I enlisted in the Marines in 1954 which was the every end of the Korean Emergency [clears throat] so I didn't get to Korea. Uh although I was in uh an operation in the Marines during Suez in 1956 I extended in the Marines to be in on that [clears throat] then I was a civilian working in the Pentagon on Vietnam in '64-'65 and partly because of my Marine background I volunteered to go to Vietnam to see for my self uh what that war involved and to see it up close which I ended up doing. [00:04:14] I saw the war very close, I used my marine training to work with troops although I was a civilian and in the end in 1967 I was in a fair amount of combat in uh

provinces south of Saigon in particular - guerrilla war. And saw the nature of guerrilla war very very up-close. You ask uh how I changed from a decade working for the government in the Rank [unsure of spelling] Corporation and the Defense Department and then the State Department. I had volunteered to transfer to the State Department to go to Vietnam and um the answer is first of all just being in Vietnam. I was one of millions of Americans who went there and realized that the war would not be won, that our achieve (sic) our objectives would not be achieved there [00:05:02] no matter how fought (sic) long we fought and that people would be killed and were dying uselessly and hopelessly for nothing and in a strongly stalemated war. So I came back determined to try to end the war and at first from using my access and my uh position I went back to the Rank Corporation and worked on a study of the war - uh which was a second factor in my education because that took me back historically to the early days of the war and uh what we called the 'French War' but was really the French American war against Vietnam - essentially a colonial war. I knew very little about that when I was in the Pentagon or in Vietnam and uh I think none of my my colleagues knew about it at all. So our sense of history, which for an American usually began the day he got into the problem in some way, had been very very weak and my relation to the war would have been undoubtably different as would our country's is we had more a sense of the history of that environment. [00:06:10] But the question really was what to do about it once you knew that it was a wrongful war from the history and uh a hopeless war from being there. Most Americans who had been involved at all came at least to that second conclusion that it was a stalemated war that it was hopeless but the question as I say was what to do about it. There the crucial thing was that I came to meet people who were followers of Ghandi or Martin Luther King and who were involved in non-violent civil disobedience or draft resistance against the war. In 1969 I was a meeting of the 'War Resisters International' conference where 'Resisters League' in Hatherford Pennsylvania and uh thats an organization of post World War one conscientious objectors who had been involved since then in direct action against colonial wars, against oppression, against war in general and against the nuclear arms race [00:07:13]. So uh I met people who were on their war to prison for draft resistance, as the strongest action they could take in their lives non-violently, truthfully, to express their opposition to the war. And when I realized that was the best thing the could do with their lives and that they were able to do it, it put question on my mind 'What could I do to help end the war? If I were ready to go to jail?' Well now that I was ready to go to jail because as I met these people I realized that I could do, should do what they were doing. And that suggested to me possibilities that I just wouldn't follow otherwise uh most people don't confront a challenge to go to jail but they often confront a challenge to do the right thing or to say the truth at the risk of their jobs. And they usually don't choose I would say to risk their careers very much, partly because they don't have examples of that they don't courage of that sort is contagious and they may or may not have the luck to meet someone who is exhibiting that kind of courage. And I had that luck, so when I met Randy Keeler [unsure of spelling] who was (sic) after he had been in prison, the national coordinator of the Freeze Campaign [unsure of spelling] the nuclear weapons freeze campaign [00:08:32] when I saw that he was on his way to jail it inspired me to do something similar and that made me think of the fact that I had in my safe at the Ranch Corporation (unsure of spelling), my own top secret safe, 7,000 pages of documentary history actually in document of lies and broken treaties and aggression by the United States. And I don't know that (sic) that history was continued. [00:09:00] My real objective was not just to set the record straight or enlighten people about the past, I was trying to change the present and the future. I knew that Nixon was continuing in the same pattern as four of his predecessors in Vietnam. We thought the

public should know that he was making the same lies and the same concealment and same threats of escalation that were going to enlarge the war. So I hoped that it would help to uh avert that if people understood that he was actually doing just what his predecessors had done - and for that they had to have this history. Since it was top secret, I took for granted that I would go to jail for the rest of my life by putting this out, it's what expected. And In the end I was indicted facing 12 felony charges for possible sentencing of 115 years. Uh that wasn't all that was done against me 'cause Nixon understood correctly [00:10:00] that I was trying to change his policy not just to tell history about his predecessors and he knew that he couldn't stop me just by threatening me with jail, he's already done that and I hadn't stopped. So he sent people to uh shut my mouth really, silence me from putting out more information about him by other means by blackmail, or even by assaulting me or killing me perhaps. Uh (sic) in 1972 [00:10:30] a dozen people were brought up from Miami to incapacitate me totally because I as I was giving a speech actually on the steps of the Pentagon at the capital. Those same people were caught weeks later in the Watergate and thus they were in the hands of prosecutors with knowledge the President had earlier sent them on criminal against me. So the President had to keep them quiet by birding them [00:10:55] and that was obstruction of justice, those were new crimes of coverup. [00:11:00] And those were had to be covered up internally. In the end while I was on trial when John Dean gave that information to the prosecutors, in an attempt to get himself uh a lighter sentence for his crimes of coverup, and when that came out in my trial it did lead to dismissal of my charges. Howard Zinn had just recently testified for me in that trial actually (on history?) but uh the charges where dismissed. [00:10:32] But more importantly uh that really started the process by which Nixon was forced to resign. It was the crimes against me and the members of the anti-war movement had made Nixon himself vulnerable to impeachment and conviction. [00:11:46] The other crimes for which Watergate is known (sic) well known like breaking into the Watergate, the Georgy trix (sic) the campaign contribution, I remember (treston?) Nixon personally even to this day so he wasn't really vulnerable on those. [00:12:00] What made him vulnerable was the orders he had given in the Oval Office to neutralized quote neutralize me and take other actions again the anti-war movement. So the people who inspired me to act and the others who acted at the same time and I, all provoked a kind of reaction from Nixon that brought him down and made the war end-able. They were more powerful these actions than they seemed at the time all that we could have foreseen entirely [00:12:20] and they did prove to be useful. So I remain very grateful to all the people in that traditi-tradition (sic) and of course Howard Zinn is very much in that tradition, thats how I met him in fact. Going back to early 1971 I was in actions directly with him uh we were uh faced arrest together (sic) on occasions even before the Pentagon papers came out and he been doing that for a long time and chronicling it and trying to explain to people the power in this kind of action [00:13:00] infant thats one of the things that he (sic) I've hear him testify on in my trial and other trials. The history and the power of the tradition of civil disobedience, non violent civil disobedience in the United States. He lives that in his life, he writes about it, he is a marvelous educator, this is the sort of thing that is best taught by someone who has exposed himself or herself to the risks themselves. It's uh very hard [00:13:34] to communicate to people convincing that they ought to consider taking risks with their own careers in their own field. Unless uh you are understood to be someone who has faced that choice yourself.

Dennis: Do you think -

Ellsberg: Hm?

Dennis: [00:13:45] Do you think as citizens of a democracy [camera zooms in and out on Ellsberg face] we have a responsibility to in regards of things of war and peace to take those risks?

Ellsberg: [00:13:58] Well certainly what I came to realize [00:14:00] from seeing examples of Ronny Keeler, and Bobby and others who went to prison, David Harris, is that citizens should recognize that there are occasions, especially involving war and peace, where they should be willing to take the kinds of risks in their own lives that we routinely expect of young men that we send off to war. [00:14:20] We expect them to risk their lives for their teammates or for their country or a cause but it doesn't occur to people that it's just as challenging and obligatory income cases to take risks with your career against the policies of a President who has gone wrong and to set the country straight basically. [00:14:20] Once I think people recognize that there is a similarity in the situations I think they could very well rise to the challenge but they rarely make the connections. [00:14:50] It's it's uh taken to be the very definition of patriotism that shows your life unquestionably in the service of your commander in chief. But when the commander in chief [00:15:00] has abused his powers or is going in the wrong direction, which is very common in this country and others, it just doesn't rise to people's minds that it might be their duty as citizens especially in a Democracy to um sacrifice their own futures if necessary to save the lives of a lot of people. [00:15:20] If they face that, and as Howard has shown on so many parts of his history, uh (sic) telling the truth the truth that the president doesn't want told can be very powerful. [00:15:30] You have the chance if you know a truth that politicians are trying to conceal you have the chance just by telling it effectively to save a great many lives and thats a power you don't have every day. [00:15:46]

Dennis: When you were working what were the obstacles you ran in (sic) when you were trying to change things from within?

Ellsberg: [00:15:55] Well from within, there is actually a uh (sic) morally way than people realize to speak your mind and criticize an internal policy within channels, than people realize. So long as you commit yourself not to wash dirty linen in public, not to reveal the same facts to another part of the government, to another agency, to Congress or to the press. [00:16:19] If you can be relied on to lie and to conceal the truth to outsiders outside your particular agency or government, your own dissent inside can be tolerated pretty far. [00:16:31] but by the same token it isn't taken very seriously. That isn't to say you'll never have a chance to influence policy, you might at some point and that keeps you going, it says I'll but up with this because uh the day may come that when (sic) I will make a real difference from within. But generally that turns out to be a delusion. It's just too easy, the policy has a lot of much momentum from within, the interests that are pushing it are not very well challenged from inside the government. [00:17:00] And the chances are that your dissenting opinion will just be filed, shunted away. If that happens the next question should be well I've tried that, what should I do now? And thats what I did ask myself late in the game in 1969, I wish I'd ask that a lot earlier instead of staying inside. But the seductions of keeping your dissent internal are very strong. Because self interest in a career sense converges with the rather plausible belief that power is exerted by men in power [00:17:39] , they are nearly all men, and that having access to them, direct access, being

listened to, being able to give them a memo, to uh make a suggestion, by them is surely more powerful and more valuable than anything you could do outside the government that is very plausible to Americans inside and out, and has some truth to it. But it's greatly exaggerated. [00:18:05] People uh because of that self interest factor, will be held in uh trying and trying and trying to change the policy from within and always failing when by going outside channels and organize resistance and educating conflicting powers in the legislature, in the courts, or in the press, in the public, the grassroots, they could actually have a far more powerful effect [00:18:33] through that would but that would probably be at the cost of their careers.

Denis: Howard talks about the um you now we have kind of the futility of the voting well vote for every beat (can't make out what he's saying) the couple seconds it takes to vote and we have two parties in the United States we have the Republicans and we have the Democrats but we also in the same sense of it [zooms in on Ellsberg face] how is it clear that it really is citizens who change things? [00:19:00]

Ellsberg: I (sic) I might say if I differ at all in a little matter of emphasis from Dave Deleger lets say, from whom I've learned a lot and I have unbounded respect, as for Howard. Um and I could also say Noam Chomsky these are three people that I've learned tremendously from and have great admiration and love for. [00:19:23] Um I do think the under-rate a little the need for uh at least individuals and groups to change and to speak out from within the system and the government, if I have to say as I did, in other words um I think that the change that the grassroots people and that these very same people had on me was not insignificant. [00:19:50] That it would be good to have that effect on others within the system. Theres, I'm not only speaking (sic) i'm speaking then about the possibility that officials will hear the message and will actually change. [00:20:00] I think a more focussed effort could be (sic) could well be used to try to get more of that, to have more people from within tell what they know, release the documents that they know, do the same sort of thing I did essentially uh which would also include testifying to Congress with documents. [00:20:20] Uh another point is the importance of elections and of lobbying, and I think a lot of people who focus on the civil disobedience and the grassroots work and the demonstrations underrate a little the importance of using that very energy to change congressional action in a kind of focused way and that means lobbying in part. [00:20:43] Uh even letter writing, which is easy to brush off or despise as meaningless, I think is (sic) is more meaningful than people (sic) people realize. But definitely uh lobbying and elections, and I don't (sic) I have heard I'll say (sic) lets say Dave Deleenger for instance just dismiss the significance of election work. I think that's wrong [00:21:05] I think you need it all, you need it all, the lobbying, the electoral work, the campaign work, the direct face to face confrontation with officials and the grassroots, the civil disobedience, the demonstrations, the non-violence. [00:21:20] In Vietnam I think every aspect of that was needed or the war would have gone longer than it did and uh it's the synergy thats very important they work together. To emphasize just one of those to the exclusion of the others would I think be wrong. [00:21:35]

Dennis: When did you meet Howard (Zinn)?

Ellsberg: [00:21:37] I actually think I first met I him at a meeting at Faniel Hall in Boston. Where we were uh proposing a "Peoples' Indictment of the FBI" to counteract the trial of Ekbal Ahmad, Phil Berigan, Liz Mcallister of others on the charge of having conspired to kidnap

Kissinger and uh that was my first public meeting I probably participated in. [00:22:07] The uh, I had been in one or two teach in's before that, uh I had copied the Pentagon papers almost two years earlier but they hadn't come out yet and uh so I spoke at that. And then we went over to the FBI office and presented our "Peoples' Indictment of the FBI" and that led to great consternation [00:22:30] and uh chaos in the FBI office. It was in an upper story in a big Boston office building, a federal building, and uh when we, I forget who announced that we were there to indict the FBI, but I will never forget FBI agents jumping over desks pulling their guns from their shoulder-houlders, you know in their shirts, and these secretaries are screaming "agents to the floor, agents to the floor" [Ellsberg laugh] probably a cry that had not been heard in that office uh previously. They were very excited, no one had tried to indict them before it seemed, I guess. [00:23:03] A reasonable assumption and that was my meeting with Howard (Zinn).

Dennis: [00:23:08] Wow, [Dennis laugh] well I'll tell you later but we did a documentary about the FBI I'd like (sic) after knowing what I know about the FBI I go wow that took some guts to do.

Ellsberg: No

Dennis: Oh you knew what the FBI you guys knew you and Howard knew what the FBI was, was there

Ellsberg: [00:23:25] Uh no we had (sic) we hadn't dealt directly, the FBI had dealt with us I guess they had been following us about but we hand't been made to aware of it. I don't know how much dealing he had directly. Um the uh (sic) that was just an ineffective (sic) impudent gesture which was to try and turn around the the questions about legitimacy and who was (sic) who was really obeying the law and who was not in this cause and to raise legal questions about the war which of course was something Howard (Zinn) had done. Now I had known of Howard (Zinn) I had read his work before because he did something [00:24:00] actually was something almost unique in the war uh and of extreme importance, I can't say that it had an immediate effect and that was that he wrote a little book on giving the case for getting out, a case for withdrawal. Um the idea of simply pulling up stakes, cutting your losses, getting out, leaving the effort which was what should have been done essentially or was the only way out the only way out uh [00:24:32] of Vietnam for (sic) by the United States was an acceptance of defeat of our stated and private purposes there, they were not going to be achieved ever, they never were and only by recognition of that could the war be ended. Um but no executive official, no President, ever came to point where he was ready to be the man who presided over a defeat, over a failure. [00:25:01]. If, in what we've just gone through I don't know if I should refer to this or not but uh cause it may date our interview here but uh the headline today is "Clinton Proclaims Victory in Kosovo" well had Slobadone Mulosovich uh not been willing to accept what amounted to a defeat essentially which he's calling a victory by the way at home but not everyone believes it and it is a defeat essentially. [00:25:32] Had he not been willing to accept that defeat this war could have gone on indefinitely long, men in power are willing to see almost any number of their own people and other people die [00:25:42] rather than to admit a failure, an error or defeat. And I think that would have been true for Clinton either too, if Mulosovich had been more tenacious, more obstanent as he might well have been, and we've been gambling on that, uh I think Clinton would not have cut the losses in this, he would have been willing to bomb and bomb and bomb

and ultimately to go to a ground war, like Vietnam it would have been disastrous for both sides (sic) for both sides. Um well, in affect Howard [00:26:15] was in the position then in Vietnam of saying to one side uh “lose it.” He didn’t suggest that it had to be put in those most humiliating and bold terms but that we had to grasp basically that we were not going to achieve our objectives and we had to re-define those objectives and if you like (sic) act like Mulosovich and say as Senator Reagan once proposed “lets say we’ve won and get out.” [00:26:43] And thats basically what Mulosovich is doing today, he’s saying he won and his troops are leaving Kosovo and thats what should have happened in Vietnam. Now what I’m saying is not only for presidents not willing to say that but their advisors were not willing to even suggest it [00:27:00] in top secret memos to the President two years into the big war uh Robert McNamara basically suggested that (sic) said that to the President in a top secret memo on May 19th 1967, uh the President had his (sic) the memo read by all the other advisors. They all denounced it, totally is, all over (sic) close to well appeasement, close to treason, it came very close to that word uh defeatist certainly weakness [00:27:35] not acceptable totally unacceptable, and of course the President had no intention of following it more seriously McNamara himself was fired within months after he had essentially gone one step further and said uh not only should we lower our objectives in Vietnam to a level that amounted to defeat but we should stop the bombing immediately. He said that on November 1st 1967 and was fired upwards to the world bank within weeks of doing that. So he did lose his job [00:28:07], what he did not do was tell the Congress what told the President now he should have done that. Uh I didn’t do that at that time so I can’t point a finger out at him in 1967 um nor did I do it in ’64 ’65 when I could have done the same. [00:28:31] As could he, either us of, or anyone of hundreds of people in the government could have given the Congress documents in 1964 or 1965 that would have prevent the war [00:28:47] and we didn’t do that. I didn’t think of it and I doubt if any of the others thought of doing such a thing of course I did think of it in ’69 four years later. But going back to ’67 [00:29:00] then McNamara simply could have (sic) have told uh published him memo, which would have read remarkably similar to that of Howard Zinn, the same argument, the same reason basically same pitch. And of course coming from Robert McNamara the Secretary of Defense it would have had a good deal more attention and weight than for the historian Howard Zinn to be saying this but even so Howard was doing what he could to change the terms of disunion [00:29:33] had even one or two people been willing to join him on the same level or with more authority at that time it could have had a tremendous effect. As it war, I think his book was called ‘The Logic of Withdrawal’ almost no one was willing to join outside the government in suggesting that this was an acceptable course for the United States anymore. Lets uh, probably a little less than we just saw in Serbia which is supposed to be a dictatorship [00:30:01] I think there was a little more discussion there during the war by people who, Will Troscovich and others, who were willing to say this is hopeless it’s useless lets end it. [00:30:11] Uh they weren’t willing to say that in the United States and Howard stuck his neck out and did do it and if only more people had followed that in saying it could have been very important. As it was uh i think it didn’t get a great deal of attention but I I (sic) noticed, it got my attention [00:30:30].

Dennis: [unsure what is said] On May of 1971 [unsure what is said] (sic) on may of 1971 in retrospect it’s like accumulation of the [cough] anti-war movement and a real victory.

Ellsberg: You said May of ’71?

Dennis: Yes, you released-

Ellsberg: Well I was that was in June of '71

Dennis: Uh you're just getting ready to release it

Ellsberg: In May, when you mentioned May uh I had very close touch with Howard it so happens [00:31:02]

Dennis: Okay

Ellsberg: Because um we were in an infinity group (unsure of spelling) on an action organized by Renny Davis (unsure of spelling) and others in Washington called May Day a demonstration, which was (sic) the idea of which was to close Washington down, if they won't stop the war we'll stop the government and a bunch of us, Howard and I, Noam Chomps, Marlyn Young, Mark Chafney, Fred Fredfrum (unsure of spelling names) and some of us were in a small infinity group that sat together on the streets of Washington to stop the traffic [00:31:34] again symbolically to say no business as usual, if you're going to carry on the war you must do it over our bodies. The same logic as when people sat in draft board doorways. We couldn't actually stop the war, but we could say it is not being done with our consent. We're making that as clear as we can, putting our bodies in the way of the war. [00:32:00] And that was an interesting day in Washington with Howard, I could go into that, but a day later, two days later, the two of us were actually sitting in front of the Federal Building side by side in Boston again the same day a blockade of the federal building, surrounding it supposedly keeping business as usual from happening. In fact on that day a bunch of people who were inside, federal employees for peace came out and paraded around holding up their I.D. cards to show they were federal employees on our side opposing the war. Now the day before that [00:32:41] in Boston Common, I heard Howard give one of his most eloquent speeches to a vast crowd in Boston Common. And he uh (sic) Howard is I think could be the best public speaker I've ever heard uh certainly one of the best, one of the funniest actually [00:33:00] uh very very funny man personally and before a crowd and and (sic) then of course he can switch or evolve into the passion or commitment that communicates itself very wonderfully. So he's a wonderful speaker on this occasion I remember a couple of things he said in 1971 I was about 28 years old um [00:33:27] he said (sic) he talked about our action just two days earlier in Washington and he said if uh that the end (sic) that day had ended after we had been maced, and teargassed and beaten and various things. But almost no body we had seen had been arrested because the Police were just clearing the streets at that time, they weren't arresting people, but that afternoon they proceeded to arrest 13,000 people simply by sweeping down the streets of Georgetown largely taking anybody who looked like a student [00:34:04] anybody with a beard, with long hair, including tourists and children of congressmen who happened to be there um and uh most of the people of the 13,000 that were arrested had probably not taken much part in the actions that morning. [00:34:20] So in Boston Howard said if Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton had been walking the streets of Georgetown they would have been arrested for being young and uh he said at the end of his speech, now let me address the secret police in this crowd, the undercover policemen. He said you were acting the role of secret police, you were doing something that should not be done in America, you should reconsider what you were doing and you should change it. Well that cost him a bit the next day

when we were sitting by the Federal Building because again the police chose in the end to arrest almost no one, they didn't want to arrest, they didn't want a trial, they didn't want the publicity. [00:35:16] that would be associated with that. They only arrested a couple of ring leaders and one of those was Howard, he was pulled away beaten heavily as his shirt was ripped off there was blood on his chest from his forehead after he had just been sitting next to me [00:35:30] and I had a distinct feeling that his comments to the police in the crowd a couple days earlier had not gone down well lets say that they had it in for him but uh another [00:35:44] moment from that day was very striking to me very symbolic of the way wars go and go on. While we were sitting in front of the police, a number of the police had come up to us [00:36:00] to pay their respect to Howard because it turned out he had lectured to the Police Academy in Boston on civil liberties or something. And they liked his lecture and some (sic) "oh you're professor Zinn oh I really enjoyed your lecture and its an honor to meet you and it's wonderful" (sic) here we were sitting there and on so forth and the police were paying a respects in a very nice way. The police had been quite friendly to us in a pleasant way while we were sitting there for most of the morning [00:36:34] and at a certain moment they got their order to clear us out basically and they straightened up their belts and put their plastic masks in front of their heads and they were carrying 4 foot clubs batons which had turned out later had been banned they were illegal excessive force, they were very large baseball bats and [00:37:00] um so they began slapping these ominously against their hands [Ellsberg claps with hands] you know making knows and getting them forward so they were all dressed up, as they say in the military uh lined up, in front of us and began to edge forward to move us away. Well [00:37:20] we sort of looked at each other and we thought we didn't come here to just get up and walk away when the police move forward we were here to get arrested if necessary oh thats what we meant [00:37:30] by putting our bodies there. And so let them arrest us you know. And the (sic) we didn't know that they evidently had orders not to arrest us so the police began moving forward and a man in front of us I heard it whispering over our heads as were sitting there who had just minutes before extremely friendly, not having discussion but was pleasant started to whisper "move, move, get out, get out quick, right away, move, move" and as I said that was sort of the point where we looked at each other and said well no no let them arrest us we aren't just going to move. [00:38:12] the feet came forward, they were edging under our feet, they were sort of just shuffling forward and then the guy got very urgent [00:38:20] and started whispering and he said "for god's sake move" and we didn't and at that point the batons were raised and they began clubbing us very heavily [00:38:30] on this on our shoulders. There had been a little discussion on whether it was nonviolent to put your hands over your head or did that suggest fear or was there something violent, there was a theory that that was violent, I did not accept that theory. Fortunately um so I had my hands over my head and I had a Rolex watch at that point which was smashed by this baton the glass got into my wrist and blood started flowing down my wrist [00:39:01] and my arms. The Rolex continued to run by the way [Ellsberg laughs] and rather impressive there was a series of ads at that time of Rolex's being found in shark bellies and you know still running and so forth so I thought maybe I could do an ad of this "this Rolex was his by a 200 pound Boston Policeman with a 4 foot baton and still keeping perfect time but without the crystal" and so [00:39:31] I was being beaten and Howard meanwhile was not beaten, well he was beaten, but he was pulled up as I say his shirt ripped off, he was being taken away and I saw blood coming down his chest as he left. And uh a matter of fact, I went and got bandaged, there was a first aid station there got bandages around my wrists and uh came back and the I sat with Roz Zinn [00:40:00] and their housemate Hilda and um so we sat there for a while and I was thinking how

(si) for the first time how it must have felt like for the Vietnamese in uh (voice cracks) operations called "County Fairs" [00:40:22] that the marines had one. Where the marines would uh (sic) and others would gather all the people in the village in order to run them through interrogation the idea was that if you interrogated everyone they would realize that if they told who the Vietcong were they informed on and collaborated on, no one would know which one had done it. [00:40:47] So they were safer in revealing this, it didn't work particularly well but that was the idea of it. So while they were interrogating each person in a village mostly women and children and old people, they would be giving inoculations to the children and giving them candy and doing this the American military does this felt virtuous about this [00:41:09] that is was (sic) and they called it a "county fair operation." But of course here these large heavily uniformed and heavily armed men confronting totally unarmed people and here we were sitting on the ground with these heavily armed police men, quite large and with their batons and their helmets [00:41:31] and I felt how naked one feels without a weapon being confronted by armed men, men with guns. As John (unsure of spelling) Ells said it in a quite a good movie movie entitled about Central America "men with guns." And uh the (sic) its what of course the people of Kosovo [00:41:50] had been afflicted by for quite a while, one way or another, and uh its that history is not over for them. So I say we felt naked [00:42:00] and um uh not the guns in our hands would have improved the situation at all [Ellsberg laughs] it would've made you feel different but um so uh then we saw the police form up again to charge us, we had retreated a little bit and in the new line they were going to come at us again [00:42:25] well Roz Zinn and Hilda were a decade older than I was at that point so I thought I got in front of them so as to take the first blow myself and I felt a tap on my shoulder [00:42:41] and Hilda was saying "excuse me, that (sic) I was sitting there" and as she later told me "I didn't come out here to have you protect me" [00:42:50] you know to be protected by a man so I said oh excuse me and got behind them. And on this occasion the police didn't charge us in the end [00:43:00] didn't come at us. Well all that was weeks before (sic) just a couple of weeks before the Pentagon papers were released and uh just to carry it up to that story, um I got the word on Saturday inadvertently from someone on Saturday the 12th of June from someone in the Times that the Times building was totally locked down and they were expecting a raid from the FBI and they were about to put out the Pentagon papers. The person calling me didn't know I had given [00:43:30] the Pentagon papers so it was just by chance that I happened to get this call and uh that revealed to me that Neal Sheein (unsure of spelling) had not warned me that they were about to put them out. It so happened (sic) I'd given them to Neal Sheein in the New York Times several months earlier but he hadn't told me when or if they were coming out. Well that meant the FBI might be coming for me any minute, and it so happened that I had a copy of the papers in my house [00:44:00] for the first time in months I had always kept them away from my apartment so the FBI wouldn't get them. But at that moment I had them in because I was planning to give them to Senator Gruvelle, (unsure of spelling) two days later, to use in a filibuster against the draft [00:44:15] which he had proposed to do. I told him I was going to give him enough material to read forever essentially if he wanted to do it, and um 7,000 pages, so I had them in my apartment thus the FBI might come any moment. [00:44:34] So um uh I called Howard with whom we were supposed to go to the movies that night, we were suppose to see Butch Cassidy at the Howard Square movie theatre that night. So I asked him I don't know if I said it over the phone or waited until he arrived but that I had this problem and would he store [00:45:00] the Pentagon papers for me it was the first (sic) I'm not sure I had told him at all before what I was doing about this and he said yes of course right away so I think we went over to his apartment right away first and stored the papers

in his apartment and then we came back [00:45:19] uh to our apartment which was near Howard Square and uh I don't know if I should reveal this or not but you can edit it [00:45:30] I think in this age, um someone had also unusually given me some grass and again i didn't want that found [by the FBI] so we smoked what we could and we flushed the rest down the toilet uh before the movie and then we went on to see Butch Cassidy [00:45:44] and uh that night the night of the 12/13th we picked up the early morning edition of the New York Times with the Pentagon papers on it. [00:45:55]

Dennis: And you were sure that they were going to release it?

Ellsberg: No I wasn't sure at all thats why I was giving it to [Senator] Gruvelle um he hadn't told me

Dennis: Uh did you like the movie?

Ellsberg: Oh I loved the movie and it was the second time I'd seen it [00:46:08] um ad uh I remember there used to be an ice cream parlor named Brigin's (unsure of spellings) uh next to the movie house and we bought an ice-cream cone covered with chocolate sprinkles I recall and we were walking down he street passing this ice-cream cone between us and this was the only time I remember [00:46:30] getting stone with Howard actually but we were still very stoned from this grass we had had to dispose of and so we were passing the ice-cream cone and I remember saying "in this square, in Harvard Square, if anyone sees us passing this ice-cream cone they will know our state or consciousness" [Ellsberg laughs]

Dennis: [00:46:50] Thats one of the things I (sic) that everyone tells me about Howard and I've gotten to know so (sic) his ability to make (sic) just a terrific sense of humor you know we asked Cleavland Sellers about it you know was he always this funny in the light of you know there's some really serious things going on here it's amaze- (sic) his ability to maintain

Ellsberg: [00:47:14] Oh Howard is very funny a very (sic) has wonderful sense of timing he's a good standup comedian.

Dennis: Yeah kind of relieves all that stuff in those days kind of relieve all of the tension that oh um (sic). So when the Pentagon papers [camera zooms in on Ellsberg face] were released tell me a little bit about the trial of of (sic) Howard's (Zinn) testimony

Ellsberg: [00:47:34] Well yes um there were just two times in that (sic) I was in court for five months and uh there were two times when I cried that I recall. Once was during a lunch break I had just been testifying about a scene I forget what brought it up but a scene I had seen in on Lilong province (unsure of spelling) near Siagon where a [00:48:02] Vietcong had been in a (sic) had raided into a village which was right near a militia (sic) the militia we were paying essentially the South Vietnamese military regional forces uh had a base right next to this village. And when the Vietcong came in the Regional force had simply fired into the village and burned it to ground essentially it was basically their own village, and I'd come onto the scene while everything was still [00:48:30] smoking the next day. Children's dolls, bits of crockery people had very few possessions to start with and what they had you know were all blacked with the

smoke from mortar fire from the regional forces and um it was basically what we've just done to Kosovo essentially. Get fired at, its what we did in Vietnam all the time, get fired at from a village and we lay waste to the village. [00:49:00] And uh so delivering that scene there was then a break for lunch and I just started crying enormously cause I could see it again and uh the anguish of the whole Vietnam experience people saw that I was crying but I think no one knew why I was crying or what it evoked they didn't know what was in my mind (sic) the scenes that were in my mind. But the other time was when Howard testified he actually testified how we could have taken a different [Ellsberg tears up and breaks off] [00:49:34]

Dennis: Do you want to stop for a second?

Ellsberg: [00:49:39] Its (sic) its doesn't matter its just the most terrible thought when its the one Howard is always raising. That things could have been different [tears up] things could have been different if we'd [clears throat] if we'd fought on our own ideals our declared ideals he talked about the Atlantic Charter [00:50:00] self determination, the ideals for which uh Clinton has just laid waste to Serbia and Kosovo basically from here but he talked about the Atlantic Charters. Well the Atlantic Charter was I guess in 1943 I think between Truman and uh Rosevelt and Churchill uh and I knew that cause I was 12 years old at that time he was 22. (car alarm can be heard in the background at this time) And what it meant the [00:50:30] 4 freedoms [Ellsberg clears throat] (sic) the 4 freedoms and if we had (sic) if we had acted on the ideas of self determination we would have never started a colonial war with the French. [00:50:45] And in that thought of um ideals and views that ignored was very anguishing to me as an American. So uh (sic) so I [00:51:00] I remember crying during his testimony. Its funny I was just seeing our friend Ryan Kovick who was a marine in Vietnam who of course became a paraplegic in an action there, born on the 4th of July, he was just in town to protest our uh bombing of Serbia trying to end it. [00:51:30] and we were having dinner with him [Ellsberg coughs] and uh this was just two weeks ago so as we came out on Pennsylvania avenue went to my car there with my wife Patricia and uh we looked up the street and there was the capital all lit up looking very elegant, beautiful [00:51:55] and Patricia said "this really is a beautiful city if only it stood for what it stands for" she said and that was what Howard testimony was, if only we stood for what we stood for [00:52:15] (brief pause) what we claimed to stand for.

Dennis: Did you get

Ellsberg: What?

Dennis: Did you (sic) could you tell what the juries reaction to

Ellsberg: To what?

Dennis: Towards testimony

Ellsberg: I don't uh know [00:52:35] really um I imagine it was probably new to them. History tends to be new to Americans you don't hear a lot of it. Um I doubt if any of them were old enough to remember the Atlantic Charter they were younger than I was on a whole [00:52:52] um not all of them, some of them probably would but um [00:53:00] you as (interrupted)

Dennis: I ask that question because Howard talks about at a time testifying (Ellsberg gets up to blow his nose)

Ellsberg: Let me

Dennis: Yeah [00:53:14] (Ellsberg back in chair) uh several times I've got I've read reports about juries that are then when given the use of the Pentagon Papers he then uses the thing up with um with David Delenger (unsure of spelling) up in Vermont in Winoosky (unsure of spelling). Is that right next door to Winoosky? (unsure of spelling)

Interviewer F: Winoosky

Dennis: [00:53:30] Yeah Winoosky 44-07 over on one of the senators offices protesting the Nicaragua thing and when juries [are] confronted with the facts with not just the fact with the truth with something that they haven't heard before set out un interrupted with the news casters (creaking noises heard throughout this portion) or anything like that judges they and this relates to your trial because you were found innocent by a jury right?

Ellsberg: No no

Dennis: Oh I'm sorry

Ellsberg: No [00:54:09] the chargers were dismissed when it came out (sic) when it came out of the crimes that Nixon had done against me the judge dismissed the charges just before it went to the jury so it didn't go to the jury.

Dennis: Okay okay do people in many cases it used to be Vietnam as an example juries will find if you're allowed to present moral arguments thats what I'm really getting at [00:54:35]

Ellsberg: Well if I may say there is a little confusion there I will (sic) will acquit people uh let me say from one point of view thats almost never happens what you just said I would disagree with um what can be said what is true is there is a valid defense called the defense of necessity the lesser evil, [00:55:00] a choice of evil, a justification defense there are different names for it in different states and different jurisdictions but the idea of it is that it can be legal to do something that would otherwise be a violation of law if the if it's necessary to do that to prevent an imminently greater evil. [00:55:20] Now if a judge allows that defense to be raised and therefore allowing testimony to come out on the greater evil (sic) the nature of the greater evil the lack of alternative ways on confronting it given a justification defense like that a jury will most usually acquit and thats why judges and prosecutors bar the defense from being raised at all. [00:55:45] If juries are allowed to believe that they can without breaking any law acquit someone who has really acted to rightly has done the right thing to prevent some greater evil they will acquit. [00:56:00] but usually the judge wont allow that argument to be made, he should but they don't because it will lead to an acquittal. Without that defense if its just on the uh straight facts of whether a given law was violated or not I would have to say that no matter how impressed the juries are by the intentions and characters of the defendants and uh the moral arguments that they

are making [00:56:30] they will convict. They will often cry as they do it uh which is less impressive to the defendants than it might be [Ellsberg laughs] to feel that I have touched their hearts and they are doing but they are going to send me to jail anyway uh even though I've done the right thing uh I could say as a defendant uh I have mixed feelings when I see [Ellsberg laughs] when i see that because I think don't they realize that [00:57:00] they could have hugged this jury if they wanted or you know they could have filed for an acquittal you have to give them the sense that they can somehow do this without violating the law themselves but um so I'm sure Howard has been on both sides of that situation.

Dennis: The fact is (sic) that was my quest- I couldn't remember what the defense was.

Ellsberg: Yeah

Dennis: The defense-

Ellsberg: Oh no if their allowed to hear a justification defense and you have a valid case [00:57:30] uh which is usually the case in these civil disobedience, you will typically often get an acquittal but that is a rare (sic) a rare rare class of cases.

Dennis: And judges do anything to keep that form coming up?

Ellsberg: No if the judge (sic) basically the judge has the right to do that [00:57:47] to allow that defense to be made and when a judge does that you understand usually that they are on your side. Cause the judge is using his powers or her powers to allow you to present this evidence in a way that will probably lead to an acquittal [00:58:00] and uh that's their way of joining your action in a way. And if what you're doing is appoint an unjust war or trying to stop an arms race it's what the judges should do if they did understand the real situation they rose to the occasion. I uh I do feel that its' worth getting people in authority (sic) challenging them to rise to the circumstance and give (sic) and understand what their real options are, what their real freedoms are but thats [00:58:30] Howard's who life intellectually and politically it too give people a sense of their choices and their freedom and their power if they are willing to act freely and to act at a risk if necessary. Actually there's so many different ways to tell history [00:58:50] and probably the commonest is simply to tell the story this happened then that happened then that happened but there always some implicate sense of why thats happening that informs the historian and usually gets through to the reader and theres a sense of causation but again that is often presented as if it was inevitable. [00:59:14] This happened because that happened it had to happen this was there was no choice the readers very often given the message at least subliminally that things were inevitable which is to say that the people at the time had no real ability [00:59:30] to change the events and if you're learning lessons from that the lesson is that you don't have that power either. [00:59:36] uh sit back, let it happen, you don't have any ability to affect events and of course Howard tells things from an entirely different point of view, that people at that time had choices and including people on the surface who didn't had a great deal of authority and power. Uh acting together and that might be inspired by an individual acting individually but uh acting ultimately together in an organized way [01:00:07] than people who don't have much money or much status or much expertise of power can raise issues can influence events can change the course of history, they could've done it in the past and his message [01:00:20] is they can do it

now and they can do it in the future. And that's a message both of hope and of reality uh I personally I try to give a similar message and I don't do it just to inspire people in ways that I think are misleading, I tell them the odds are against them very often (sic) the odds are against them [01:00:42] its an uphill fight, the change of succeeding is not large in fact. But it does exist and the existence of that possibility of changing matters by changing your own life is a reality its a truth it's as true as anything else uh and when people understand [01:01:00] that they don't have to been given assurance a guarantee a success when the stakes are very great they they will take large risks in their own lives when they realize there is a chance of actually making a different and Howard more than anyone else (sic) more than anyone else I can think of has communicated to a large fraction to the earths population that there is that chance. [01:01:25] And by changing our own lives we can change history. [voice breaks]

Dennis: Okay thank you. thank you very much. [end of interview]