

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WAYNE R. FERREN, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Wayne R. Ferren, Jr., on August 2, 2021. My name is Shaun Illingworth, for the Rutgers Oral History Archives, and I am currently in Hightstown, New Jersey. Can you please tell me what city and state you are in?

Wayne Ferren: Yes, hi, Wayne R. Ferren, Jr. I'm in Las Vegas, Nevada.

SI: All right, great. For the record, you have also published a memoir *Conscientious Objector*. For people reading this transcript in the future, this is obviously a great companion to the interview and it goes into great detail. If you do not find something in the interview, it is bound to be in this book. This is a great resource on your life and the issues we are going to talk about, like the environmental movement, conscientious objection, things like that. To begin, can you tell me for the record where and when were you born? [Editor's Note: Wayne R. Ferren, Jr. is the author of *Conscientious Objector: A Journey of Peace, Justice, Culture, and Environment*, published in 2021.]

WF: Yes, I was born on August 18, 1948, in Camden, New Jersey.

SI: For the record, what were your parents' names?

WF: My mother's name was Lois Weeks Bowers, becoming Ferren, and my father was Wayne R. Ferren. I'm junior, and by default, he becomes the senior.

SI: Now, we like to know a little bit about family histories, if there are any immigration stories there, or how the family came to New Jersey, for example, Camden County. You go into detail in the book, but if you can just give me a little bit of that background.

WF: Yes. As in many families, people are investigating more and more about their heritage, so it's an ongoing unfolding story. The Bowers, on my mother's side, [were] mostly English, Lovegrove, Bowers, Hudson, traditional English names, English immigrants, over a period of a couple centuries. On my father's side, my grandmother's last name was Bossler, and she was a first-generation German. Her parents spoke German. My grandmother was born around 1889 or so. My grandfather's birth certificate has McFerren on it, but he dropped the "Mc." I have "Mc" and MacFerren and Ferren relatives all on the East Coast and now spread around. As the story unfolds in the book, there's another Wayne Ferren, and he does not have "Mc" or "Mac," as far as I know, associated, or did. There are many spellings of the name [laughter], the various vowels and various attachments of "Mc" and "Mac" and the like. It's a broad Irish-Scottish tale. I don't know all the details yet, but I think it is interesting. If anyone was to look deeper into my past, it's clearly related to a broader perspective of names.

SI: Now, your family was in Camden County, the greater Philadelphia area, in the City of Camden. How did the family get there, to your knowledge?

WF: Well, my mother's side was mostly Burlington County. My grandfather Cecil Bowers was a magistrate, and he is a figure in the book because of his legal mind and also library that I borrowed books from that I quote from in my book. My grandmother ran a small motel associated with the Gable, which was their Victorian, transitional Craftsman house in Parry, a

part of Cinnaminson, in Burlington County. She also had a magistrate's license for marriage and the like. They were quite a couple. They were almost exclusively in the Burlington County area. I know there were various other family members with the last name Russ (my great-uncle Howard Russ, who married by maternal grandfather's sister, Mary Bowers) who had farms along Creek Road in Delanco along Rancocas Creek.

That's a different story than my father's side, which was almost exclusively in Camden County, as far as I know, both the Bosslers and the Ferrens, although I think at one point my grandfather was known to have walked from Burlington down to Camden to work at Campbell Soup. So, there may be some more connections there that I'm not entirely aware of. On my father's side of the family, his parents had seven children, one of whom died in childhood, and the others lived to adulthood, mostly older siblings. My mother's side had five children, one boy and four girls. My mother was number three in the sequence. My parents had three children. My brother Howard, named after my father's brother, Howard Jennings Ferren, is two years younger than me, approximately. My sister was nine years younger, and she died at an early age. It was a tragic death, which I cover in the book to some degree.

SI: You talked a little bit about your parents' backgrounds and how that later affected their lives and your life. What can you share about their lives prior to your birth, the impacts of the Great Depression and World War II, those things?

WF: My father was in the Navy during World War II in the Pacific Theater, and he never spoke much or anything about it. My brother has his scrapbook, which covers a lot of territory and some medals and photographs of the time. There is that military connection there.

My parents had met skating on a pond near where my mother lived. My mother graduated from high school and went to work for Campbell Soup, one of the larger employers. Campbell Soup's corporate headquarters was in Camden, New Jersey, as was RCA and others. It was a major industrial and corporate hub at one point, prior to the depression, and all that had occurred subsequent to that. They were married in '47. The war was over, Dad came home, they got married, Mom got pregnant, and she left her job and then didn't work. She was a housewife and mother during my years at home until later, when she then got work herself after the children were gone.

SI: What did your father do after he got back from the Navy?

WF: He worked for Public Service Gas and Electric. He was a meter reader, as they called them, and went around to the homes, and at the time, all the meters had to be read for consumption of gas and electric. Later on, he joined the transportation portion and was a claims adjuster for the public transport portion of that utility and transportation group. So, it was called Public Service Transportation.

SI: Do you know if he used the GI Bill at all?

WF: He never went to college. Some of his brothers did. I know his brother Jack was in the Army. He's the only one I know of that did service. The others did go to college and were

professional, white collar, you might call them doctors and corporate executives and the like. My father didn't go to college and stayed as a blue-collar worker and had a much more modest income and life than some of his brothers.

The one thing with my father's side, there was a twenty-year gap between the first five and the last two children. While that may be hard to believe, it's true. My father and his younger sister were born about twenty years after the last of the first five. So, that resulted in having some of my first cousins, who I don't really know, as the age of my parents, and so some of them I only knew peripherally and unlike other first cousins that I know who are more like brothers and sisters. That was an interesting gap. I think that probably affected my father somewhat in his behavior because there are the issues of who was my father and his behavior through my book that I try to portray. Perhaps was spoiled rotten after he came along after twenty years. [laughter] Who knows?

SI: You said your brother has a scrapbook that reveals some of what he did in the war. Do you think there was any kind of potential PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] issues, or do you know if he was in a combat zone or that sort of thing?

WF: Well, he was scheduled to go to Japan, but the war ended. Although he has some documents from Okinawa, I think, and other battles--he was on a landing ship [LST 547], he was the boatswain's mate--to my knowledge, he didn't see any battle. I don't know if there's any evidence for that.

SI: I was just curious.

WF: Yes, I understand, because my father became a very bigoted and a difficult person and ultimately was accused by at least some of perhaps abusing or molesting my sister at some point. That's a difficult subject and unprovable, but [it led to] my sister's behavior and her decline and ultimate death from alcoholism in a fire. She was a brilliant young woman, straight-A student, great artist, and something happened along the way that derailed her life. Well, we'll never know for sure all those details. I believe he was capable of abusing her.

SI: Well, let's move to your earliest memories. You grew up in--was it East Camden?

WF: Yes.

SI: What were some of your earliest memories, and what was that area that you grew up in like?

WF: It was all white. I mention that because we were one of the first families that moved out when the first Black family moved in a block away. That's a tragic legacy. As a footnote to that, when I married an African American woman, my father disowned me and we didn't speak for about thirty years before his death. There's a family dysfunctional legacy and difficulty over race that bothers me to this day because I don't understand it. He never met my wife or his two grandsons--a real tragedy, and it had family repercussions for decades.

My father enjoyed camping, hunting and fishing. I don't ever remember him playing any ball games of any kind--and skating. He played ice hockey. We eventually had a summer camp at the lake where his Boy Scout camp had been at Wilson's Lake. From the mid-'50s through to the time I entered college, most summers we spent at the cabin my parents built at Wilson's Lake. The escape from Camden was a big deal. It affected my life because of my interest in wetlands and ecology. When you're immersed in it all the time as a kid and catching turtles and fish and looking at all the insectivorous plants and the like, it's very cool. My mother was very loving and interested in that and encouraged all that activity.

I went to Francis X. McGraw Elementary School. I remember Mrs. Collingswood, my third-grade teacher, was very influential in helping me over reading disabilities and some other things. The other thing I remember is that I used to win awards in flower arranging. Believe it or not, every fall, kids would bring in vases and whatever they had in their yard, and the whole cafeteria would be set up and I have these little certificates. My interest in botany, I guess, goes way back. As a professional botanist later on, it was kind of fun to think about that.

Then, I went to Cramer Junior High for seventh grade. The school was then condemned. I see it's functional today, so they must've repaired it. It was a nineteenth century building. I think the upper floors needed work. Then, I went over to Davis Junior High and then to Woodrow Wilson High School. They're mentioned in my book, especially Woodrow Wilson. It was such a good school, and we had so [many] activities that I became involved in, in science fairs and speech contests and the like. There was a lot of opportunity for growth and involvement, and I think highly of that time. The African American students mostly came from public buses or school buses coming in from North Camden and the like and likewise for the Puerto Rican students.

My second wife, Yvonne Gray-Ferren, was African American from her mother's side of the family, and Puerto Rican from her father. She had a broad ethnic background and was a very talented songwriter and singer. Von died this past August, almost a year ago. That's another part of the story. She was in the Air Force, and my younger son was in the Army. We have a broad interest in peace and war and discussions of the like. That's another whole topic, but I think one has to respect other people's points of view and interest and have a full dialogue, those kinds of things. That part of my life was very interesting.

Then, graduating in 1966 from Woodrow Wilson, I realized I wanted to be a geologist and all my life had collected fossils. I was interested in dinosaurs and I wanted to be a paleontologist. I was accepted at Rutgers and got a four-year, state-paid scholarship.

SI: Before we talk about Rutgers, I want to ask a few more questions about your early influences.

WF: Oh, sure.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit more about your going to Wilson's Lake and that impact on your love of nature and science? Were you just kind of on your own going out and collecting specimens, or was there any kind of, maybe not a program, but could you follow along with books and correspondence?

WF: No. [laughter] It was great. We had a canoe and a pram. We weren't directly on the lake, but we had a pier. My [father's] younger sister, Nancy, and her family, the Gambacortas--Bari Gambacorta is like a brother to me today--had a place as well eventually, and they were more directly on the lake. We would fish and collect plants and animals and swim and canoe. My father commuted to Camden or Philadelphia, depending on where he was working, and then some folks came from Philadelphia and spent the weekend, for example, or vacations. There were other families who spent the whole summer, and that was us, except when we maybe went to the Jersey Shore. We had relatives who had houses there. We always had our annual crabbing trip and Delaware Bay fishing trip and the like. As I said, my father was into that, and then we also went hunting. I discussed that in the book. You only know what you're taught in the beginning [laughter] and it became clear to me that I was not going to go out killing animals and this wasn't something I can do. So, I gave that up. My brother continued to hunt through his adult years, but that was something that I felt I just couldn't do, even though in the beginning I did because that's how we were brought up, with bows and arrows and guns and fishing.

Yes, it was very influential. My interest in plants, I think, clearly came from time at Wilson's Lake, because I was exposed to, as I said, a lot of insectivorous plants, pitcher plants and sundews and the like, bladderworts, and then many other plants in wetlands and the animals that it supported. We always had terrariums and aquariums of the native fish and turtles and snakes that we found there and then let them all go at the end of the year. [laughter] It was quite an experience and I think very influential later on in my interest in ecology and the sanctity of life and the diversity of life and the things I then studied as an adult in my career at UC Santa Barbara [University of California, Santa Barbara].

SI: In your early school experiences, would you say that you found ample support for your interest in science?

WF: Yes. Well, my mother, as I said, was always encouraging. We always had bird feeders in Camden. She was always interested in that kind of thing. Then, in the lake, we pretty much were encouraged and I think left alone for some of it really. Because of my interest in fossils and living plants and animals, I was just immersed in that.

My interest in science fairs came when I went to Davis [Junior High]. My friend, now lifelong friend Bill Gallagher, who is featured in the book cover to cover almost, he was quite a rocketeer in the early days of young people with rockets, as well as fossil collecting. He had connections with the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, now at Drexel University. So, I became more and more interested and was out collecting with him and entered science fairs. My close neighbor, Harry Corey, we lived in a duplex in Camden, so Harry, Bill, and I would compete in science fairs often, and one of us would be one, two or three, gold medal, silver medal or bronze medal kind of thing for several years. My interest then was catapulted into more formal things, such as science fairs, one of which I won first prize and then won first prize in chemistry at the Franklin Institute and then went on to West Point to present it and won a Ford Foundation award and the like. That was extremely exciting to me to be involved in areas somewhat beyond my realm. That was paleobiochemistry and looking at amino acids in fossils and thinking about the evolution of life. So, that was part of the high school experience.

Plus, literature and then speech, I took public speaking as a course, and the teacher was not much older than us and very progressive and interested in all the students and set up the Auslander-Rose Speech Contest, which was held every year. It was funded and developed in honor of two men killed during World War II who were students at Woodrow Wilson. It was a very interesting situation with Winston Churchill dying the year before I graduated and those of us in class who were going to be in the speech contest choosing something, and I chose to present quotes from Winston Churchill. So, that also opened my eyes, [along with] of course, the school being named for Woodrow Wilson and his interest in world peace and the motto of the school really has an element of peace in it. All those things were part of this swirl of your youth but not necessarily focused into what would come later in college, when confronted with the draft. But I look back and I include in my book various elements of what was going on in high school and the global sense with folks like Woodrow Wilson and Winston Churchill and others. In addition to my science, there were other elements of my life that were also just part of what I was doing.

SI: You would go to these institutions in Philadelphia for competitions, but did you go there for research or just to visit?

WF: Yes. My teacher, Mrs. Garbarino, was the chemistry teacher, who was very influential, and went to West Point with me. She was a chaperone for the presentation. Yes, I had professional assistance and people who could help provide chemicals and all that I wouldn't be able to get. Then, once I won first place that year, this was my junior year in '65, I was then entered into the Franklin Institute Delaware Valley Regional Science Fair and won first place in chemistry, which then catapulted me to be able to go to a national competition and a presentation at another regional one at Monmouth University in New Jersey first and then to West Point. That was pretty exciting, very exciting I'd say [laughter], to be able to travel with Mrs. Garbarino and other locals who were going to go, the local students, and then be able to have your paper published in the proceedings, very exciting and interesting and allowing me to expand my interests further in realizing that I really wanted to go to college. To do that, one had to not only get in but had to have money to do it, and so that set up how was I going to go about it.

I received support from a scientist at Campbell Soup, who provided guidance and supplies, such as sample amino acids for my science fair project in paleobiochemistry. I also received significant mentorship support from Dr. Horace Richards at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. I am very grateful for the many folks who have helped me throughout my education professional life.

Regarding family support, in my book, I mention a poignant moment that my father and I didn't have too often because we didn't really connect well through life, even at an early age. I think, as I mention sometimes, sons named after their fathers are in an interesting situation of having their name. After my father disowned me, I never saw him use senior, as though the recognition of senior would mean there had to be a junior. [laughter] But I do remember once, because he could be emotional, when I went up to get the award at the Franklin Institute, my parents were in the audience and I happened to see him with a tear coming down his cheek. That sticks with me to this day because here's a side of a father who was apparently proud and excited for his son but not really connecting well, even though I did fish, did hunt, and did some other things with him,

and then eventually having me disowned because I married a Black Puerto Rican, which just shocks me and all the family meltdown associated with that. I just mention it because you said about the support. Yes, that's an interesting moment.

SI: Yes, absolutely. You mentioned that some of your teachers were hands on and supportive.

WF: Oh, yes, I think all of them. I can't say enough about Woodrow Wilson. Now, I do mention, I think, in the book, that our classes were integrated and I had, once I got out of elementary school, connections with people of color and that was good and exciting. I don't remember thinking anything unusual about it really at the time. We were just all students together. It was only later on that I realized, bringing someone home, that my father was such a racist. It just didn't occur to me. But we would segregate at lunch, and I distinctly remember the missed opportunities of having--I think some of the athletes ate together, but you would have your African American area and your Puerto Rican tables and your white tables. I hope it's not that way today because it was kind of self-isolation that was totally unnecessary. I went to the fiftieth reunion at Woodrow Wilson and it was just one of those things that sticks in your mind, a product of the times, although what you see today, it obviously hasn't left us, as far as the racist issues in this country.

SI: As you were going through high school, things are changing for Camden, not only because of issues of race but also economics as well. How were you seeing the city change?

WF: Well, there used to be department stores we'd go to and theaters downtown. Even when I was in college, I remember buying albums at LITS downtown, and then all those stores were eventually gone. In addition to the economic problems associated with the depression that Camden never really recovered from, there were also the racial tensions and some of the disturbances. I hate to call them riots because I see that as a negative term for a situation of desperation with the killing of Martin Luther King and then eventually the killing of some local folks. I cover that in my book. There were two major conflicts in Camden that resulted in the burning of Kaighn Avenue and some other business districts that further impacted the situation, perhaps like Watts in Los Angeles and the like. There was so much of that nationally, I think some cities don't really get the--recognition is not the word--but the press and understanding of the depth of the problems. Now, Camden has, over a period of time, gotten lots of negative recognition for all the violence and deaths and the political corruption and economic meltdown, and it's definitely on the upswing now. I'm so proud and happy to see that my hometown is having a renaissance of sorts--it's got this fabulous waterfront that has been underutilized for decades. It has this great history. It's multicultural, and it can have a great future. It just had a very difficult and corrupt political system for a long time that didn't help any. I remember some of that and also have read about it--my mom would send me articles all the time, for one thing or another, from the latest dinosaur discovery to what's happening in Camden. I have a box full of correspondence from her over the years in which I didn't see her that is a source for another book perhaps at some point. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Two riots occurred in Camden, on September 2, 1969 and on August 20, 1971. Both stemmed from incidents of police brutality.]

SI: As you were coming of age in high school, were you following news beyond Camden, like the civil rights movement of the early '60s through the mid-'60s?

WF: Again, mentioning my book, the first time that I became aware was Little Rock, because there was television coverage. Those incidents in the late '50s were really my first awareness. I mean, I can distinctly remember those events on TV and the violence. To me, my recognition of some issues related to race go back to TV coverage of Little Rock, and then it's been part of my life in recognition or reality ever since, through high school and then in Camden, partly because of the Black Student Unity Movement at Rutgers and other things that made you aware of the inequities in the community and in the school. Some of that and their actions were the foundation, for example, of some of the anti-war activities. Eventually, I think they became integrated to the point of our Free University, but I don't want to get ahead of myself. There is that leadership of civil rights, as well as then the joining of forces, whether it's the women's movement, gay rights movement, anti-war movement, environmental movement, all these coalescing and having, I think, a profound influence on individual lives and collectively in Camden, and Rutgers was in the center of some of that. Being there at the time, I thought, was highly influential on me, as well as me then participating and growing from that. [Editor's Note: In September of 1957, nine African American students attempted to enter the newly desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas but were denied access by mobs and the Arkansas National Guard, which was deployed by Governor Orval Faubus to block the school's integration. In response, President Dwight Eisenhower federalized the National Guard and deployed federal troops to the school to grant entry and provide protection to the students, who became known as the Little Rock Nine. The Black Student Unity Movement (BSUM) was a student-led civil rights organization at Rutgers-Camden that formed during the late 1960s to protest the underrepresentation of African Americans at the State University and inequities in campus culture and curriculum.]

SI: You mentioned that you got the scholarship to go to Rutgers. Was it always an obvious choice for you to go to Rutgers-Camden? Did you look at other schools?

WF: No, I wanted to go to the UC-Berkeley because of a paleontology program, but, no, it was just out of the question with the money and whether I could get in or not, although I was in the honor's society. I was a member of the honor's society at Woodrow Wilson. I had great grades. The issue was, I don't think, was my academic record. It was the fact that I would have to figure out how to get there financially and support myself.

Rutgers in Camden had a new geology program, relatively new. I was sure I could get in there and at least, in the early years, could commute from home. So, it made sense. As I say later in my book, "If there's a will, there's a way. If I want to do this, I've got to figure out how." Applying for financial support and because of my parent's economic situation, I was eligible for a four-year scholarship. Then, I had, the first year, all the books paid for too. I think that was a separate [scholarship], it wasn't a part of the state support. It was a separate award that I got of some kind that I don't remember the details of now because being in the honor's society or whatever. That was helpful. I was able to [matriculate] and get in there and begin a whole new life.

SI: Your family was still living in Camden at the time. When did the move to Voorhees happen?

WF: I was about to be a junior, and my brother was about to become a freshman. I think this was the fall of '68. We'll have to check that. The spring is when my parents had moved to Voorhees. Now, that's '67, spring of '67. That was because of the first African American family moving around the corner, and my father just uprooted us. We moved, and that was that. I then had to commute a further distance using buses, and the scheduling and all just became more complicated.

Also, my father and I and our relationship became more difficult. I remember my brother and I brought home an African American friend, and Dad wouldn't come in the house and told us never to do that again. I mean, there were things that were just shocking. Looking back at his behavior, my brother associates it with a pretty severe case of OCD [obsessive-compulsive disorder], and I didn't even think about it or know. What do you know when you're a child, trying to deal with a parent who is pretty brow-beating abusive? [laughter] My mother ultimately was in receipt of some of that, as were some of us. I was having my own growth issues in late teen years and trying to find my way, and it just wasn't going to be with him. So, I told my brother one day, I said, "Look, I'm going to leave. I've got to figure this out before we start school this year. Do you want to come with me?" He said, "Yes." He already had a part-time job with my father's brother, Uncle Ed, the doctor, with his shipyard in Camden because my uncle was involved in banking and shipping as well as his practice. He was, I think, the third in line on my paternal side. It was my Aunt Jessie, then my Uncle Howard, and then Ed, I think, and then Jack. He [my brother] had a job. I didn't have a job. [laughter] I [thought], "I've got to figure this out somehow."

We got an apartment on the third floor of a three-story building for seventy-five dollars a month. That was more or less on campus. I mean, it was one block from the Science Building. It was at Third and Cooper. We started our life there. We moved out, and I know my mother was upset. We didn't see them for probably six months. But that launched us.

What am I going to do for work? As a geology major, one of the things you have to do is take freshmen biology. Biology was taught at Rutgers by the semester system, not quarter system, so you had your fall semester and then your winter-spring semester. The first part was botany, and the second part was zoology. Ralph Good, a major mentor in my life, a plant ecologist, important in the Pine Barrens and freshwater marshes and the like, announced one day he had a work-study position. I'm thinking, "Work-study, what's that?" [It was] in the herbarium. "What the hell's a herbarium?" [laughter] I immediately went up to him afterwards, and I said, "Okay, I know what work-study is now. I'm sure I'm eligible, and I'm happy to learn." He hired me, and that, again, set off a whole new trajectory in my life regarding botany and herbaria and plant ecology that then changed my life because it was influential in me getting my alternate service once I was drafted and got my CO [conscientious objector]. [Editor's Note: Dr. Ralph E. Good served as a faculty member at Rutgers-Camden for twenty-four years. He was a botany professor, director of the graduate biology program, and biology chairman. Good is well known for leading the preservation efforts to protect over one million acres of the New Jersey Pine Barrens. He died in 1991 at the age of fifty-four from throat cancer.]

Ralph, then later when I was in graduate school, was my major professor. Although he is now deceased by several decades, his wife Norma, also a professional botanist, and I still correspond, and she in fact gave me a picture of the two of them that's in my book. Their daughter Karen and I communicate. Norma has now moved to Denver, where her daughter Karen is. They, together, Norma and Ralph, were influential in my life in a big way. I cover some of that in my discussions with Ralph regarding my application for conscientious objection as well and his opinions on what I can do.

The fact I left home, you see, resulted in me getting a job as a work-study student in a herbarium that I knew nothing about and it changed my whole life, although I always had an interest in plants back to the days of Wilson's Lake. I guess it's a continuum of sorts. You never know when the doors are going to open, and you can choose to go through them or not. This door opened and I went through it and here I am today.

SI: Now, your initial interest in Rutgers-Camden was the geology program.

WF: Yes.

SI: Tell me about that. Are there any professors there that stand out?

WF: Oh, yes. Mr. Alfred Hirsch and Mr. Lee Harvill were two professors/lecturers who were hired at the time. I think they were still working on their Ph.Ds. while teaching at Rutgers. Hirsch was the paleontologist and Harvill was the geomorphologist, structural geologist. Then, they hired Dr. Robert Greenwood, who was a mineralogist, and so all three of those gentlemen were influential in my life. I eventually got a teaching position as a lab assistant working to teach some elements of freshmen geology. I was doing that too through part of my junior and senior year, so that was great. We went on a lot of field trips. I had a great time. I learned a lot. I just loved my courses in geology. But, interestingly, because it's a liberal arts school and because you need to take a certain number of liberal arts credits, I chose to take "Western Civilization," "Modern American Novel" and "Modern American Poetry," great courses, very influential. Can we stop for a minute?

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: We were just discussing the liberal arts courses you took and how they were influential on you.

WF: Yes, I thought "Western Civilization," too bad there wasn't Eastern civilization or others, at the time, but the young teacher, whose name I forget, was really quite good and it was exciting. Then, "Modern America Novel," taught by the same teacher who taught "Modern American Poetry," another gentleman, allowed me to read things I may not have read otherwise. We went through, in the "Modern American Novel," a lot of interesting novels, and likewise with poetry. I eventually wrote poetry myself, which I include some of them in the book that I thought were representative of the time. I began writing poetry in the late '60s and continued for several decades. They were both influential.

That, I think, is one of the benefits of going to a liberal arts college because getting a B.A. in Geology makes you different, rather than a B.S. I think in liberal arts colleges, you're being trained to be a thinking adult, and it's not focused so much on what is your job going to be. It's getting a rounded education, so that you can think for yourself in a broad range of things. I was reading all sorts of literature and studying history, which included, of course, wars, while I'm also studying science, and that has to have an influence on you. It absolutely has to.

I'm just going to back up to high school for a minute. One of the things I mention in my book is having to write papers for, I think, a course on social sciences, and I chose capital punishment. I used one of my grandfather's books, again, back to the magistrate and his library, among other documents. [laughter] I think that also was influential in my thinking about killing because suddenly I'm reading about the global elements of capital punishment and how some countries don't have it and how it's not effective and the available statistics at the time. I'm thinking, "Well, being against capital punishment is consistent with me not killing." I was raised a Christian, although I later became a combination of a more transcendental kind of thinking. Nonetheless, not killing, including capital punishment, was part of my early thinking in high school, which then continued into college and the rest of my life.

There are roots. You can see the roots of one's training and exposing whether it's my early Christian training, thinking in terms of high school courses, and then the influential faculty at college, at a liberal arts college. Having a degree in science but taking a lot of liberal arts courses just rounds you out and allows you to think of things that you may not have been exposed to. Then, when life confronts you, like the draft, the military draft with a low lottery number, then you really have to use your mind to think, "Am I going to war or not?" I can look back on all these individual things that occurred and realize that they all had influence on me.

SI: You talk about the confluence of the environmental movement, conscientious objection, there were all these issues. I am curious, when you were a freshman going into Rutgers-Camden, were you, even at that point, exposed to eastern philosophies? Was that part of your belief?

WF: Not right away, no. I went through a period of existentialism, it's true, but I think a lot of young people do, "Who am I? Why am I here? What's the universe about? Do I care?" I think some suicidal thinking comes out of that for a lot of young people, and the statistics today are not good on youth. But I also had similar feelings about life, and because you're suddenly thinking and questioning what it's all about, you need to figure it out. Some people figure it out on the streets. Other people figure it out entering the military. Some people figure it out going to college. We have all different paths, and they can lead to different forms of thinking. I mention some of this in my book. I feel it's an important period of trying to break through from the early years to young adulthood and you're not sure. [laughter] You're not sure what's up.

But I was more and more interested in eastern philosophies, especially once I left home and I had more opportunity to have more influences. I had new young neighbors. I don't mention all this in the book, there [were] a lot of local residents and local college residents who had other thinking. There was a couple that went to Cuba to harvest sugarcane. I thought that was interesting. There were a lot of other influences that one may not get living at home because

you're simply on campus and back, rather than twenty-four/seven being involved in an inner-city situation with neighbors. I was mugged once as well, just walking between the apartment and the Science Building, a random opportunity, and it's just one of those things. I was there at that time. [laughter] Fortunately, I was only mildly injured, and there was nothing to rob. I was a completely broke student. [laughter] [I thought], "You guys are robbing the wrong guy here because you're not going to get anything out of me, other than just to whip my ass." [laughter]

I think there's a lot to be said about the influences of this other environment. One of those influences was, as I became more involved in drug culture and while visiting Philadelphia for various reasons and the like, encountering Buddhists and being invited to participate and understand their religion. I think that was a big moment as well, which led me further into eastern thinking, and then to American transcendentalism, neopaganism, and other types of modern religions, such as New Age. Some of the influences of that type of thinking and belief systems in terms of the relatedness of humans and all living things and the sacredness of all living things and peace and nonviolence and the sanctity of life and the energy flow through ecosystems, as I discuss, is the basis of some of my claim of conscientious objection. All those things are related, and one can look back and think, "Well, if I hadn't left home, or if I hadn't done this," all the what-ifs that we all have in our lives. I can look back at some moments and realize when certain things occurred that were opportunistic--and if you're open for it. I mean, someone else could've said, "No, thank you" [to] taking the job in the herbarium with Ralph Good or accepting the invitation to understand Buddhism. To be open to things, I think, is a gift too because then it allows you to mature, and you can make up your own mind as you experience these other aspects of life.

SI: As you were progressing in your studies, first with geology and then plant ecology and those issues, were you thinking that you would always go into something like academia? What were your goals there?

WF: Yes, well, a lot of geologists end up in the oil industry, and so that wasn't my thinking. I always wanted to be a paleontologist, and of course there are some in the oil industry as well. Because of my interest in paleobiochemistry and I was interested more in the evolution of life, which is hence more of an academic pursuit, just simply because you need a job, maybe that's where the job is, which then requires graduate school and the like, so it's a broader thinking, like, "Where am I really going with this?" My thoughts were that I would be in academia because of my interest in questions and answers in science, but there were more jobs in applied disciplines, such as in geology or in the oil industry or in mining. Certainly, here in the west, mining in Nevada especially is a big deal, so there are many geologists employed in various aspects of geology including hydrology and ground water. Some of the work I've been exposed to in my older years here is in ground-water remediation of polluted aquifers, and so that's often a hydrogeology and geology issue. It's likely I would have gone in the academic direction that I eventually did, but some of it too was maybe premature to think about. "I'm interested, okay. Where's it going to lead me? I have no idea."

SI: In general, could you tell me a little bit about the Rutgers-Camden campus during this period?

WF: Yes. Well, the campus had fewer students than my high school. Today, it's around ten thousand, I think, but back then, it was maybe fourteen hundred or so. I remember my high school senior class was over four hundred. It was just about the same size maybe, but I think a little less. The campus was small and founded partly on the law school that had been there in the '50s. I always thought it was interesting to see the students who were attending their reunion, who had been there in the '50s. They were there with their fiftieth reunion or something, and then here I am, now at the fifty-one reunion, which just passed, so it's interesting to think about. Time just flew by. [Editor's Note: In 1950, Rutgers University merged with the College of South Jersey and its law school, the South Jersey Law School, to create Rutgers University-Camden. In 2015, the Rutgers School of Law-Camden merged with the Rutgers School of Law-Newark to form one law school on two campuses.]

It was small. The benefit of that is you knew everybody. You knew the administrators, and some of them were very helpful to me, in the end, in my application for conscientious objection. You had a close association, especially those of us who eventually lived in the surrounding urban neighborhoods of campus. Today, the Camden campus consumes a much greater portion of Camden. It's grown significantly and I think is quite a contribution today to the area. Back then, it was an island of mostly white students commuting into an area that was mostly people of color. Camden had changed from being mostly Caucasian to mostly a combination of African American, Puerto Rican and other Latins. That was interesting. Today, the campus is quite different than it was back then.

I had good teachers, small classes. Some of my geology classes had three people. It was like private training. No more than a dozen. Most of the geology majors came from recruitments from freshmen geology. I was one of the few people that actually entered Rutgers as a geology major. I was a rarity. It was a good experience. We had our progressive elements with the coffee house called the Perimeter, where you could go listen to poetry and folk music. I had a very good education, and I enjoyed it very much. I grew a lot in that, realizing that it was majority white, but there were students of color. It was just that it didn't represent the neighborhoods, and so some of the conflicts that developed were really trying to get Rutgers to own up to its responsibilities to the neighborhood it was located in. This evolution was occurring at the time of the formation of the Black Student Unity Movement. That superseded some of the anti-war elements, but eventually the two had some similarities and similar involvement in activism regarding campus affairs.

SI: Well, before we talk about the movements, you mentioned there were spaces for listening to folk music and stuff like that. What other elements of student life might have there been?

WF: Fraternities and sororities were a big, big deal back then. I did pledge, but after having gone through hell night at KSU [Kappa Sigma Upsilon], I just felt it wasn't for me, although some of my friends continued to and some of the friends today still have their annual meetings and get-togethers and with their fraternity brothers. I didn't join, although I had been through all the motions, including hell night. I presume I would have been accepted at that point, but I backed away. I'm not sure I can articulate all the reasons why at this point, but I did. That was one outlet and the Greek parade and the Greek parties, so that was a major element on campus. There also was a local campus-oriented bar, The Grille, which was quite popular. It was

reproduced on campus for the 2010 annual reunion that happened on our 40th reunion for the Class of 1970. A great time reminiscing was had by all!

As I became more and more interested in botany and became known on campus in different ways, I was asked to be a member of the Landscape Committee. I was part of the committee that helped design and implement the main park in the middle of campus. Penn Street was closed. It provided an opportunity and there weren't many green spaces, and so this central area was designed as a park on which the university center, the administration building, the Science Building, and some of the newer buildings, including the new library addition, are oriented toward the campus court. I have a picture of me sitting with some of the committee members. [laughter] I've got my long hair, beads and vest on. I remember it being important because later on, I got involved in, as an adult, designing nature parks and being interested in the interface between urban and natural areas. I can look back to that as maybe my first exposure to landscape architecture. Because of my interest in botany with Ralph Good, I was the student representative on the committee. [laughter] They needed a student representative, and I became that person. That was interesting. You see the park today all grown with mature trees and don't realize that it had a beginning back then, as a concept. It just so happens I was appointed as a student representative.

There were various outlets to get involved in on campus as well. The new library was finished when I was a senior, the library expansion, and we were the first graduating class to graduate on campus and not graduate in a theater in downtown Camden or somewhere else. Graduation was exciting because we were able to wear our anti-war bands and demonstrate our opposition to the Vietnam War. The front deck of the library facing the park became the place in which you marched across and received your diploma. That park area then has its foundation in those latter years of the '60s, when the committee was set up to think about working with the landscape architect to design it.

SI: Was there anything in particular about that park that you personally wanted to see done or you felt the students would want?

WF: I'm not sure I remember a whole lot about it, except probably I wanted native trees too, not just exotic trees, and maybe that was my contribution in that diversity and nativeness. I would like to think that's a focus I wanted [laughter], but I'm afraid I don't remember a whole lot about it. I have the picture, and I have the recognition of it and probably somewhere some paperwork about the committee and park. The campus was thinking about more design and quality of lifestyle, as it began to expand. I think that was a big issue. Of particular note and of historical relevance, the Student Center facing the park on Penn Street is located where the home of Isaac Martindale once stood. He was a banker and well-known 19th century botanist who established a large and important herbarium containing specimens collected by himself and many other botanists of the time. Upon his death in 1893, the collection was donated to the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science and is now housed in the National Herbarium at the Smithsonian Institution. I have often thought a plaque should be located on site to honor him as an important Camden resident and historical figure. The land on which the Rutgers-Camden campus is situated has a long and fascinating history and pre-history that is worth understanding and recognizing.

One of the things I didn't include in the book and I may take a moment to say is about having a class in math that had a profound--I don't know if effect is the right word, but it made me think about violence in education. Eddie Cantor was hired as a graduate student from the University of Pennsylvania--I hope I get this story right--to teach math courses at Camden. The course we had as freshmen was Boolean algebra, the theory of sets, upon which things like Fortran and other computer programs were based. Oh, my God, you could see a bunch of freshmen here thinking, "Boolean algebra?" Well, Eddie was just in space and he would stand up with his back to the wall writing formulas on the chalkboard and then erasing them, and he then would turn around saying, "It's intuitively obvious that..." but then we'd get the answer wrong anyway. Well, much of the class failed or got Ds. I mean, it was just remarkable. We were all just flabbergasted. Not only is the subject different than anything we ever had, this guy just couldn't teach or couldn't relate. Well, he wound up having this conflict with his graduate committee and he shot and killed this major professor and himself in class. He was no longer our teacher, and I don't remember what year that was. You see the violence today and students and issues, and here's the stress of maybe not getting his Ph.D. or having trouble with it. He didn't relate to people. I mean, it was very difficult. I didn't bring that into my book, but it's one of those things that sticks with you because you knew that person and you experienced what he was like. Could it have happened at Camden? There was a clear reason it happened at the University of Pennsylvania because he was having a conflict there. But that's an early wakeup call to me about guns and violence that perpetuate today, and I just thought I'd mention that because most people may not have any idea that the tragedy took place or that we students had Eddie, Mr. Cantor, as our Boolean algebra teacher. Another influence. I was a freshman at the time, at the time I had him, not necessarily the time that he committed that violence, but it sticks with me to this day as an example of guns and violence in education and so I mentioned it here. [Editor's Note: On February 11, 1970, Robert Cantor shot two professors and then killed himself at the mathematics department at the University of Pennsylvania. Walter Koppelman, who suffered a chest wound, died two weeks later, and Oscar Goldman was hospitalized and recovered. Cantor was a former graduate student who had studied with Koppelman.]

SI: I wanted to ask about the anti-war movement, particular in relation to the campus, but also your other experiences. It kind of comes out very strongly in '68, going into '69, but in the early few years, were you aware of what was happening? Was there a movement at Rutgers-Camden that you were involved with?

WF: Well, it was covered on TV and radio so much and in the news. It was just there. You couldn't escape it. There were, of course, students who were coming back who were veterans as well, and I knew some of them. Having the four-year educational deferment is what we were offered if you were in college. Again, thinking about equity, which is an issue for me from all of this, at the time, there wasn't always a draft for the war, but due to economic circumstances and others, young men at the time, not women, would enter to serve or to obtain a job. My future wife, for example, was an assistant to a base commander in the Air Force. One of the things she did was receive for the commander the dog tags from dead soldiers, and they would then contact the parents and arrange for them to receive the dog tags. So, she was stressed by that grim statistic. Anyway, a sidetrack.

Yes, it was part of our lives but in the first few years of college not significantly so. As more and more student demonstrations occurred, and because I went to Philadelphia often enough, I picked up more and more literature, some of which I preserved and cite in my book. I began seriously thinking about the war and what the war was really about and about the economic aspects, not the Communist aspect. That became a huge influence on me in thinking about war and the Vietnam War in the context of the exploitation of resources, cheap labor, and markets for export and the whole Southeast Asia area being up for grabs. We, the United States, have always been interested, since the eighteenth century, in Southeast Asia and the related parts of the continent.

Gradually, thinking ahead, both that at some point I'm graduating and then there is the draft, one of the things that affects young men at the time is that you were forced into thinking about your future and not just letting it happen to you. That is, with the draft that occurred in December of '69, when the lottery was implemented, I remember watching it. My birthday came out of one bin and the number out of another. My number was 141, and I knew I'm a healthy guy, I eventually easily passed my physical, and the numbers were going to go much higher than 141. [Editor's Note: The first Vietnam War draft lottery took place during the senior year of the Class of 1970. On December 1, 1969, the U.S. Selective Service held the draft lottery, which was broadcast live on television and radio. The lottery selected birthdays to determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970. In that draft, the highest Administrative Processing Number (APN), or draft number, that was called up was 195.]

In the earlier aspects of it, I was beginning to participate with demonstrations and anti-war activities. The march on Washington on November 15, 1969 was big. We got a bus, and a bunch of the students in Camden went on the bus down and joined the thousands of others. I have a picture in the book on the march on Washington on Pennsylvania Avenue from the Associated Press. Yes, we were there. That was before I knew that I would have a low lottery number, you see. [Editor's Note: The march on Washington refers to the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam, which took place on October 15, 1969, followed by another large anti-war march in Washington, D.C. a month later, on November 15, 1969.]

I was involved and participating from a scientific point of view, and my concern for human beings and beginning to think about my concern for the Earth and my fellow human beings and how war is the antithesis of everything that I felt. The demonstrations picked up, anti-war picked up. The more that Washington did, depending on which president was there, there were things going on that just were horrific and we were the invaders and we were the ones exacerbating this, really pretty much picking up the colonialism from France that had been going on for centuries. That was just inevitable.

Now, getting a low lottery number adds to that situation because then eventually you have a decision to make. Either you participate with the system and you enter the military, or you participate with the system and try to get your conscientious objector status, or you go to jail. I cover in my book my dear friend John Braxton, a Quaker, who was a conscientious objector, but refused to participate with the system and so he was jailed for sixteen months of a two-year sentence in federal prison for refusing to go. That's a different path. What path would I have

taken if I hadn't gotten my conscientious objector status, we don't know. Leaving the country--my then wife, Angel, Angela Napoliello-Ferren, we were thinking of leaving the country probably. I don't know that going to jail was my path. I considered just disappearing as well. Most likely, we'd have left the country if I wasn't able to get the CO, because I didn't mind doing service for, as I said, my country, planet Earth, mankind. I think it's a good thing, and I discussed, in a whole section of my book, the national workforce idea.

I think there are different paths that different people had. John is one of my heroes in his ability to always think in a serious way about what his actions mean, and he was not going to participate and have someone else go in his place, as he felt. So, he was tried, he committed a felony, and there's a picture of him in handcuffs in my book. I wanted to give John a voice as another alternative to those of us who were fighting a war and were in situations that we didn't always have full control over. The options were few. I was fortunate enough to be able to articulate my feelings, and the Supreme Court had timely rulings that somewhat reinterpreted the Selective Service Act. There's a lot of convergences, you see, of different elements that result in what one's life is about. Some of it is beyond your control, and some of it is in your control.

SI: You talk about in the book the importance in your mind of ecology, particularly the ecology of Vietnam, and the impact the war was having there. Was that something you picked up from this literature you were getting that was also talking about the economic background, the history, or was that coming from somewhere else?

WF: Of course, Vietnam was unknown to me, and I felt that if my country could send me to a country that I don't know to kill people I don't know for no good reason as far as I could tell, I could certainly figure out more about the country and make up my own mind. Some of what's in the book is subsequent to my thinking. Certainly, the economic importance of Vietnam and its geology and the connection of the Indian Plate and the Asian Plate and the subduction zone, where the volcanoes are and where all the important metals are found, is an envy of many countries of the world, you see. Vietnam is rich in geological resources. Today, rare earth elements are important for jets and computers, and Vietnam is a vital source. Oil is located off the coast, Russia's interested in that. Japan and its interest in rare earths; there's lots of countries, including the United States, with a focus on Vietnam. Then, there's the biodiversity; Vietnam is a biodiversity hotspot on the Earth in part because of its arrangement across different latitudes and in its geologic history and a great wealth of soil types. Vietnam being in the sub-tropic and temperate zones and with its mountains, foothills and terraces, there is a lot of geographic relief and climate variability. There also are huge megafauna, such as elephants, the last rhinoceros apparently killed, Bengal tigers, and others. Then, there's great botanical wealth including many tree species that are harvested, so it's a fabulous spot on Earth--something to be conserved, not exploited.

Its cultural history, the first humans' remains date back thirty thousand years, more than twice as old as this country probably. The evolution of the cultures, the indigenous cultures, the Bru that I mention in detail in the book, in Laos the Hmong, and all of that diversity and wonderfulness, the Garden of Eden kind of situation and the young men going there, many of whom would appreciate the beauty, but were there to drop bombs, Agent Orange, other herbicides, and kill

people. It just didn't make any sense. We were the enemy invading someone else's country for economic reasons.

A lot of the information I did get from Columbia University and others that were out doing research and providing information to the masses, and if you wanted it, it was there. I actually saved some of this and have it cited in my book. Being a collector and curator, you just gather things and keep them, so I was lucky to be able to actually do that.

One of the things, just as a sidebar here, that I was able to preserve were all my records before the draft board, and we may eventually get into my claim and how I went about it and all that. The Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, I didn't interface with early in my effort, but they did advise later on that I keep copies of everything I submit and I always got them stamped by the secretary of the board, with the date and time and the official stamp, so that it was an official document. I have all those documents today, and they formed the basis of some of those chapters of my claim. [Editor's Note: The Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) was a non-profit organization that sought to help people avoid or resist military conscription.]

I wanted to know as part of the research for my book--were there were any records from the board about my case? What was the board thinking? I checked with the Selective Service System, and they said, "Oh, everything's in the National Archive." I checked with the director of the National Archives, and an archivist wrote back saying, "Well, Mr. Ferren, unfortunately the Selective Service System destroyed everything from the '60s and '70s but just sent us the draft cards." I was just shocked. That means the documents I have stamped by the board are the only official documents for my case, as far as I know. The story and its detail couldn't have been told if I hadn't saved it and wouldn't be official [without] having them stamp every single page of every document. There's something to be said for being thorough and being a collector. I think the details are important and I think my story's important for young people today.

I'm happy to be able to provide some of my story through you folks, for example, and the path that I took, the challenges that I had to confront, and the serendipitous aspect of getting a low lottery number but having from the Supreme Court a ruling change, and such things that are just beyond your control. You can react to them, but you can't change them. That's an important element of it, the fact that records are important and details like that are important.

SI: Going back to the anti-war movement at Camden, did you ever have discussions with faculty members about the war? Did they ever offer advice?

WF: Yes, many. As I portray in my memoir, eventually the faculty voted to strike, and we had many conversations. Now, some of the faculty were close to me and gave advice on my claim and reviewed documents with me. As you know, the Dean of Students, [Barry] Millett, and Assistant Dean, Berjoohy Haigazian, she was a friend and a supporter, I knew them through the Earth Day celebrations and through anti-war activities, and because it's a small campus, you get to know people. They wrote a great letter for my CO application, and so the fact that there's a letter from the institution representatives supporting me and my claim of conscientious objection, I think, was pretty remarkable. There also were wonderful letters from the minister that married

Angel and myself, as well as from my friend Bill Gallagher, another member of the Class of 1970.

Ralph Good was instrumental in helping me think through my CO application and appeal. He referred me to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine and their writings, which helped me articulate my beliefs and understanding of "God." Ralph also helped me articulate my emphasis on the environmental impacts of war.

Yes, the faculty, we had connections, we had discussions, and eventually we had the strike. There were seventeen students, as I remember, who formed this unofficial strike committee that went and initiated the effort. I remember some parents coming to the campus to take their students, their children, back home, because of those of us who created all this "trouble." I have a recollection of some of that kind of momentary conflict about the strike. I remember meeting in the Student Center and having meetings about the strike with a small group of students and faculty.

Of course, we had the invasion of Cambodia, the killing of the Kent State students, the killing of the students at Jackson State. It was more than faculty could bear. Throughout the country, there were faculty who were willing to take a vote to strike, and the Rutgers-Camden faculty did. On May 5th, they approved the strike retroactive to noon on the 4th. That was a big event. [Editor's Note: Following President Richard Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia, a nationwide student strike commenced in the beginning of May 1970. On May 4, Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on anti-war protesters and bystanders at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine. On May 14 and 15, 1970, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries.]

Then, that precipitated things like setting up the Free University and the subcommittees on relationships with the campus community, with the external community in Camden, the internal community, the relationship to Rutgers-North, as we called it, then New Brunswick, and so there were subgroups. Now, I participated in a group that wrote letters to elected officials. [Senators Harrison] Williams and [Clifford] Case, I think, wrote back to all of us, at least sent a form letter in support of these activities. It was pretty remarkable to actually get these letters back, some of which I cite in my book, that showed that the invasions were some of the things we were doing.

It was so hard in May, as we were graduating. I had a senior thesis to finish, my coursework to finish, although the faculty in striking said all your classes can be pass or fail, or you can take an exam and you're allowed to, if you elect to take an exam, to have the faculty provide you with an exam. Classes were terminated, and we set up a free university and these other activities, even though there was only a month of school left or so.

We did graduate. [laughter] At the time, we didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know whether we'd graduate or not graduate. I also had to get in my application for conscientious objector status, you see. There was just all of this going on at the same time.

We had just finished Earth Day, and I was the chair of the Save the Earth Committee and had helped set up the Earth Day celebrations in April. It just cascaded from those of us organized to do that to continuing to be organized with others to do the anti-war activity. Oh, yes, we've got to graduate. I finished my senior thesis, and I submitted the application for conscientious objection. It was really a remarkable month for the nation and the world, and then, personally, it was a remarkable month because we had to get through all that. We had things that had to be done. I remember the stress and the anxiety at the time. [laughter] We also went to Washington for another demonstration on the 9th or so. So, we organized another bus and went down to Washington again.

There was a lot of direct action on the part of the faculty and the students to make a difference; we are not going to stand for our students being shot and we're not going to stand for having a new war in Cambodia and Laos, and the one thing you can do is just say, "No!" I try to point that out in my book that the power of one becomes the power of many if we all stand up and do it. I think the image on my book of the people of peace forming the peace sign is just so powerful. I just was so fortunate to be able to get the rights to use that, because I think it's so powerful and itself is a statement. The faculty were very much involved and proved that by striking, voting to approve the strike. I have copies of those important documents. In the book is actually the verbiage of the resolution of the strike and all the supporting documents that come with it.

SI: Since you have tied them very closely together, the Earth Day organization and the anti-war organization, let's go back more on the Earth Day movement. You point out the Santa Barbara oil spill as a major motivator, but was there any what you might call environmental activism prior to that, or was that really the start of it? [Editor's Note: The first Earth Day occurred on April 22, 1970. On January 28, 1969, a blow-out occurred on Union Oil's offshore Platform A in the Santa Barbara Channel. Over three million gallons of crude oil spilled into the channel before the leak was stopped, making it the worst oil spill on record at the time.]

WF: Well, of course, you have to go back to things like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* or Paul Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* and other eye-opening publications and pioneering individuals concerned about the Planet Earth and ecology. Ecology was a relative new science, compared to fifty years later. I had the course in ecology taught by Dr. James Durand, and it was like eye-opening and interesting. Eugene Odum's book [*Fundamentals of Ecology*] was influential. In some of our lab courses, we'd go out and we'd sample the streams that were polluted and look at all the indicator organisms of a fresh stream versus a polluted stream. We were doing this, in class, going into the field and evaluating environmental impacts. I was doing my senior thesis on estuarine systems, interpreting some of the sediments as compared to fossil areas. I was out in the field with some of the folks; for example, a lot of the faculty studied the water quality of the Great Bay and the Mullica River Estuary. I was part of that movement of environmental investigation and education with the courses that I took, in addition to working with Ralph Good in the herbarium. All of these activities were connected. My increasing interest in ecology and pollution can be attributed in large part to some of the faculty who studied it, you see, and in the courses they taught. We were immersed in this.

There were other events, some of the rivers were on fire from oil sheens, burning rivers and the oil spill in Santa Barbara. Little did I know that I would wind up in Santa Barbara for so long and be part of that scene. [laughter] In '69, the Santa Barbara community had a big impact nationally by establishing Get Oil Out! (GOO!) and the Environmental Defense Center. So, I was already immersed in this coursework and interested because of my interest in botany and ecology and things that came along when I took a job at Rutgers with Ralph. I was just totally into it.

When the Friends of the Earth Committee was formed in Philadelphia for the national Earth Day movement, I went over to represent Rutgers-Camden and I don't remember entirely the link. Nonetheless, I went to the meetings, and I was able to buy the pins, the paraphernalia, and set up things. Then, with the committee that we had, we just started. Tom Olejnik, the vice-chair of the committee, and others, my brother, started inviting people and worked with Sy Zacker, the director of the College Center, and the Dean of Students and others, who later on would be helpful in the anti-war movement, to set up the Earth Day celebration at Rutgers-Camden. The College Center was the focus of the area, and we had a whole program, including speakers and we had a propane-fueled car and movies in some of the College Center rooms emphasizing pro-environment, anti-pollution kind of things. We had tables set up with the buttons and pins, and everything I bought with a small fund from a campus office to facilitate all of this.

Then, the committee members each wrote an article that was in *The Gleaner* [the Rutgers-Camden student newspaper]. I include my article in my book, but I also list all the other authors and the subjects they covered. This was good because then on Earth Day, there was a special issue of *The Gleaner* with all of our papers about different aspects of pollution and more.

I think Earth Day was really very remarkable and that we were able to pull that together. I think it was a great event. Rutgers then, you see, was there as part of the national Earth Day celebration, which was at Fairmount Park, as well as the signing of the Declaration of Interdependence that had occurred the evening before at Independence Square in Philadelphia. Thousands of people showed up for that. I didn't go because I had responsibilities on campus, but a number of the folks on campus went over to the Philadelphia afternoon Earth Day celebration at Fairmount Park. That event turned out really good. I was just very proud of the moment we had at Rutgers-Camden, and I was able to use that kind of activity then to demonstrate my seriousness regarding the environment and how war was the antithesis of that. Can we take a break for a second? [Editor's Note: On April 22, 1970, Philadelphia had one of the biggest inaugural Earth Day rallies in the nation at Fairmount Park, the city's largest park. Then, the Declaration of Interdependence, a document that highlights how everything is connected on Earth, was signed in Independence Square, which is the space outside of Independence Hall.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about the Earth Day movement and celebration, which was just before this very hectic and monumental month of May. As you point out in the book, a lot of stuff is happening, one thing on top of another. At the same time, you are also a student trying to get your thesis done. Tell me about that aspect. You were studying the estuaries, you said.

WF: Yes. There were several faculty members who had programs at Great Bay, which eventually became a National Estuarine Sanctuary, and so we had boats, we had access to the estuarine environment. Part of my requirement for graduation included credits I took for a senior thesis. Of course, I was a geology major [laughter], so I came up with the idea of looking at modern sediments in the estuary and the ratio of living and dead snail, mollusks, clams and the like as a way of interpreting paleo-environments in the fossil record. I had to go out and sample, do cores, and then dye the material, so I could tell the living specimens, which dyed red, from any dead shells, and then had to put together a paper on the analysis and what the results were and how that might be then used to demonstrate paleo-sediments and environments.

I had to have all that done as part of the graduation. [laughter] In the evenings, I was working away in the lab, looking at sediments and separating living and dead and trying to pull together the data, so that I could get it done and turn it in to Mr. Hirsch, who was the faculty person (the department's paleontologist) responsible for overseeing my senior thesis. Yes, it all got done. [laughter] If you have to do it, you've got to do it, so you just work around the clock. That was quite an effort. Plus, I guess I took pass/fail on all the courses because whatever was left, I was going to pass them anyway. I managed to put in the time, and I don't think I took any final exams that year. They weren't required. You either passed/failed on what you had, or if you were concerned, you took the exam in order to maybe increase your grade, once the strike took place. Of course, my wife Angel, she had her own things to do. We were both seniors, both trying to graduate. We got through it. It was pretty remarkable, but I was bound and determined to do that.

I didn't submit my application for conscientious objection until June 12th, something like that, because I had only so many days beyond graduation to accomplish it. As soon as I graduated, the day I graduated, May 31st, my four-year exemption expired. So, I was going to receive a notice immediately that I was eligible to be drafted and I had a low lottery number. It wasn't until fall that I had my physical, because once I submitted my application for conscientious objector status, it set a new clock in motion.

SI: You mentioned some of the faculty were of assistance. Were there draft counselors as well?

WF: In my memoir, I call it, "Going Alone," because of all my immediate male friends, I was the only one with a low lottery number and good health. I didn't know anybody else. I didn't know a soul who was in this situation. We didn't really have anyone counseling. Now, I took my claim of conscientious objection, based on balanced energy flow in the universe and all the things that I was pulling together from all of my experiences, and Ralph Good reviewed it. He felt I should focus on the ecological impacts of war, which is an ethical claim. But you have to remember, I'm filing under a religious claim because at the time, based upon the *Seeger* decision of the Supreme Court, you had to have more of a traditional religious claim and believe in a Supreme Being and a conviction for this. So, I knew that while my ethical beliefs were right along those lines, that would not fly with the Supreme Court ruling, the *Seeger* case from 1965. [Editor's Note: In *United States v. Seeger* (1965), the Supreme Court resolved the question about the status of conscientious objectors from non-orthodox religious backgrounds and ruled that one

can have conscientious objector status based on a belief that has a similar position in that person's life to the belief in God.]

I was walking the delicate balance then between my claim as me seriously believing in balanced energy flow in the universe and God in all of us. We are God. We are all part of the continuum and this is a balancing act, and war is against all this. I attempted to put this into context by using folks like Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine, as suggested by Ralph, and other philosophers who reasoned, "What is God? Is there a God?" and then tried to show how my belief was consistent with the serious belief in a traditional religion. The minister, who married Angel and I, wrote this very elegant and very thoughtful letter supporting my claim, which I was appreciative of Reverend [Theodore] Pitt from Woodbury.

My initial filing didn't even include support from the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) in Philadelphia. I went to see them after I submitted the application because I had to get it in. As I said, all of those contemporaneous forms I kept, and they are all replicated in the book, including the questions the draft board asked, and my answers. I also wanted young people to see the challenges I faced, but also understand that I'm an educated white guy and, I'm sorry to say, there are the issues of education, race and economic status built into our system. Appearing before a draft board of five middle-aged white guys, I may look like this with long hair, but I can speak and I can articulate my beliefs because I do have an education. Not everyone is so fortunate, and therein lies the inequity of our system in having so many of people of color or people of economic-depressed areas, people needing opportunities, perhaps serving as a conscientious objector. While some may claim I gamed the system, which is not true, I think there's a way in which you can work with the system and be able to understand the system and be able to represent yourself well. My first submission of all that material was done without any help except from my wife, Angel, and Ralph Good. Then, I received some assistance from CCCO, such as, "Well, be prepared for this and that when you go before the board." "When you get called in, here's what you need to do." That was helpful later on when I appeared before the draft board and during my appeal.

When you're thrust into a situation where you don't know a soul who's in that with you, you know because of your experience in anti-war activities, there is such an opportunity for conscientious objection and you know what it is you have to do. If you believe that you are alone, how can you represent yourself well without issues? The situation is filled with landmines. I'm sorry to use that analogy, but it's full with pitfalls and situations where you could trip yourself up during questioning, especially before the *Welsh* ruling, which surprisingly occurred three days after I submitted my application. The ruling had broadened the interpretation of what is a conscientious objector and then did include those of us that have a serious belief for ethical reasons that there should be no war, and that your beliefs have to be held as serious as your traditional religious beliefs, but they can't be based on a personal moral code. Now, what nineteen, twenty, twenty-year-old person is going to be able to say, "Okay, what's the difference between my ethics and a personal moral code?" [laughter] Again, it's a serious matter. You have to demonstrate that society has influenced you, as you and I've talked, about your beliefs and that you just didn't come up with this, "Oh, because I don't want to go to war." [Editor's Note: In *Welsh v. United States* (1970), the Supreme Court ruled that conscientious objector status applies to "all those whose consciences, spurred by deeply held

moral, ethical, or religious beliefs, would give them no rest or peace if they allowed themselves to become a part of an instrument of war," thus expanding conscientious objector status beyond the religious-based objection.]

Yet the interpretation by each board can be composed of different people and different thinking, and I was lucky to have Mr. Perrin as the chair of the board, he was an attorney. The board denied my application for CO, which probably happens to most COs when they claim the first time around. The board probably asks, "How serious is he? Well, we'll deny and see if he comes back." So, I was coming back, and I did apply for an appeal. Mr. Perrin said, "Come to my office, I want to tell you what you have to do." Well, what kind of opportunity is that? I mean, it's like, "Okay, let me go and talk to him." [laughter] He and I had a very good conversation about what my appeal had to demonstrate.

My appeal documents, which were just about as lengthy as my initial application, did bring in a lot of this discussion of religion and my beliefs in the context of how to interpret them, although I knew the Supreme Court had already ruled that my initial filing was probably acceptable because my claim had a lot of ethical elements to it, and three days after I submitted my application, the court changed the interpretation. But, nonetheless, the local board denied me, and then we went through the process of appeal and they approved my CO claim. I was delighted and in my book described that moment with people who came to testify for me but didn't have to, because suddenly the world's changed, you see. Suddenly, I'm not going to war. I'm not going to jail. I'm not leaving the country. I'm going to do alternative civilian service, just like that. I'm thankful, and it was quite a moment.

SI: I want to save the actual service for next time, but I want to go back to your work on the anti-war movement in the last month or so of your time at Rutgers. You mentioned that you went to, or organized at least, another trip to a protest in Washington.

WF: Yes, there was a whole group of us. I alone didn't do that by any means.

SI: Okay.

WF: I may have been the chair of the Save the Earth Committee and had a lot to do with the organization of Earth Day, but I was one of the many cogs in trying to deal with the anti-war movement too. I don't know who it was that organized the bus, but we chipped in some money and got the bus and went down for a second time to demonstrate, after the invasion of Cambodia and Laos and after the students at Kent State were killed and Jackson State was a couple days after that and then there were other students killed that I try to [explain in my memoir]. I kind of list, by bullets, the days of May and the things that were going on that were pretty profound, including the women's movement (the Off Our Backs and Women's Center strikes in May), the March 9th Emergency March on Washington in which we participated, and the National Student Strike that Rutgers-Camden participated in when our faculty voted to strike on May 5th to be retroactive to the 4th.

As a student too, as we discussed, I was trying to graduate. I had a senior thesis. I was thinking through the claim of my conscientious objector status. Unlike some of those who may not have

been seniors, who may not have had all the things to confront them like CO application and senior thesis and all, I didn't participate directly in some of the Rutgers-Camden Strike Committee and Free University activities that were organized in response to the strike. What I did to participate was to write to our senators and explain how we were against the war and willing to defund the war basically, and that's what happened with the Cooper-Church amendment that was approved by Congress because the only route to try to limit the war was to cut the finances. Our senators were on board for that, and that support was a very good thing.

At graduation, Mankiewicz, the press secretary for the deceased Robert Kennedy, was the keynote speaker for our graduation. I include a few quotes from him from his discussion at the commencement. He was very supportive of the students and all that we did to help bring attention to the war and to help change the dynamic. That was a pretty powerful moment, too, there at Camden, Rutgers, having him discuss the fact that what we did was important. I thought that was a very important moment. [Editor's Note: Frank Fabian Mankiewicz II was a journalist who served as campaign press secretary to Robert Kennedy in 1968, when Kennedy was seeking the Democratic nomination for president. Mankiewicz served as the president of National Public Radio from 1977 to 1983. He spoke at the Rutgers-Camden graduation on May 31, 1970.]

SI: Does anything stand out from either trip to Washington for the protests?

WF: Well, just masses of people. [laughter] I have one button left. This is my only Vietnam-era draft button, "Stop the Draft." I have a lot of other buttons, but you can tell by the back of it, old and rusty. There were many speakers, musicians, speakers, some tear gas, some police presence. It was also a march on Washington for equity, for poverty, for many social concerns. Both marches I was involved in, I'd say especially the one in November of '69, were a broad coalition of movements and trying to bring attention to peace, poverty, women's rights, human rights, the anti-war movement, and the environment. The march brought together all these progressive elements to build a big coalition, and you can see that from some of the signage in the picture that I have in my book too. [laughter] There's a diversity of signs, banners being carried by people, and that's the way many of these movements are. They're coalitions of many people with many similar thoughts but all in the name of humanity and preserving the Earth and the quality of life and equity for people. I remember marching from the bus and joining other people coming from other streets [laughter] and heading right on down Pennsylvania Avenue, trying to get close enough to the stage to hear what was going on, and just being one of the masses there and then trying to find the bus on the way back and feeling good about having gone. Of course, there had been many movements before and afterward, many marches to this day, but they were very positive, important things to demonstrate, that the citizens of the country were not in favor of continuing this war and not in favor of war.

I know, having left Vietnam and having lost "the war" in the process, we then look at the abandonment today in Afghanistan and what's going on in Iraq, and I know some of my friends who are veterans draw many parallels and wonder, "What in the hell were we doing there?" Well, there are parallels today, because war should never be fought. They're always going to lead to other conflicts. They've always come from other conflicts, and until you stop the conflict and find other ways to resolve your differences and provide equity for people, war is not the answer. It's been demonstrated so many times. In trying to continue with that theme, part of my

memoir brings the peace alternative to the attention of people in a way that it's presented in one volume and based on one man's life and the lives of other young men confronted with the Vietnam War.

Now, we didn't talk about Jerry Wayne Ferren and his life and his death or much about John Braxton and his life or, for that matter, other folks who went to war who I have in the book. I try to frame the story in the context of several young men who experienced it in different ways and what some of their thinking is, whether it's jail or participation or, in the case of Jerry Wayne Ferren, of being killed at nineteen at Khe Sanh. That whole story is worthy of a big discussion as well. [Editor's Note: Jerry Wayne Ferren, a nineteen-year-old lance corporal in the Marine Corps, was serving as a crewman on a KC-130F Hercules that took hostile fire and crashed landed at Khe Sanh airfield on February 10, 1968. He died on March 1, 1968 at a military hospital at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.]

SI: At the time, did you know anyone who was going to Vietnam or had come back from Vietnam?

WF: Well, there were some veterans on campus or friends of students on campus, but I never had a serious conversation with any of them that I can recall. I just remember them coming back. One bought a big, new Shelby Mustang and didn't want to know anything else about what went on. His response was, "Let me get on with my life." Jim Fulbrook, I included, was a student at Woodrow Wilson High School, a closer friend to my brother, but I knew of him. Through my brother, I contacted him. He was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. I include some of his writings and comments, and he was very kind to give me his thoughts on what went on. So, that was my way in the book to try to portray what at least one individual felt about being involved, a pilot of a helicopter, who flew rescue missions and also sprayed Agent Orange and other things. I didn't want to leave that voice unspoken, and so Jim was very kind to provide some of his deepest thoughts about it, another Camden guy.

SI: You also noted that as part of the effort in May of '70, the relationship between Camden and New Brunswick was an issue. Can you talk about that?

WF: I don't remember a whole lot about it. I know that there are notes in files, in some of my files. I think the main campus of any state system always is seen as the ship that doles out the money, guides the system, and is probably looked upon by the smaller campuses as a problem. It was probably no more than happens at every state [university]. They get more resources, bigger campus. I wouldn't say they're always more conservative, because look at Berkeley as compared to some of the other campuses. Berkeley figured heavily in the anti-war movement, and Governor Reagan, at the time, had some major conflicts. It resulted in one student being shot and killed on campus. That, of course, is the big UC [University of California] system campus. So, you can equate that to Rutgers-New Brunswick, which I felt was probably much less progressive in the anti-war elements than we were. Nonetheless, our Camden faculty voted to strike, so it was pretty big. I don't know all that went on. As a graduate student in the '70s at Rutgers, you're there with the system-wide graduate program, the graduate school system-wide, and I was in New Brunswick much more frequently. I knew very little about New Brunswick when I was in Camden. But my notes suggest that there was some concern by the strikers on

Camden that the "North" needed to do more, and I'm afraid the rest of it is lost in history, from my point of view. Somebody else will have to fill in that blank. [Editor's Note: The national strike also occurred at the various colleges at Rutgers-New Brunswick. Demonstrations began on May 1 and continued through the month. On Monday, May 4, two thousand protesters gathered on the Old Queens Campus, and Rutgers President Mason Gross addressed the crowd, calling the protesters his guests. That day, two hundred students occupied the second and third floors of Old Queens, including Gross' office, resulting in a two-day sit-in of Old Queens. In solidarity with the strike, the faculties of the undergraduate colleges voted to make classes and final exams optional and instituted pass/fail grades for the spring semester 1970. The Rutgers College faculty also voted to eliminate ROTC on campus the next year, though that was later reversed by the Board of Governors.]

SI: Would you say that there was a lot of student support for these movements?

WF: It was mixed because if you take a look at our yearbook, you realize there's very few people who look like I did at the time and there were only seventeen of us in the group that I recall that were part of the strike committee that demonstrated. Parents were coming and getting their kids. Not everybody was on board for it, for sure. I think it was just a sign of the times. It was more conservative, the youth there, and they came from middle-class white families mostly and probably didn't really have much at stake in some of it. Of course, most of them weren't seniors and didn't have lottery numbers that were low maybe or weren't affected by some of it. A lot were women too. Angel was very influential, and she and I partnered in many things. I credit her in my book for a lot. She came from a conservative military family, so it put her in a situation there as well.

We did what we had to do in what our beliefs were. We were put in a situation where you could make a decision between war and peace, and where some of us had to make that decision. To decide was to decide, to not decide was to decide, because then you'd be drafted and potentially shipped out to Vietnam. The campus response was mixed and not everybody participated for sure, but we were able to, with the faculty and the faculty vote, terminate the classes and students were given the opportunity, as I said, for a pass, no pass, or pass/fail, or to take the exam. The Free University was set up to continue campus activities. I'm sure this didn't go down well with everybody, but the anti-war movement was part of a national trend and there was a national strike and Camden participated in the national strike, the same way we participated in the national Earth Day. Some of us, naturally, were involved in both because that was the times and that's what we were doing.

SI: This is probably a good place to stop for today, and we can pick up later on.

WF: My little dog is just like, "Okay, this is enough. I can't stand it." [laughter]

SI: Well, thank you very much. I am going to stop the recording.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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