

**Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**  
**Interviewed by Alan Berube and John D'Emilio**

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**Transcribed: Loren Basham**

**Alan Berube:** This is Alan Berube and John D'Emilio doing this interview in San Francisco on Saturday, January 2, 1982.

**AB:** As John said, could you start by giving us a just a little bit of early biographical information? When you were born, what your early years were and what kind of neighborhood you lived in, your ethnic background, just general things like that.

**Richard Bernstein:** Yes, I was born in 1915, during World War I. My family, my parents were immigrants to this country coming here in the early 1900s. I was born in a Wisconsin Midwestern city—town, I should call it, of about 25,000 to 30,000 population. I believe that I had, in many respects, as educations go, I had a very good education because in Wisconsin the standards are generally high. I do realize, now, that I have gone through the university, the missing pages in our American history. I am well aware of that and I have tried to do something about that by doing research and writing in the areas of women's history, black history, gay history, labor history.

Our family was very poor. I remember that my mother doled food to us. She gave us each a certain portion. But then, I think in 19, my parents were married in about 1910 or 11 and had four children just as soon as it was possible to have four children. I'm the middle. I have two brothers and a sister. That makes four of us. Then about seventeen years later my mother and father had a baby girl. And so that's our baby sister. So I have two sisters and two brothers. And we all, I went to a country school. And in a small community, near Green Bay, Wisconsin, a small rural community in Brown County. And it was the type of school where there'd be a row of first graders. We did not have kindergarten, but we had a great number of games to play like they do in kindergarten, but we also learned our ABCs and our reading. Then there was another row of second grade and a third row or third grade and so forth until the sixth grade. Then in another room, there was seventh and eighth grade. I took my first year there, my first grade there. It was a time of the flu epidemic and I remember how sulfur was given to us for counteracting any possibility of flu.

I can remember certain derogatory things now that I look back at. For instance, my mother was very ill at one time and a woman came to help us, take care of our family and cook for us and I used the word "old maid" in regard to her. Something I would never use today. It's a very derogatory term, but at four years old, or five, I got this from my adults. The derogatory term "n-i-g-g-e-r" was also used and was used as a nickname for me because I was dark complexioned but there were no blacks living in our area at all. And I never knew what a black person was until we went to Milwaukee in the 1930s. We moved to a larger community, where really I grew up and went to school, my second

grade through high school. On Lake Michigan. And I had many very pleasant memories of people there and we bought a home. My father had started a small business and we prospered. We really did not know the depression in our family. But we saw the effects of it all around us. And it affected me very deeply that there would be so much unemployment in a country that was so rich and I think that helped start me in regard to radicalism. That was one aspect.

**AB:** What kind of business did your father run?

**RB:** He had foods--in regard to foods.

**JD:** What kind of work was he doing when you were younger?

**RB:** Well, he worked in such a place, fruits and vegetables, to be specific. Then when, he joined with another fellow to start a business of their own and they were very successful. You know, I think I told you that we were Jewish. My father comes from Lithuania and my mother from a small village near Vitepks, Russia (sp?). There are many combinations of Jewish people mixing with Italian people and my father joined with an Italian fellow. But there are many. For instance, I don't remember if this is exactly right, but I know that in Milwaukee and Chicago there were firms like Guglianno & Cohen. And if you knew Italian and Yiddish, you were fine. With English, you didn't cut any ice at all.

**JD:** You said that the towns you grew up in were small. Were there many other Jewish families where you grew up? Or were you fairly isolated?

**RB:** No, we were not at all isolated. I don't know how many Jewish families there were, but it was like one family. Things were different then as far as culture and custom go. And our immediate family and all of my aunts and uncles and cousins were very close. We knew all of them and we gathered together on Sundays. When one was in trouble, the others helped that person. And then, too, there was great unity among the Jewish community itself. There might have been about 30 families altogether—including those of neighboring--30 to 50 families altogether. And they had an orthodox Synagogue and they hired a Rabbi who, incidentally, (and it sometimes surprises people when I say this) but he too gave me my first lessons in radicalism through the study of the prophets. He was in no way a radical, but a most ritually observant person. But he told us about Jeremiah and Isaiah and all of the other Jewish prophets who spoke about freeing slaves in the ancient Jewish land. When I began to make--speak at black churches or any church--I would quote. My favorite quotation was Jeremiah to whom the Lord is supposed to have spoken and said that the Jewish people in Israel or Judah must give up their slaves. "And then the Jewish people did give up their slaves, but then they called them back and the Lord said unto Jeremiah that I will visit the Jewish people with the liberty of the sword and famine and fire." I quoted that in Montgomery, Alabama where we lived. The results were both extremely wonderful and extremely the opposite.

**AB:** You mentioned before that Wisconsin is your alma mater, did you go right up to University?

**RB:** Yes, I did. Though this means some development. The tuition was \$27.50 for a semester. But then, of course, wages, you must remember that there was unemployment. When people tried to run out and get a steak for five cents, ask them please how much they earned and how much that five cents was of their salary. Because, otherwise, you compare it to today and you'll laugh and say, "Oh, my, wasn't that wonderful." In Wisconsin by the time I entered the University of Wisconsin at seventeen. My major was journalism and social studies. I had a pretty hard time at the University. You wanted to know more about the original--the boyhood?

**JD:** I have a question about--before high school. Were there any other?--did you know any other?--gay people. Or people in town that had reputations as sissies or anything?

**RB:** No, I did not. I lived at home largely. I didn't know of the existence at all. It wasn't until I went away to the University of Wisconsin that I learned that some other--that there were different orientations. But, of course, by that time I was feeling in that respect too. I think my first gay feelings were in high school. Though nothing resulted because, that is because I didn't combine with anyone, but I had those feelings. I suppressed any possible crushes or feelings I had toward specific persons because I knew, as we all knew, that they were not permitted in general society. As a matter of fact, I had two feelings really--and I have them still.

**AB:** How did you know that they were not permitted?

**RB:** How did I know? Well, I don't know. You have me there by that question. I just knew. Just like we knew that when we were taught orthodox living that pork was not to be eaten. Of course, we were very explicit. Society was very explicit. Society didn't make any options or openings for people who didn't feel, who didn't fall into the pattern of dating the opposite sex, marrying and raising a family and having a business, concerning Jewish people, a profession. And that was the way. I knew that anything else was considered very wrong. I guess I went through what many young gay people do go through especially, well, middle-class or not. That "Oh, gee, something is wrong with me. The whole world is right." And some people still, today, obsess themselves with these feelings. I know in Chicago there is a young fellow at a university there and he told me that he was gay but that he also had feelings in the other direction. Now, he told me recently, that he was going to get married. Now I am not able to say how strong the feelings are on one side or the other with him--or whether it is for protection--or whether he feels, "Well, I can leave all the 'gay' behind me and live in an open society." I don't know how much of that is, but there is that too.

**AB:** What were the two feelings that you had?

**RB:** Well, I was able to assimilate quite naturally, in a natural way. I had questioned the opposite sex as well as the same sex. But that when it came to, in regard to feelings, but

when it came to sexual relations, I had more the feeling of wanting to have sexual relations with the people of the same sex and not of people of the opposite sex. Yet, though, a person of the opposite sex could appear to me as very attractive. Facially. And also personality-wise. That obtains still today. And then I don't chase it away. I feel that primarily I am human. There are labels and they are convenient, it is true, but when you consider the way society is today. Quite mixed. For example, consider blacks. Many blacks whom we in America call "blacks" are also "whites." If we didn't have the pressure of "you are a black person and you get back there in the ghetto." They would be just a proud of their white ancestry--Scotch, Scott, or whatever. They have knowing they're black. There would be no need to--but because they are in the United States, we force them to be black. If it's known that they have one microscopic aspect of blood (if we can talk of blood in that way. I don't believe that we can.) That's the way that we speak in the vernacular. All human blood is the same. And, of course, in the religious sense, St. Paul said the same thing.

**AB:** When you went to college--that was when you first started feeling more articulate about it?

**RB:** Well, I felt that I began to feel that something ought to be done about it in my sense. And, yet, where did I meet people of the opposite gender who felt as I did? I didn't know. I didn't know. And if I knew that there were bars, I would not have gone to them. I was very inhibited. Of course, I realize the inhibitions still today. I lived in a rooming house and I liked the physical appearance of one of the fellows there very much. But he--

**AB:** Was this on campus? Or off?

**RB:** It was on campus, yes. But there was no hope because I knew that he dated and went out and then who was I? I didn't think he would look at the likes of me for two minutes. But I put myself in his path and tried to chum with him and his clique. Of course, they used me as a butt of jokes because, well, I was most un-macho. I took a lot of ridicule for that fact. In my time, when I was growing up, there was no option but. If you were a fellow, you did not play with dolls. You were careful and your parents were careful. And you were careful, too, because of social pressures. No one came and said "Now you are this." Well, they did come. They said, "You are a little boy. You're a boy. You don't cry. Little boys don't cry." Since then I have thrown that out. But only because you know people who have come up and helped change our society, a lot of this. You don't use cheerful colors, bright colors towards dress. As a matter of fact, I have to laugh. In just recent years, one young gay friend--I have an African kinte--and that's exceedingly bright and cheerful. I would want to say "gay" in the old sense. But he gave me another scarf with duller colors and he said those are more masculine colors. Well, I didn't want to offend the fellow and so I took it, but I wore the kinte again many times. I don't fall into that--

**AB:** What sorts of things happened to you in Wisconsin that made you realize that there were people of different orientation from society?

**RB:** Well, yes, I want to get into I want to tell you that. There was one fellow, young fellow, who was a very handsome fellow and he used to come to the house to meet these ruffians, these macho fellows I used to know who were in my house. But that's because they were from the same town in Wisconsin. That's how he knew them. And his father, it was rumored, was a gangster in Chicago. A great deal of flavor, please. But he was a very gentle person. He made a point of getting acquainted with me and I think he was a gay too. And he would have talks with me in my room. Nothing physical happened at all. But he recommended a book to me. It was the book that came out-- Yes, you can write this down. This was a milestone. *The Well of Loneliness*. And at first, well, first of all, it was the first gay book that I have ever seen. You went through it for that purpose. Then it dealt with lesbians. At that time did very little to me. I thought, not that they were less, not that lesbian sisters were less, but it didn't deal directly. Here I was a novice in that life and I wanted something to deal directly with me. That partisanship continues with me. It shouldn't because, as I told you earlier, I feel that first and foremost--screw the platitude--I am human. Then I am a man and then I am a writer and then I am an instructor and then I am, you know. But first, I am human. So I hope to be able to transcend as much as I can. By ethnic background, I belong to all ethnic backgrounds. I belong to all genders. I am a child. I am a man. I am a woman. I joke with many people and I say, well I am a feminist. And I am. I am a strong feminist and I write in the area of woman's history and I tell them that my mother was a woman. And so that is my reason for being a feminist.

**AB:** What I want to know, here is this guy, who you said was very gentle, but also hangs around with all these macho guys because they are from the same town--.

**RB:** He doesn't hang around a great deal. He comes once in a great while.

**AB:** How did he know to give you *The Well of Loneliness*? What were you talking about then?

**RB:** I don't remember what we spoke about except that he was able to see me through my life style and through my actions and through how I reacted that very likely that I, too, was gay. I don't think it is a--remember what we say, "it takes one to know one." That's not infallible. But he saw me. He saw me through the way they persecuted me. Made me the butt of their jokes. He saw me. It was like a moth to a flame, really. He was someone among those people that I liked very much. Just by the physical aspects. Every time I went into that flame, the moth got burned. But the moth was still attracted to the flame. And he saw that. But he saw many other things about me. I am sure. And that's why I think that he--that's how I size it up.

**AB:** What did it mean to you when you read that book?

**RB:** When I read that book? Well, that book depressed the hell out of me. It didn't liberate me. It depressed me that she would have such a hard time from her mother and from others. I think it was her mother, if I recall the book. I just recently read, some of

my friends gave me this Jonathan Katz book on gay history. And I read about *The Well of Loneliness*

[telephone delay in tape].

**AB:** You were talking about *The Well of Loneliness*.

**JD:** Right, and your reaction.

**RB:** Oh, yes. *Well of Loneliness*. I read just recently, here there was a book called *The Well of Loneliness*, in print and by a publisher--and it didn't dawn on me that that book had any trouble being published. And I read this book in 1934 or 5. I think it was '34. Must have been within the range of when it came out. Just now, in 1982, just about 50 years later, I am reading Jonathan Katz' gay history and am learning what a terrible time it had to come out, to be allowed. I should of thought of that. Also there is another book that I did not read but it was recommended to me. I'll tell you how it was recommended. I began to be bothered considerably--now, mind you, I am now 18 or 19. More 19, I believe, still at the University of Wisconsin. I lived and felt so frustrated with no one around me was I able to relate to---to tell about how I felt about my gay feelings. So I went to the University of Wisconsin Health Center. They had, well, I'm not going to laugh at the doctor. He didn't know any more than I did. He said, "Well, you ought to try to do it with women." I knew that he was not in the right field. He said, "If you don't --if you still feel real strongly, the feeling of frustration and all--well, then you come back and I will try to recommend you to a psychiatrist on the staff." And that's exactly what happened. I came back and he did recommend me to a psychiatrist. A feminine psychiatrist--that is, one who was of female origin. And she told me that many she opened the door to me a great deal. She was pretty wonderful in many ways. She said I should not be ashamed of being gay and many great people were gay in historical life. She told me about a book, which I tried to read, but was not too successful in reading. And that is an autobiography of a fellow, an artist, an Italian artist, I think back in the Renaissance days, called Shanelec (sp?). Have you fellows ever heard of Shanelec?

**AB:** I have heard of him but I have never read anything about him.

**RB:** I think I read part of it.

**JD:** Is that the one by John Pennyton Simms (?)

**RB:** This is an autobiography. Autobiography. eah. He was supposed to be a craftsman, craft artist. Working in precious metals, I believe. And he told about visiting a couple and having physical relations with both men and women. But the writing was --the error was on my part. I was not too much of a reader at that time. Although I am since very much of a reader. But I couldn't get into the book. That was not a fault of the book. It was a fault of my own. But then later I learned about Walter Whitman, Walt Whitman

and Oscar Wilde. And these were support persons to me. I can't remember others, but also by this time I was becoming concerned— I was very concerned about the Depression.

**JD:** Can we go back for a second? [Yes] When you were with the psychiatrist, do you remember what language she used, what words she used to describe what your problem was?

**RB:** Oh. I can't remember.

**JD:** You said "gay," but....

**RB:** Did I say. I don't know if I will be able to hit the nail on the head. My memory doesn't go back too well. But, I must tell you about her approach to me, I don't think I did. She told me about these people in history who she thought were gay and that. But she also recommended that I try to have friendships with women. But she was a bit more careful in regard to that than the male physician that I saw, indeed. She said right off, she said, I am not recommending that you do this for sexual purposes at all. But maybe if I look at that now, as I have, maybe she hoped that I would open up in that regard and then that would be successful sexually. But she said very definitely that it was not. Then too, she did not urge, she did not support, by any word the idea of combining with another gay person. She did not speak against it. But she did not speak for it. I think she might have done that. But, of course, that's all the benefit of hind sight.

**AB:** Before going on to your reaction to the depression, the politics, the other question that I have is that at this point, had you yet met anybody else who was gay or had you had gay sex yet or were you still just having feelings?

**RB:** I just had the feelings. I didn't have gay sex until much later. Considering the fact of inhibitions and I think that today it is more open and so fellows are more open with each other. Well perhaps even then they were cliques of fellows, and women, who were open to each other too. There were, I am sure there were. But consider the straight life, there was quite a bit of mixing there. But I came from a family that was very, there were a great deal of inhibitions. And it was not proper to have sex until you were married. And the purpose of sex was for the reproduction of children. True, we were not Catholic but it was very much like that. So I had a lot of qualms concerning sex and who I would have it with. It was very important for me to have it with a person who would be empathetic and compassionate. Although I would, my eyes would tell me that, well gee, this person looks just wonderful. But, then part of me would ask well is that person compassionate. Because I knew that if I had sex, approached the wrong person I would probably be beaten up. I had heard of that. Being robbed of money and that it would not be pleasant. I'd have to have a rapport with the person before. I still feel that same way.

**JD:** Today, such much of the source of anti-gay feeling in the culture comes out of, or the excuse for it is like Old Testament prohibition. I am wondering, given that you did have a sort of....

**RB:** No. Before you finish, I say no. That did not affect me at all. That was not; I didn't even hear of that. It is true that our Rabbi told us about Sodom and Gomorra, but he didn't tell us what went on there. We were boys, we were children, so he didn't tell us what went on there. Later I learned.

**JD:** You had the knowledge that the struggle that you were having was really a social and cultural and did not have to do with....?

**RB:** No, it did not, no.

**AB:** Did that have to do with your class background or your family, do you think?

**RB:** What was that, the prohibitions?

**AB:** Yeah.

**RB:** Well I still feel a great number of prohibitions even though I have going through, I have gone through so-called liberating experiences. I was just talking to my friend in this house here how un-liberated, how it was funny that I have stood all my life, all my adult life for liberation of blacks and women and working people and yet how inhibited and un-liberated I still am. Because I realize that. And in this interview I will probably realize it even more. And I think we have said and I agree with it that if we really liberate the world, we must first become liberated ourselves. And I believe that to be very sure. In the past, we took the .....

**[End of tape 1, side 1]**

**Tape 1, side 2: Eugene Feldman (Richard Bernstein)**

**AB:** You were very aware of the depression and I was wondering if you could tell us how you started to develop a radical political consciousness and became politically active during the '30s?

**RB:** Well, I think I began to tell you, about how I became a radical and then later active. I mentioned the stories of the prophets that our Rabbi told us and I think we had certain qualities in our family that when some member of the family was unemployed, or sick or needed help, we all helped, the family would help them. Take them into the home. (I am going to cough, I'm sorry.) There was a general idea of help. Which we don't have as much of today. Now, today we have institutional help. I learned that we must be concerned about each other. The family then was concerned. We lived in Wisconsin, as I told you, but we also had relatives who lived in Florida, in Northern Florida. And they'd come up to visit us and some of them would be very prejudiced against blacks, but some of them would not. One aunt came to tell us, and she would tell us stories about segregated life and she said that they were riding in the country one Sunday and they came across a black funeral and there was a great deal of mourning and loud crying and the people in the car with whom she was riding laughed about it. And said it "was only



n-i-g-g-e-r-s.” But she, herself, felt differently. She told us that all people are humans and she felt sorry for anyone who died and especially in this instance of a family who probably was losing, had lost a mother. And so that made a big impression on me.

She was later to tell me after World War Two--maybe I'll tell it then--that this very same aunt, that we were having dinner once in an uncle's house and the people upstairs were from Germany. This was right after the World War Two and these people helped my uncle through very sick hardship and helped take care of his store. And I made the remark at the dinner table, it was a round table just like we're having here, that “I can't stand to hear German spoken.” And she said, “You of all people who have devoted your life to civil liberties and rights, you should include all in your humanity. I thought you did,” she said. And I said, “Well, you know, they killed 6 million Jews and I feel very strongly.” And she said, “We all feel strongly.” But then I reconsidered and of course all people--I realized my error. That all people are human beings. True, some people within each group might not be. But, this, to go back to my earlier boyhood and childhood. Then too, in my religious training, we were told that we had one father. Of course, now I question whether the Deity, what gender the Deity is, you know. I ascribe both genders, all genders to the Deity. We were told that we were one family of humanity, so we were told. And I felt that very strongly. I got that. Then at the University, there was a young fellow who took very much interest in me. He liked me very, very much as a person. He had a love affair with a young black woman, and it was the first black person that I ever got to know. A very beautiful young lady.

**JD:** This was at the University?

**RB:** At the University. And he introduced me to the poems of black Countee Cullen. He said that she had to live outside of the campus because they did not allow her to live on campus. And she got me interested in the youth NAACP, which I joined. And I gave out handbills on the campus. This was my baptism into the radical field.

**JD:** This would have been like maybe 1935?

**RB:** Yeah, '34 and '35. I got very interested in food co-ops for students and I tried to organize one, but I failed because I was the only organizer doing this. I didn't, I was just very young then. Didn't know what it took to do that.

**JD:** You were handing out leaflets, what were those leaflets?

**RB:** Oh, the leaflets about segregation on the campus--concerning segregation on the campus. Later, I was to hand out many leaflets concerning many other issues: War and Peace and Unemployment. As a matter of fact, I think that issue--the black-white issue--the racist issue, concerned me very, very much. Little did I know that there was a gay issue too. I wasn't to know that until the '60s--late '60s--when some of my gay brothers and sisters started to revolt against oppression and come out and speak their minds concerning that issue. Then the unemployment bothered me very, very much. The fact that our country was the richest country, had the biggest, had a large industrial capacity, had farmlands and here there were 12 to 14 million unemployed. Suffering. And I saw

the suffering. I was bothered to no end by that suffering. And then, of course, there were Socialists and Communists, anarchists already to tell me--and technocrats. You know what technocracy was? They said that we needed a cooperative society, but technicians needed to run it, not politicians. Well, that soon died.

The radicals, I was sympathetic to all of the radicals. Although I knew that, I later knew--found out--that there were quite significant differences. As a matter of fact, there were differences within one party and within one clique and so forth. Rather ironic, this matter of radicals. That (this is an aside. Maybe shouldn't give it now. Maybe.) But they preached a certain doctrine, but didn't allow any differences and yet they split like stock splits off in many forms. Then--.

**JD:** Let me ask you this. Hear this. The oldest radical opinion--was this all stuff that was happening on campus?

**RB:** Yes, yes. I'll tell you about the radical campus, the radical aspects of campus. There was an outfit called the National Student League, which was the radical group, the National Student League. NSL we called it, Nicata Magazine. (sp?) I remember very fondly, I used to get that magazine from the local NSL group and I used to attend their readings and their lectures. I sometimes had a chance to earn extra money by waiting at table at a Jewish fraternity.

**JD:** There was a separate Jewish fraternity?

**RB:** Yes there were. Oh, yes.

**JD:** Was that out of necessity or, were you allowed to be in other fraternities or?

**RB:** I was not rushed. My only relation to this fraternity was to wait on their tables, not as a member of it. I think that they were segregated then. That they were not allowed--it was not by choice, no. I think--I don't know--but I didn't see any black fraternities. But later, in my later college days, I did. But the cook, the black cook at the fraternity house, she said she liked to that magazine too because she had a daughter, but I later found out that she was--that the "daughter" was she. She was wanting to get that. And then there was another more mild group, a Socialist group, called League for Industrial Democracy. "Student League for Industrial Democracy," if I am not mistaken. They joined or some elements of both joined and they started the American Student Union. I don't know if they still exist. One of their leaders was Joseph P. Lash and he has written quite a bit in--

**JD:** Oh, like *Eleanor Roosevelt*.

**RB:** A friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's, yes. Some people said that he was co-opted and some people said no. I was a great admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt. In many respects, I know, she did not coincide with many of my later--and during the cold war she did not coincide with many of my ideas--but I admired her for the fact that she spoke up for Marian Anderson and gave the White House and her office, the office of the Presidency. You know that Marian Anderson was to give a concert? Do you know about that?

**JD:** Right.

**RB:** And she spoke up for her. Then, too, she refused to be take the only option, I am not opposed to housewives, and I am not opposed to househusbands, similarly, but she refused to be a housewife. She refused, at that time the only option mostly was just to be a mother and to be a woman of the house. Take care of the family. Not unlike German--Nazis,--you see--children, *kinder, kuche and kirke*—that's German for "children, church and kitchen." But she traveled around and lectured. Thereby was she hated by many macho men. And there were many Eleanor jokes. But I responded to her. I thought she was absolutely wonderful. Even better than her husband, although I thought a great deal of what her husband was doing too.

**JD:** These three student groups, these two student groups.

**RB:** United. And then there was the American Student Union. I was not too much part of that. I was on the periphery of it. I knew the existence of it. I read their literature. I listened. It was very interesting. But the unemployment and the race issue and the gay issue all frustrated me considerably. And I felt like dropping out. It affected my studies. First of all, I was a very poor student in high school and the principal at the high school said, did not recommend me to the, recommend that I go to college. But my father, being a status seeker, wanted a son at the university. So they sent me. And lo and behold I did quite well. It was different. I had an English teacher. Oh, she was just magnificent. She too defied conventions by wearing a white linen suit and high heels. I had a big old crush on her. Oh, she helped make me. I don't mean sexually at all. Today we can't speak without scoring. But she was so beautiful. I just loved her. And she was in the English department. My major was journalism so I immediately changed--didn't change my major--but I went through a lot of rigmarole and red tape to see that she became my adviser. And, as such, I went to her apartment and we talked. She was wonderful. She was part of my education. I don't know if she realized about me, I didn't. I could tell her a lot of things, but I didn't reveal. She was not a radical. But she was a liberal and she allowed for all views.

When I went home, back to my hometown, I had finished one full year. I did not want to--oh, I must tell you. How it was? Let me see now. I did go back for the second year and I did--I passed the summer session there at Wisconsin. I took summer session. I didn't want to go home. I felt Madison was a better climate for me. For the small amount that it did offer. Still no sexual outlet. Oh, yes, I did become enamored with a fellow who lived in the dormitory. I think you can call it "puppy love." Because that's the way it was. He was--I was--we were very much like puppies. We had no contact and he would often speak about his girl friend. But I admired him and he allowed my presence. And so we saw a great deal of each other. He was in my German class and I would always invite him to have a beer with me at the Student Union. In those days it was one percent beer or something, but nevertheless gave us a chance to talk. He didn't at first accept because he had other things to do. Then, finally, he accepted and we talked and I got to know him. It seemed like the fellows at the dormitories were taking fellows and dumping them into Lake Mendota. You know it? All right. Well. And I told some

of the fellows that he ought to be dunked. It was all in play, of course. But he got angry about it. And we had a real--on the phone--I had left and he called me later on the phone. And we had a real talk about how I didn't mean any harm and he felt that I did mean harm. Well, it ended there and I was utterly ruined. I think that of all my experiences--I don't know how to express it--but the physical aspects of my gay life were the least attractive and the other aspect of gay life, the friendship, the spiritual, how to express what one feels--that was to me, that was more important to me; that was the most important aspect of gay life to me. And I learned then that you could have friendship with fellows who were not necessarily gay, but who would tolerate you and even encourage you as a friend. That was very, very wonderful. Of course, there was a frustration even there as you can very well imagine, need I even say?

**AB:** Let me question--earlier you mentioned that while you were at Madison, you read something in the paper about a den, a party, that was--?

**RB:** Oh, yes. No, that was a later period. I was to go back later to Madison after World War Two.

**AB:** OK, we can come back to that.

**RB:** All right. And I knew exactly what that den was that they were exposing--and why. But I will talk about that. So I went back to my sophomore year and the things were so heavy that by Thanksgiving I went back to the psychiatrist and said, "I cannot concentrate on my studies" and so sick and so heavy. And so she put me into the hospital, the physical hospital of the students, for the students. And she gave me some things to sleep. And then I felt much better. And she said, well, perhaps, you ought to stay out a semester. She had no answers. She meant very, very well, but neither the doctor nor she had any answers. Then I stayed out I went back home and I stayed out. I read in the Wisconsin--large Wisconsin paper--about a college in Arkansas. It was unaccredited. It was a college that would train people for community organizations. For social change. And I became interested in that. The name of it was Commonwealth College. It was born in the 20s. It was given money by a fellow by the name of Garland who started the Garland Fund. And it was an effort on the part the Garland Fund to have a four year college. I don't know if it was accredited then--have a four year college for poor people's sons and daughters. And, mind you, in those days, in the 20s, a Bachelor of Arts meant some more than it does today. And very few people were going to college so that was no effort. It was on a piece of land. They had their own farm, their own cannery, their own print shop, their own electric Delco (that's a trade name for electricity), and they had their own little store. And what else? Oh, and they had their own library. And in the 20s, if you remember, people who were liberal and especially bohemian, fancied themselves way up in the clouds. And so, they had wooden structures for their dormitories and so one place was called the Castle and other very exotic names. I read some poetry that they wrote in those times and I am going to quote just four lines of one:

Lilacs heavy with the dew

Bring me back the thoughts of you  
And the fragrant sweet Narcissus  
The rapture of your kisses.

Well, it was very romantic. However in the 30s, people from New York--radicals came down. It started to lose--a few came down and then later more and other people--and they decided, the students and some of the teachers decided that the school should change its orientation and be a school for social change. What good does a degree do in times when there are 10 to 15 million unemployed and when racism is rampant? And when sharecroppers are still feudal and [there are] so many ills in our society. We need to have a change and we need to educate students to become organizers for that change. Yes, go ahead.

**JD:** Where was this campus?

**RB:** Well, I'll tell you. Picture if you can then Oklahoma and Arkansas. They have a common border. And right in the middle of that, on that border, was a little town in Arkansas called Rena. Up some 25 miles from little Rena was the college, Commonwealth College.

**JD:** At the point then when you went there, was it actually run--would it be--a Communist Party school?

**RB:** No, it was not a Communist Party school. In spite of what the conservatives said. It was a school in which--it never became a Communist Party school, though the Communist Party was there. But also there was the Socialist Party. And also there was the Trotskyite groups. (I think they called them the Workers' Party). They were quite powerful in Minneapolis and they had had a successful truckers strike which you can still read about. One of the few successful strikes of the early 30s. I think they even had a general strike in Minneapolis. And then, as I said, there were the Technocrats and also there were religionist folks. Religionists who believe in social change. Not Fundamentalists, not the Falwell folks, no. But these were from the Methodist--there was a group called the Methodist Social Federation, I don't remember. But they were radical too. All radicals. And I came down there and--remember I told you that I had had a religious background?--and I spoke here in a religious sense. And they told me there was no God. Well, that disturbed me very, very much. As a matter of fact at the University of Wisconsin, some fellow by the name of Otto Nathan--I don't know if I have that name correctly--spoke on the Necessity of Atheism. And that disturbed me too. Of course, I was open and I knew that they would lecture on some subjects. And then one Socialist lady--I worked in the laundry--and one socialist lady said, "Look at all those judges. They're part of the capitalist class." And I said, "No, that is not so. Judges are--" I saw the scale and I saw the woman with the bandage on her eyes and I said that wasn't fair. And it wasn't so. I said to myself--I was about to call my name--but this is a name that cannot be spoken--I got you there. (We spoke, you know, of a lot that cannot be spoken.) And I said to myself, "No, don't believe her. She's radical and she has a right to her opinions but don't believe her." But as I went along, some of the classes were, it was--

I'll tell you about my relationship in regards to that and gay life too. But the subjects that I took were Proletarian Literature. I took War and Fascism, Trade Union Problems, Share Cropper Issues, The Women Question. (All but the gay issue please).

**JD:** There was a women's question class?

**RB:** Yes. Right. We had sessions and some men walked out angrily when the women told how bestial they were. Is that how you say the word? But then not all men were bestial. Some were.

**JD:** Was Commonwealth racially mixed.

**RB:** No, that was the hell of it. They knew that they could not be racially mixed--because this was in the 30s and some counties in the South were lily white counties and they had signs all over the place--that is in the counties--"don't let the sun catch you here," [don't let] the "sunset" catch you here "or you will be lynched." We did--I noticed that the college bought some mules and they had had derogatory terms for races and we promptly changed their names. But, of course, we had the problem of having them obey commands by new names. So that was a difficulty. But we did not resort to the--no we did not resort of calling them derogatory names. I remember the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, the sharecroppers union, was being organized in Tennessee. Incidentally, there was also a sharecropper's union of Alabama which was Communist Party led and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was Left Socialist. Let me tell you about the Left Socialists. They worked in the critical United Front way with the Communists. But not all of Left Socialists were willing to do that.

The Communists--remember fascism came up in Germany and it had been in Italy and it smashed the German Communist Party (which was a strong party). And all the rest of the opposition--and so the Communist Party through Dimitras, (sp?) a Bulgarian Communist, said in this stage of our history, every country must try to build a United Front with everyone who is anti-fascist. Without reference to [whether] the person is a petty capitalist or even a capitalist--or whatever class in life--we must have a United Front. And, sure enough, in France and in Spain, they did build the Front de Popular (sp?) in Spain and the Popular Front in France. However, a group of Socialists, Left Socialists, said, "Yes, we much have a United Front, but we cannot have elements of the capitalist class in any respect in it. Because [when] we are fighting comes, when the time comes for campaigning against the capitalist class or against fascism, they will not be true. They will vacillate. And, of course, we see in Spain that that Popular Front, I understand, they did vacillate at the end. But even now, I don't know the merits and demerits. There was a great deal of discussion at Commonwealth concerning the merits and demerits of what kind of popular front we were to have. I must say--that in answer to your question--the Communist Party was quite strong at Commonwealth. The Socialist Party, divided into left and right, were not as strong. But they existed--as did, as I said, the Trotskyites and the Religionists.

**JD:** You said before that you would be able to tell us like gay life and Commonwealth and you also when you first--.

**RB:** I will do that.

**JD:** You also said something about bohemians.

**RB:** Well, all right, yes. Well, once I came to Commonwealth--and this was in 1935--of course, I hadn't been there before and they told me the history of Commonwealth and they told me that the names of the dormitories and the schools were bohemian romantic. And now, of course, we had one dormitory, I think the men's dormitory was Smalnce. (sp?). Smalnce was a girl's--a woman's school, I believe--in St. Petersburg later become Petrograd. And still later Leningrad. This is one of the places that the Bolsheviks took over and it signified a victory of the Bolsheviks along the way toward a total victory. And so the radicals at Commonwealth were quick to name one of the men's dormitories as Smallnce. Another place, I think where the women resided, was called after a Communist Party woman who was quite a leader in the party and who had known Walt Whitman and her name Mother Bluer. And so it was the Mother Bluer House or dormitory. So--I can't tell you,--I'll tell you after while about some things. Very funny. I just realized something from the past that you'll laugh about. There is also laughter in life as well frustration as you well know and oppression and, life is quite a mixture of ingredients. Thank heaven for that (or whatever spirits are responsible).

Oh, yes. And I was there--I was there for my father gave me tuition money although he did not like me to go there. He learned that it was a labor school. Well, it was more than a labor school. I got very frustrated again after maybe about, well I was there for six months and enjoyed it and so many new things came to me that I didn't have, it was a safety valve for my gay feeling. I still felt gay--and oh, yes--tried to attach myself to this person or that, however the appearance was. I knew that the eyes were a poor measurement for sizing up people. I also knew that that was the first measurement that we have, is it not? The eyes tell us.

**JD:** (unintelligible)

**RB:** What?

**JD:** How did you learn that it measures?

**RB:** Well, everybody that your eyes saw and said that person was beautiful and wonderful was not necessarily a wonderful person. So I got very--at least the people at Commonwealth seemed to know the answers to many things and were very modern and up to date in life--and I said, surely, they would help me and be sympathetic at least.

**JD:** We should turn this over.

**RB:** So I consulted some of them.

[End of tape 1, side 2]

**Tape 2, side 1: Eugene Feldman (“Richard Bernstein”)**

**RB:** And while they listened to me at length and over several sessions--and gave me time and counseled me--they didn't counsel me. But the very fact that they listened to me was counseling. But they had no answers and they said they had no answers. They didn't know how to deal with this.

**JD:** Let me ask you once again. At this point when you are talking to about--can you think of what words you used? I mean, did you just simply say I have “sexual feelings” for? Or?

**RB:** I can't remember that. I can't remember the specific words, no. I did tell them that the reason for the problem that I had.

**JD:** What was the problem?

**RB:** Well, the problem was that I --well, I can express it now in fine terms. The problem was that I was gay and that I didn't know the solution. I didn't know a solution to that problem. I didn't know what needed to be done. What options I would have, one way or the other. When men of the ways or others--not of only one way.

**JD:** Was some of this in terms of finding a mate?

**RB:** Well, yeah. I knew that you were going to ask that. I did want expression. Yes. I did want expression. And that was one aspect of it. But that was only one aspect of it. And I don't want to separate it from other aspects, but how to live as a gay person? How to live being--wanting a person of your--in our society--which condemned everything of a gay life, how to live that way. And they didn't know the answers. And all that they could do was be sympathetic. Even empathetic. But that's all. And--.

**JD:** Were they very condemnatory, though?

**RB:** No, they were not. They were not condemnatory. No, they were not. They were most sympathetic. But they didn't--well, yes, they suggested that I go to the--now I didn't follow this suggestion--not because I didn't want to--it was just not--they suggested that I go to the Menninger Clinic. That was in Kansas. And the Menninger doctors had been very sympathetic as liberals to what was going on at Commonwealth. But I did not follow that. I still felt very much alone and while they were sympathetic, they did not take me in. Now that I think of it, they might have sent me there or asked me, or made arrangements for me to go there. They assumed I would act on my own. And I was not able to fly that way yet. I felt in spite of my age now--I was about 20, 21--I was not able to take--I should have taken initiative, but I was not able to do so.

**JD:** How long did you stay at Commonwealth?



**RB:** Nine months.

**JD:** And then what happened?

**RB:** Well, then I went back home and I went to live in Florida. I went to live in Jacksonville actually. And I got a job through family. It seems that part of my family--not my family but very distant relatives--cousins of cousins, that sort of thing, had a large supermarket there. That is, supermarkets. And I worked there. Actually, the wages there were very, very poor. But it was a job--which was quite a miracle to get in those days.

**JD:** When was?

**RB:** It was about 1937. In Jacksonville, as I said. It was my second entry into the South. Commonwealth was my first. At that time the radicals, both Socialists and Communists, if I know them rightly--size them up rightly--felt that the South was the source of the poisons as far as racism goes in our country. I was later to find out that these poisons existed everywhere in the country and that Malcolm X said the Mason-Dixon line began at the Canadian border. And I believe that is true. But, nevertheless, I found in Jacksonville a knot--not a knot--but about 10 young white people who were radicals.

**JD:** How did you find them?

**RB:** Well, when I was at Commonwealth they gave me an address to go to. And so I looked up that address. By this time I stopped seeking advice as to what to do in regard to gay life. I just lived the best I could in a very suppressed way. But I at that time I joined--I guess that it would be fair to say that I had joined the Communist Party at that time.

**JD:** In Jacksonville?

**RB:** Yeah. I don't remember whether it was in Jacksonville or Wisconsin, but I would say that in Jacksonville I got my first CP work, activity.

**AB:** What does joining the Communist Party mean? I mean, like ...?

**RB:** It means a commitment. At that time it meant a commitment to doing something to which you agreed with, the person joining agreed with, the program of CP at that time. Never mind today. But agreed to that--and then was willing to work within the discipline of the CP. When I say discipline, I think--and I think it was a positive--that discipline was positive. And that in general the specifics were that we were opposed to racism, we were opposed to male chauvinism, we were in favor of better living conditions and the organization of trade unions and the development of class consciousness, proletarian consciousness. We were in favor of jobs and we were in favor of what was going on in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR. We considered that as the first socialist,

beside the Paris Commune, which left in 90 days, the first socialist republic and that was to be defended strongly. And so we were very attached to that. Yes.

**JD:** How big was the Communist Party in Jacksonville?

**RB:** Well, I say it just about 15 people. Young people. There were friends but they were not active. That is, around, there were some--maybe 4 or 5 friends--but they were not active.

**JD:** And was racially mixed at all?

**RB:** A, there were blacks who were, I believe, CP people but it was not--the party was racially mixed on the executive level, but not in the club level. In the South. Generally in the South, although there were struggles and talks about integration within the party. We did have some meetings together. We did have some meetings that were together. It was a very difficult thing. I know that some communities they had meetings in cars where black and white would meet in cars. They would ride around town. It was that. And then, too, there were some homes that actually people met in. Later, when I lived in Birmingham there were--.

**JD:** Black and White men together?

**RB:** Yes, there were more. There was more of a mixture. That was in the 1950s though.

**JD:** But in the 30s, it was very--am I right in saying that contact was very surreptitious?

**RB:** There was contact on the higher levels. And not on the so-called lower levels. Not meaning that the higher levels were more important in that respect. But in the clubs--in the clubs there were separate meetings.

**JD:** Was this mix male/female too.

**RB:** Yes, there were mixed female and male. Yes, mixed.

**AB:** You also said before that the party was opposed to racism and male chauvinism, and I just wanted to know--when you say male chauvinism, are you talking about reading backwards from the 70s--70s stuff to the 40s and 30s? Or was the party really concerned with male chauvinism?

**RB:** Well, we had sessions concerning the women's issue and how women were treated. Of course, you must realize that not unlike churches, countries, parties of all kind, political parties of all kinds, certain rules were pronounced. Were spoken. Even in the gay movement, if you please. But the adherence to these were sometimes lacking. (As you well know to your own sorrow.) Actually, in the 70s when I first began to associate with any gay institutions at all, I said to myself, "Well, at last, the fellow gays and sister gays would be a wonderful support. They're all going to. I'll find a wonderful support

from them because they understand to oppression." But I learned that not every gay cared, gave a good goddamn about it, about support. And were just as conservative, some of them, and lived as petty lives, as many of the straights did. And the only reason that they might join Dignity or Integrity or any other gay group was because they were gay and that's all. They touched these organizations and then left for their own individual lives and not all came out to picket Anita Bryant. Huh? But some did, but many didn't. And if you spoke about oppression of blacks to them, they would be just as ready to oppress blacks as any straight person. So that's just an aside which I will get into as you see I feel very strongly about that.

**JD:** Can you give us a general idea the kinds of issues you worked on and the kind of work that the party did in Jacksonville?

**RB:** Yeah, we worked on unemployment. We tried to get for jobs for--we didn't try to get jobs--we tried to ask the public, the governmental agencies--to supply jobs. We tried to open people's eyes as to what the governmental--the limitations of capitalist society--was. There was an unemployed organization known as the Workers' Alliance. Have you hear of it?

**JD:** I have actually. From the 30s.

**RB:** From the 30s, yes. And it was born out of from the consolidation, if I speak correctly, of two organizations, the Workers' Alliance was a Socialist Party formation, not a Communist Party one. The Communist Party had another organization called Unemployment Councils. And that was in the very early 30s. I never knew those. But they joined together and they called themselves the Workers' Alliance. Well, in Jacksonville, there was a black Workers' Alliance and a white Workers' Alliance. And, you see, how ineffective that could be in putting up a front against governmental agencies who should have made every effort to get jobs or tell that they couldn't. The other issues were the black and white issue. Which was exceedingly--you couldn't just talk to every white concerning this. Most whites were racist, but not all of them. So you went around trying to make friends with people, feeling them out as to how they felt about things. And if there was any door of theirs open at all, to speak to concerning the black-white issue, then you were. We who were white all through the Communist Party, the effort on the part of white members was to break down racism among whites. Blacks weren't the ones, black people, but we worked with blacks also. Whites did. But we had the responsibility, the special responsibility for breaking down white chauvinism. White racism.

Of all the political parties, this is what attracted me to the CP at that time (a twenty year marriage) was that of all the parties that existed at that time, the CP was the only one and I think the first one that raised the issue of discrimination against blacks. The IWW did take in blacks. But I would like to say this about the IWW: I respect the IWW and respect it for what they did. They are a wonderful organization. Militant and did a lot of good. And so this is in the nature of criticism within the brotherhood and sisterhood of our own family. The IWW and the Socialists said all humans are one. A black is the same as a white and vice-versa and Chinese and Japanese--and the IWW took

in, as far as I know, took in everyone. But the Communist Party said that there needs to be a special effort made in this aspect of our country of racism concerning black and white, that a special effort must be made to breakdown among whites the racism and also to bring to consciousness among blacks the fact that they should resist oppression, that they should know more and more about their history.

And that at some time along the way there came out the idea of black nationhood. A fellow by the name of Harry Haywood wrote *Black Liberation*. And there was the idea, and I think for awhile it was accepted within the party that when the revolution came that there would be set up in the South a black nation. Because the black people were the majority in certain counties, certain areas of the South. A map showed that. And now, I think, many blacks have moved so that this is now no longer as true as fully as it was. Although some of the smaller 1960s Communist Parties (ML), they also spoke of black nationhood and went back to the old dogmas. One of these old parties is breaking up concerning some of these matters. But, as you know, that's not what I want to speak of now.

What other things? Oh, yes, jobs. Workers Alliance. We helped to build the Workers Alliance. The white at least. And we tried very much to unite with blacks whenever we could--whenever there was a possibility. One thing I learned through the CP and that is--although all CPs have not learned this or done this--but since the popular front days--to reach out to all people, wherever you could, reach to them on an issue--if some people were interested in, deeply interested in, the matter of jobs and there were feelings firmly about unemployment, reach to them on those issues. Even though they might be racist in segregation, you might have a chance later to do something on that score.

**JD:** Especially about that, when you were talking to whites about unemployment, you say you would feel them out because a door opened that you could talk to them about racism?

**RB:** Yes.

**JD:** Did you ever see a parallel with that with your friends, when you were talking with your friends? Did you ever feel like there was door open that you could talk about being gay with them? Or was that a skill you could use to draw on that you brought to the organization?

**RB:** I did with very, very few. So few that I would have to scrape within my memory to talk about it. I resolved the issue by resolving not to do anything about it.

**JD:** This is in Jackson?

**RB:** Yeah, I must have had...

**AB:** Not to do anything about your gay feelings?

**RB:** Yeah, right. I'd like to go backwards. When...I'd like to take a break, how 'bout it.

[Tape stopped]

**RB:** When I left Commonwealth, I went back to Wisconsin and I went--the friends at Commonwealth recommended a psychiatrist to me in Chicago. And I went to see that psychiatrist, a man, and he fully approved of my gay life and my gay stance, but I was too inhibited to ask him questions that I should have asked. I got a job in order to live in Chicago. It was about 12 to 14 hours a day in a restaurant and it was very, very hard, very difficult. I wasn't accustomed to such 7 days a week, 14 hours a day work. But I had had a session with this psychiatrist in Chicago and he said that he would take me for very little money, which I didn't have. I had very little money. The first session was his offering to me was the best that I had ever had. He said it was all right to be gay. That I should have gay--shouldn't have any qualms about gay relationships. Of course, I didn't--what I wanted to ask him--and I couldn't get myself to ask him--was where does one find gay people?

**JD:** (unintelligible)

**RB:** Yes. I didn't ask him that. I knew I wanted to ask him that. But I didn't ask him that, because I was inhibited and I was afraid to ask. So I came to him at the second session and told him that I had given up my work and I couldn't go through with the therapy because I just couldn't work at a job 14 hours a day, seven days a week. He said to me then that there were two reasons I had done this. Two possible reasons. One was that I was afraid of pursuing the therapy, that I had qualms about that, I didn't have any conscious qualms, but he also admitted that working seven days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day was very hard. He admitted that. Yeah, right.

**JD:** Can I ask you another thing? And if either you don't remember or don't want to answer, that's fine. Do you remember the name of the psychiatrist?

**RB:** I'd rather not offer the name now. I'm sorry.

**JD:** That's fine. My mother would say the worst you can do is say no.

**RB:** The worst you can do is say no. At first make no errors. Then after that I settled in Milwaukee, briefly, I worked in regards to. Remember the Spanish Civil War was on, and I worked in regards to committees that supported the Spanish Republic. That was mostly, I worked in a restaurant. At that time, they were organizing the CIO and the Communists were in the lead of organizing the CIO. I think that they were. The restaurant was organized CIO. I remember a sit-in that we had. We determined to have a strike and instead of walking outside we--all of us--just sat down in the restaurant. And I remember that I went to the door, the revolving door and people would try to come in to get service. And I would say, "Strike on, no service." We had a lovely time and we won

our demands and got our--and we had steaks and hamburgers and malted milks and were well taken care of. We designated places where people would sleep, very careful to have the feminine side go one place and the male side go to another. But we won our demands and it was a very interesting. You remember the auto workers were having sit-ins at the time? So we thought we would have our little sit-in too. It was our little sit-in.

**AB:** How big a restaurant was it?

**RB:** Well, it was a corner restaurant and it had two large dining areas. Incidentally, there was always one fellow that came in and we discussed Spain and the lack of progress that the popular front was making at the time. There must have been about 35 to 40 restaurant workers, including cashiers. You know, that's a small number when you count cashier, busboys, servers, and what else, pot washers and washers and, well, the whole staff. Then it was after the failure of that that I then went to Jacksonville to work. And so, I'm sorry, I thought I would catch up on that.

**AB:** It is good that you brought us back to that. How long did you live in Jacksonville?

**RB:** I lived from '37 to 1939--to the outbreak of the war, World War Two, in Europe. It was mostly, oh, yes, I must tell you. It is true that I formed a relationship with various people, but they were never sexual relationships. They were, well, I liked people very much. But I didn't have any relations with them. I'll backtrack a little bit. I remember going on a bus from Commonwealth. And there was a young fellow sitting in front of me and the bus was very rickety and so I wanted to converse with him and I said, "Well, if you ever get settled right, if you find a comfortable spot on your seat, let me know." And he joked with me. And then bus stopped in Missouri at some town and we were there overnight. Well, we spent the night together and I came very close to him and he came quite close to me too. I think that was the first time that I had a physical reaction to sex. That is, the emission, the climactic emission. But after that, he was very shy of me. I think he was--what would we call it?--ashamed that he had had that relationship. And he wouldn't talk to me or wouldn't have anything to do with me. But that was to be typical of relationships that I was to have in the future.

**JD:** You both climaxed in bed together?

**RB:** I didn't know that he did. I think he did; I know that I did. As a matter of fact, it was such a sudden urge (or surge, I should say) that I didn't know what was happening. Didn't know that was supposed to happen. So ill-informed was I--and I the modern progressive, to make in the world. I am not cynical and I am very full of hope and faith, as you can see. That was one of the first. Later I was to "dis-enjoy"--is there a word to say "dis-enjoy?"--other relations, which I'll tell you about. Yes, in Jacksonville, there was a fellow who apparently was able to have sexual relations with both men and women.

**JD:** How do you know that?

**RB:** Well, because--I knew that because he had them with me.

**JD:** Sexual relations?

**RB:** Yeah, right. Right. And then with women too. He--like many males, he boasted about his relations scoring with some women who were in our circle.

**AB:** Was this another CP member?

**RB:** No. Yes, it was. Yes. But it was within our own cells. It wasn't within--I didn't have much confidence to release myself, my feelings, within the CP. I don't know why, but I just didn't. I guess one can tell, just as a child can tell, when there is to be confidences to be had and when there isn't. I think even animals can tell.

**JD:** This is very different than your experiences with political group of Communists?

**RB:** Yes, it is different. Well, I felt differently. Yes, I did. Never mind that they were both supposed to be radicals. But we know very well. But because a person is

**[Tape stopped for telephone call]**

**[End of tape 2, side 1]**

**Tape 2, side 2: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**RB:** But the sexual relations were not satisfactory with this particular person?

**JD:** Did he teach you some things? These are fresh experiences that you are having sexually?

**RB:** Yeah, did he teach me. I don't think he did. No, I don't think he did. I'm reluctant to describe what was done, but I did not--I didn't do completely what he wanted. He wasn't angry over it. He was frustrated over it. But we were together quite a number of times. And he deplored the fact. He wasn't angry with me at all. He deplored the fact that my inhibitions wouldn't allow complete relaxation and completion of the relations that he would like.

**AB:** Would you consider trying--if I asked you what it was? Or do you not want to talk about that?

**RB:** I would at this time prefer not to talk about it. Suffice it to say what I have already said.

**JD:** That was outside of--that was a relationship you had outside any friendship or relation you had in the CP?

**RB:** Well, he was a part of it. He was part of the CP, but our relationship was, I think, unknown to them. But at any rate, I don't think the way they were they would care, because there were a number of couples that were living, who were not married but were living as we live today. Live together.

**JD:** In Jacksonville?

**RB:** In Jacksonville. Yeah, right.

**JD:** The other question that I have about the relationship is that, did the two of you ever talk about it? About that you were two men having sexual relations?

**RB:** No, we did not go into a great deal of talk about it. No. From hindsight, one might say, "Well why not? Gee, that would be the first thing to do." I was tempted to talk to this first one that I mentioned. I wanted to talk. But he didn't lend himself to talking. And so I didn't converse. I don't know how to describe how strong the inhibitions are and the oppression is that you do not talk. Where you should talk. That's what should have happened. But, here it is 1982 and I am first having--this all happened 50 years ago, as it were. I think just about 50 years ago, almost, some of it anyway. And I am first now having some talks, with difficult, about some things. You note, you asked me a question which [I] said I'd rather not answer.

**JD:** Another question that I have that there may be no answer to: but Jacksonville, Florida has a Naval base?

**RB:** Yes.

**JD:** I think that the Naval base was already there in '30s.

**RB:** It might well have been. I had no relation to that.

**JD:** Could there, in general, be a folklore that relates to the Navy?

**RB:** Yeah, I understand.

**JD:** You had sex with Navy...?

**RB:** I didn't know the Naval base period. I didn't know of it. I knew of a Naval base near there or by, during World War Two. But I wasn't there during World War Two.

**AB:** It might also not have been until war time.

**RB:** It might have. I don't remember it being there.

**JD:** You said that you left Jacksonville when war broke out. Was that at the party's instigation that they sent you somewhere else?



**RB:** No. I moved against the wishes of the party as a matter of fact. I had, by this time, remember I told you I worked in a supermarket. There must have been about 12 such supermarkets in the chain. And I worked in the supermarkets and the AFL Union came, went in, to organize that union. Wanted to organize the clerks. But they didn't come. The CIO. Their method would be to organize to get acquainted with the people who worked in the place and then organize them and then confront the employer with the fact that they had a union. But the CIO didn't work that way.

**JD:** The AFL--which?

**RB:** The AFL didn't work that way. The AFL wanted--the business agents wanted--to control the show themselves. See, if you work the way the CIO did, then the members would have some voice in how the union, what the union was to do. Because you organized the union first, the ground first. Well, the AFL didn't want to do that. The AFL came to the boss and said, "Unless you recognize the union here, we'll picket." Well, they had pickets that they hired. But the CIO had pickets from their own membership. Which was a healthier situation. But, anyway, the CIO came and established picket lines at where I worked.

**JD:** The CIO or the AFL?

**RB:** The AFL--AF L, as I said, came and saw the employers and said, "Unless you recognize the union, we will picket this place." And they had no membership at all and the employer said, "Well, you don't have any membership." They knew what was going on. "You have no membership here." But they had their strong points, too, the AFL. They hired all kinds of people and paid them and they picketed.

**AB:** They needed jobs, right?

**RB:** They needed jobs, yes. And never mind that these people who they hired cared about the union or not.

**AB:** Could care less, right?

**RB:** Couldn't care less. But anyway, I saw the picket line and I said, well, I knew that they were trying to organize. As a matter of fact, the company organized a union called, well, it was a company union. And they were going to join that, and then they said well we have a union. But it didn't handle wages and hours. It wasn't a real union. Someone in the company, as a matter of fact, even asked, "What about our wages and hours?" And they were told that they were out of order. "You're out of order. We're not talking about that." They organized a party--to have a social picnic or something--to get off the steam of a union drive. Anyway, I joined. I immediately called some of my CP friends and told them what was happening and that there was a picket line. And, of course, we had a very strong feeling about picket lines. We did not cross them. And so, I did not cross it and I went out on strike. There were a few people who out on strike, but not many. And

so I went out on strike and we picketed day after day and it was very hard, you know. I was once picketing right in front of the door and someone tried to slam the door at me. I just missed the door, missed it, but then some drunk took his fist and knocked it in my picket sign. Knocked my picket sign over. And one employee who still remained on strike pulled out a knife and said, "I'm going to get you." It was just a threat that didn't go through. My parents lived up North at this time, still in Wisconsin. They hatched a plot in Jacksonville how to get me off of striking because here was a Jewish person striking. There must be some credit to the strike if one of their own strikes. And so, in that respect, I had some credibility there on the strike.

**JD:** Did this also--it must have created quite an alienation from the family though?

**RB:** Yes, it did. A huge alienation. And, as I say, that at this time the owners of the store, who were Jewish, were being attacked as Jews by anti-Semites. And so in the feud by the family that I had some affiliation with the anti-Semites. Because wasn't the union attacking the owner too? The owner would get a lot of the family in on the stores to be managers and to be cashiers and so forth. Well, I picketed and this young radical group that was with me, one time we staked out the largest store and we all picketed and they and their friends, not what I said were about 14 but were about 25 on this picket line. It was a Saturday night when they did a lot of business. But we said, "Throw that food upon your table. Be sure and get the union label."

Well, we lost the strike, but they had many positive aspects. For instance I lived a distance away from picketing and the cabs were all union. And I would hail a cab and tell them I was a striker and immediately that door opened for me. I got a free ride to wherever I was going. I wrote comments to the labor paper, the AFL paper, concerning why I'm on strike. I said I was on strike for better wages and hours and I was on strike to defeat the company union and so forth. One of my cousins was chairperson of the company union. And he was the one that said that wages and hours, "No place on the agenda for that." Well, we lost our strike and they had promised me that if we lost the strike I would get a job at another supermarket-- that is, at another company which they had organized. I went to try to get a job there and the people there said, "We don't hire Jewish people." And so I told the AFL clerk union and they said, "Well, we are not going to combat that." Yeah, right. So we lost the strike and then at this time my parents were going to move south to Alabama and we moved there and they opened a general store.

**JD:** In Birmingham, was this?

**RB:** Well, a smaller place, but it's on the map. But we won't name it at this time.

**JD:** It strikes me as strange that a Jewish family would move to the South. I mean, I don't know if that 's just a stereotype--because I think of them as anti-Semitic or--.

**RB:** Yeah, I think so, because they wrote to their--there were quite a number of Jews in the South and they were shop keepers and professionals. Even during the Civil War,

before the Civil War, they had come. As cotton factors, as middle class people. The Jewish, the German Jew, the reform Jews had come even before. Some of them had participated in the Civil War on the part of the Confederate side. And they boasted of that. And then Northern Jews had moved down too, that is Jews of Polish and Russian extraction. And Lithuanian extraction. It didn't happen often. But when my people came from Europe some of them settled in Baltimore and in Jacksonville and then, of course some of the children married Alabama folks and so therefore they moved to Alabama. And my dad opened a general store, which was very good and asked me to help. And I did help because I was out of a job. As a matter of fact, in Jacksonville, when I lost the strike, I had so few resources, financial resources, that I was hungry many times. And were it not for the fact that once a week the Workers Alliance gave a general supper to its members, I might not have eaten very well. I remember one supper which very filling. It was rice and chicken. I think they called it "Chicken Pullet," I don't know. It was a French term. But then I moved to Alabama and I lived there. I did "right to vote" work, but that was--.

**JD:** What years did you live in Alabama?

**RB:** In 1939-40, '41. And I did right to work. Oh, crase that, right vote. I know what "right to work" is and that is on the opposite side of the fence.

**JD:** When you say right to vote, you're talking about for blacks.

**RB:** For black and whites. I'll tell you, because in Alabama in order to vote you had to register first of all, then you pay a poll tax of \$2.00. And if you did not pay that poll tax the first when you became voting age, the next year it was \$4.00 and the next year it was, yeah, cumulative and then it went up to \$36.00. Of course, it was not publicly done. The most public aspect of it was that a group of us put out signs, posters that we could put in the windows of shops and stores and so forth, that said, "We urge everyone to register." I don't know. We had a small group there but I don't remember the name of it. Was it called the "New South Club" or something like that? It wasn't necessarily CP. It included some CP, but it wasn't necessarily CP.

**JD:** Did you maintain your former affiliation when you moved?

**RB:** Yes, yes.

**JD:** There was like a party group in the locality?

**RB:** Well there was in the state. So whenever there was a meeting we would go to Birmingham. Birmingham was the center. But that was the center. But we did go. We were outgoing people, most of us were. And we became acquainted with other folks, with people. So we were able to talk to them and give them literature and call them to certain meetings. It was very slowly done. But I am thinking now that that work had better quality than the bigness we have that we sometimes have today. I think that it was important during Vietnam to have a huge peace parade, yes. And today for anti-nuclear,

yes. But sometimes we overlook the quality of our contacting people, the contacts we make.

**JD:** Meaning that that's important, the one-to-one?

**RB:** Yeah, one-to-one, but also what kind of people do we get? Are they people that will drop out right quick like? Are they people that come because they like your looks or because of some small appeal? Will they last till tomorrow? So that's why I think it's good. Both are good, but I think that sometimes we emphasize on numbers and large sized things in America. I think that the one-to-one is very important. There used to be a newspaper called *Majority of One*, a radical paper. I don't know if you have ever heard of it. And then didn't Thoreau say "I am a majority of one."? (I think that's where it comes from.)

**AB:** A question that I have is throughout all these years in the 30s and maybe even into the early 40s, you had this earlier experience of someone giving you *The Well of Loneliness*, the book you read, did you find any other books?

**RB:** No. No, I did not. That brings up a very humorous thing, in the library in the city in which I grew up as a boy. In my senior year, I began to look up books on sex. None of them were anything concerning gay sex at all. But just on sex physiological, physiological aspects, sociological aspects.

**AB:** This was in a public library?

**RB:** Yeah, a public library in Wisconsin. Right. And one time I returned a book and the next day or two, since I frequented the library very much, the librarian came to me and said certain pages have been torn out of a particular book. And "We think that you did it." I said, well, "No ma'am, I did not do it." She said, "Well, you're too young to be reading these books anyway." I resented that inwardly. I didn't say anything. But I resented that. I was a high school graduate and I thought that I had gotten to the culture that told us that we should read everything that there is nothing we shouldn't investigate and read.

**AB:** Were those books on open or closed shelves?

**RB:** They were on open shelves, yes.

**AB:** Do you remember what any of them were?

**RB:** Oh, no. I can't remember, no. No, I can't remember. But I was very deeply interested. Wherever I would find the word homosexuality, which maybe there was a note, maybe there was a sentence, I would read it. And I was very interested in that subject, for obvious reasons. But I found nothing.

**JD:** When you were in Alabama--when did you first start realizing that the US was going to be involved in the war?

**RB:** In the war? Well, here is where I differed with the CP. I think it was 1939 when Hitler and Stalin made non-aggression pact. Before this time although I didn't quite--the party on account of that--although some did. Up to this time, the party had been telling how terrible fascism was. And here we made a deal with fascism really. We were to combat it. We were to fight it. We were to try to put it down as much as we can. And yet, but of course, those that were fighting fascism--that is, England and France--their fight was not an all out fight either. There was what we call the phony war. They were hoping that, in my estimation--I wouldn't know if it was party line or not--but they were hoping that by giving Czechoslovakia and Poland to Hitler that they would then go in that direction. And that Russia, the Soviet Union, and Hitler would fight each other, weaken each other, and they would step in. That's what I and many others did think so too. Then in 1942?

**JD:** '41.

**RB:** '41. Yeah, '41. Of course. The character of the war changed. It became a people's war. Yes, a people's war. You see, these things are loosening my allegiance to the party. Which I still adhered to. By that time we joined the war and by that time I had left my father's emporium, because that's what it was. You could buy chamber pots, textiles, grits, food. It was a general store. And I went to work in Savannah. I went to work in a newspaper there. One of the daily papers. A rose by any other name. I had my cub reporting. Mind you, my major had been journalism and I had had freshman's training and all. And I wrote account of the Rotarian's Club and Kiwanis, matters military. As a matter of fact, that was name of a column. I didn't have a by-line on it. Things like that--I wrote community things. But then everybody was joining and I had very bad eyes and the draft would not take me. But then came out a notice that you could join the Army through the draft if you had certain eyes, what they called 20/200--or something like that. So I got into it. And I left for the service. But before I left, I went up to see some friends in New York. Your town. In Philadelphia.

**JD:** When was this?

**RB:** 1942. Yes, early 1942. And they told me about certain bars and where to go and they were also of a gay persuasion.

**AB:** Your friends, the friends in Philadelphia, how did they become your friends? I mean like....

**RB:** When I lived in Savannah, one or two of them lived in Savannah too.

**AB:** So you met them there?

**RB:** So I met them there, yes.

**JD:** How did you meet them there?

**RB:** I met them at dinner. We frequented a place, a cafeteria, together and we talked together and so we knew each other that way. And then I got to know them a little better but very soon after that this one particular one left for the North. For his home in Philadelphia.

**AB:** How, though, did you all find out you were gay?

**RB:** Well, I don't know. I think what you are asking there is just like asking children who speak different languages and who play together. I never had any relations with any the fellows, but they just know. They fall in with one another. They talk one thing and they meet each other because they are open to each other. And then they talk, they may mention one thing and then that would lead to another--and soon the whole pattern would be known.

**AB:** Now can you think in terms of those friends in Savannah, can you remember what some of those things, what one thing that lead to other things might have been?

**RB:** You are probing, aren't you? I can't. Let me see, I'll try and think.

**AB:** Let me give you an example, that someone might say (not that it might have been true for you but maybe it will help). Harry Hay told me that in the middle 30s, when he started meeting other gay men, that one of the signals that people had was that they would start talking about Revel's Bolero. And that if somebody knew it, so were things like that around music or books, or whatever, that would be a signal?

**RB:** No. This one fellow lived in the same place I did. That was the YMCA. And I got to know him. I didn't have any idea who he was. He was very friendly, that's all. Very friendly. I was very friendly to him. I got to know him better. One day I noticed that he was in bed and he was very depressed and I asked him what the depression was. We had both been to college and we had both been students and so we were talking on that level too. Anyway, if you were a college student, as you probably know, if you are about between 20 and 25 and you go to any college, large college campus, in the country--even in Europe perhaps--you can talk to people very easily and you can tell them that you are a college student too and soon, most likely they'll give you a place to stay and you're on a buddy-buddy basis already. And that's the way we were. We ate together and so forth. And one day I came home, or to the "Y" and he was there and he was in his bed and he was very depressed. I said, "What's the matter, aren't you well?" And he said, "Come in," and he closed the door and said, "I'm going through a very tough period in my life." I said, "Well, why is that?" And he said, well, he said, "I've met someone that I love." And I said, well, "Why don't you go out with her? Why don't mix with her?" And he said, well, "It's not a her." And, of course, I knew immediately then what it was. And he said he has a sweetheart, a young woman up in Philadelphia and he hopes to marry her. He was a Quaker, of Quaker influence, and she was a Quaker from England. He was

going to marry her. And now this fellow, this very charming and very handsome fellow, they had met and this fellow wanted him to sleep with him or be with him. And my friend was perplexed as to whether to enter into that life or not. Apparently, he had been in that life. And so he was debating. It was a debate in his mind. Mind you, this was in the early '40s and there was not all that support for that kind of a life.

**AB:** I want to ask you a couple of questions to clarify. Is it your--the friend in the YMCA--is he the one that is engaged to a woman?

**RB:** Yes. I don't think he was engaged. But now that you mention it, he was engaged.

**AB:** But then he's fallen in love with another man?

**RB:** With a fellow, yes.

**AB:** I wasn't sure who was the one connected to the woman.

**RB:** You got it now? But finally this fellow, my friend who was distressed, did go with him. And I must say, he was a very nice fellow. I had nothing to do with him. I wish I had, but I didn't. But anyway the fellow moved back to Philadelphia and the fellow of Savannah also moved to Philadelphia and the two had a house together. And had some parties together. I came up there just before I allowed myself to be drafted in the Army and I was at one of the parties. And I met a young fellow that I spent the night there at his home. And the fellow that I spent the night at, he lived there with another guy and they were both gay but they were not lovers. One of the fellows said to me, "Now here we have this couch. You can sleep on this couch or you can sleep with me." And, of course, I was dying to sleep with him. But I was ashamed to say that "I came over there for that purpose." I came over ostensibly to find a place to stay. This doesn't mean that I didn't need a place to stay, even on the couch. And finally the night progressed a little longer and I said I think I'll come over to your bed. Then he said, you can come over but we're not going to do anything. But we did. The best laid plans of mice and men. Mostly men.

**JD:** To go back to Savannah for a minute--when you and your other gay friends were sort of sitting around talking in the cafeteria or something like that, were there other groups of gay men talking in that cafeteria?

**RB:** No, it was not--it was not a gay place. As a matter of fact, in those days, as far as I know, there were no gay places. There might have been but we didn't know of them. I know that there were some. I am sure that there were some bars and hangouts that gay people had in many cities. And even people's homes. But this was not one of them. This was a regular straight cafeteria.

**JD:** The party in Philadelphia--

**AB:** Let me ask another question: were you aware of--the YMCA's have a notorious reputation as being places where gays hang out?

**RB:** I was not aware of that.

**AB:** You were not aware of that?

**RB:** I was not, no. As a matter of fact, I roomed with a very straight fellow. I met him. He was a companion to me, not anything more than that. And he used to date and we talked. As a matter of fact, he wasn't radical. He said to me once, "If I found out that you are a radical I would just call the police right in a minute." So I left off all that for--I changed. I don't know how it was now that I had another roommate who was straight but was much better.

[End of tape 2, side 2]

**Tape 3, side 1: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**JD:** I have a question about the party at your friend's house. When you, do you remember anything about the party? Who went there? Was it a gay party?

**RB:** It was a gay party, yes. But there were some sailors there and I remember the drink they served. I don't remember what it was, but I have been trying to find out ever since. It was, well, that's not important. But there were gay couples there that came in and out. There were gay people who came in and out. That's all I remember of it.

**AB:** But it was a gay party?

**RB:** Yeah, it was. It was the first that I attended.

**AB:** OK. What kind of impression did it make on you? I mean, here you are, like 26 or 27, feeling gay all these years and you are coming up north and here is a party. Did it? I don't know.

**RB:** Well, what you are trying to say, now, to me is "what it would do to you under those circumstances." But necessarily it didn't do the same to me.

**AB:** Well, what did it do?

**RB:** It acquainted me with the fact such exist. And I am very glad that they did exist. But very soon after that--mind you I was just visiting Philadelphia--I went back home to Alabama and got into the Army and was in the Army. Huh? I didn't, it didn't do anything for me other than--that is, to meet people. My friends did tell me about a bar which I went to.

**AB:** In Philadelphia?



**RB:** In Philadelphia. I don't remember where it was or what the name of it was.

**AB:** What was that like?

**RB:** But it was very interesting. There were just gobs of fellows at the bar. And they were all drinking and one fellow came up to me, he was a very nice fellow, good-looking and all that, and he said to me, I have to laugh every time I hear it, he says: "Who's little boy are you?" Do you know any other line? Well, I said, "I'm not here with anyone." He said, would I like to go home with him. And I said, "Yes." And he lived just in the area and so went home with him and he had one room. There were no sheets on the bed. And an electric light hanging down--and I guess I didn't do what he wanted to do. He wasn't angry, but he didn't ask me to come back. But I had lunch with him. He did agree to have lunch with me that next day--so I had lunch with him. But that was all that happened of it.

**AB:** Were there, at that bar, were there servicemen and non-servicemen?

**RB:** I don't remember that.

**JD:** I have a couple questions about the bar. Was it really packed?

**RB:** It was quite packed, yes.

**JD:** All men?

**RB:** All fellows, yes.

**JD:** Do you think it was all gay?

**RB:** Yeah. It was a gay bar. It was a gay bar, yeah.

**JD:** Do you remember what it was like at all--or what it looked like at all--or any details of it?

**RB:** Well, I just remember the bar itself. Loads of fellows, three or four deep around there. That's all I remember. My friends told me a little joke about it. They said that a cab came, pulled up to the bar outside, and two sailors got out and the sailors asked the cab driver, "Is this were you get the blow job?" And the cab driver said, "Yes, this is where you get the blow job." So that's what they told me.

**JD:** At the party, though, there were servicemen, though?

**RB:** There were, yes.

**JD:** In uniform?

**RB:** Yes, they were. Yes. I can't remember what outfits. But there were sailors, that I remember. Beyond that, I don't remember.

**JD:** This was in early '42?

**RB:** Yeah, early '42, yes. Wait now, '41, I think. I'm not altogether sure. In May of '42, I got into the service.

**JD:** This is an odd question, but what were you doing at the time of Pearl Harbor?

**RB:** What? I was in Savannah then. I was a cub reporter on the Savannah paper.

**JD:** You mean it happened that day when you heard the announcement?

**RB:** Oh, yeah. I remember. Well, we tried to get stories concerning all that, another laughing joke. We tried to get stories concerning people who were being called back to their camps. There were people, servicemen, being called back to their camps and to their battleships and there was a lot of excitement. We got one telegram, I know the nature of it at all, but it had the Spanish word or the French word. (I think the Spanish word, meaning "without origin.") Because in those days, right after Pearl Harbor, we were at war and they were taking precautions as to keep secret as to where messages were coming from and going to. We received one message at the newspaper and it said, "Son, Son Origene." Which means "without origin." But we thought it was a place. And we looked at the atlas for that place. Well, we didn't find it. But now, as I recall. But people were assigned to write the story and that story causes all that excitement. Huh. And you can imagine the excitement. We were just plunged into war. Of course, we were very much in favor of joining the allies. By this time –

[Tape stopped]

**AB:** This is Alan Berube and John D'Emilio doing this interview on January 5, 1982, in San Francisco.

**JD:** I think where we left off was you had now joined the Army. You talked about Pearl Harbor and working at Savannah.

**JD:** So, what, you decided to enlist in the Army?

**RB:** Well, suffice it to say that I got in. Those who, well, asked, "Why didn't you volunteer?" and then to go through all kinds of a "who shot John" as to how you got in I got in through the draft. I was drafted. It wasn't possible for me to volunteer because of the condition of my eyes. But then the regulation came out and I guess they became more desperate in need and they took people whose eyes were bad. But these people entered through the draft board. And these people if they wanted to get in could facilitate their getting in through going down to their draft board and making it known that they

wanted to be enlisted. In today's climate, this might sound rather strange, but you must remember that in World War Two we were combating fascism--that is, especially the Nazi aspect of it and I was an American and a Jew and hopefully a humanitarian and a civil libertarian---and I felt that as a duty to join the armed forces. And I was young and I guess I was able to be capable in some field so I wanted to join and did.

**AB:** How aware were you at that time of what the Nazi's were doing to the Jews? Was widely known in America? Or did you know it? Or?

**RB:** That, specifically, the death business, I did not know. But that they were opposed to Jews and they were putting them into concentrations camps and would be capable of death, I think we all should have known. Is that hindsight?

**AB:** I don't know.

**RB:** I'm asking too.

**JD:** When you joined the Army, did you have any worry, like either in the back of mind (or in the front of your mind) about what it would be like to be in the Army and have the gay feelings that you had?

**RB:** No, I wasn't too worried about that. Because there was something more uppermost, something more in my mind than that at the time. Not that that wasn't important. It's like saying, that's like trying to ask if you minded if you were suddenly blinded. But [what] I was thinking of--what I was mainly thinking about--is to help build the Army, to get in the Army myself, my individual commitment. And I was not concerned. I did not give too much thought, about gay life in the Army. Gay life for me then was, before then--as I described in other recordings--was rather surreptitious because of the pressures of the times and, I supposed in myself, that if I had any sexual expression in the gay way that they would continue to be surreptitious and I knew that there were regulations and, of course--we all say--we're all ego enough to say, "Well, they'll never find me out." So we take our chance and I compared that to--as I have compared it before--to the moth and the open flame. It's such an attraction that the moth will take every kind of chance to get to the flame, which it adores and which it will also be burnt by. So I guess we do that and I guess we'll do that as long as we live. Except that now days, there is much more free atmosphere. Not completely free at all, by no means.

**JD:** During your Army induction physical, do you remember them asking you a question about homosexuality?

**RB:** I don't remember that, no. But had they asked that question, I believe that I would have answered "No." Because no blood test, no physical test that they could give, I don't believe, could tell whether one is gay. I noticed that in the Vietnamese War that some fellows, straight and gay, wore pink shorts so to be--but they caught on to that very soon too.

**JD:** Where, can you tell us where you served during the Army, and the kind of work that you did in the Army?

**RB:** I can't be very specific, but I can say that I served on a South Pacific Island. Not too far from Australia and New Zealand. Suffice that. I was there for about--almost three years. I served a half a year in the States. I think it was a half a year after induction. Where I got some training. We didn't have. I'll go chronologically perhaps.

I was inducted in the South and were sent to I can say some places where we were sent. We were sent to Biloxi, Mississippi and that's the area, incidentally, that the Lord created last. Humid, hot, dirty, out in the cow pastures. In order to make a camp, first we would make it all muddy. If it was pleasant and nice, first we would get it all muddy and arrange the worst kind of arrangements there at all. It was Biloxi, Mississippi. And then they gave us various tests and I happen to cotton to--to be able to discern--sounds. And so they put me into a unit for Morse code. And we kept in touch with aircraft, flying aircraft. So we were in the Air Corps.

**JD:** The Signal Corps?

**RB:** No, the Signal Corps is something else. They too had Morse code, but ours was part of the Air Corps. The Air Corps, there was no Air Force then. The Navy had an Air Force unit and the Marines had that and the Army had an "Air Corps." C-O-R-P-S, I believe. So I was with that. And we took our training at Scott Field, Illinois. And it was just jam-packed with fellows in the barracks and the fields. If a fellow stayed out, they didn't have track of him, they had very little, they wondered where, they didn't know if he was out or not. There were so many--such bureaucratic disorganization. I studied Morse code and I went even additional time so that I was very desirous of reaching the point of about 20 words a minute. That was the minimum that they would pass you on. You would copy for one minute and they and if within that minute you made no errors. Well, they would give you about five minutes of test. And if one whole minute of test was error free well then you passed that.

Later I was to go to Shute (sp?) Field to study air controlling, air controller. And I passed my tests in that also. But after that they gave me an eye examination. And they found out that my eyes were poor and I couldn't see the planes. But they should have given you the test before they sent you to school. But not in the Army. No. They didn't do it that way.

**JD:** So that when you were sent overseas in the Pacific is that the kind of work you did?

**RB:** Morse code, yes. Yes. We handled coded messages and others encoded them and put them in clear text too. I worked especially with weather units. Getting, weather units worked with digits. About five digits to a group. But these digits meant something in weather. They had a codebook and then they would tell that.

**JD:** What years were you in the Pacific?

**RB:** I was in the Pacific in 1942 to 1945. Then I was released in '45.

**JD:** Do you remember meeting any other gay men?

**RB:** Well, no. I think if I were going to be asked that, I would answer it this way: There were many men, as you well know, to say the obvious --overseas, and who were gay and who weren't gay, I don't know. Psychologists, some psychologists, tell us that if a man (or a woman, I suppose too) participates in gay sex that then they are gay. Some psychologists say that. But I don't know. I've found, not through my own personal experience, that many men supposedly straight participated in those circumstances in gay, in sex with the same gender. And who was gay and who wasn't, I don't know. Because these men, I believed to have been straight, they desired, they acted gay. They would participate, I believe, in both. And when they got to home shore, they participated in heterosexual relations. But on--in an all men circumstance--they would curry favor. (The same is in prison too.) They would curry favor with a particular person, fellow, to. They might give the fellow their ration of beer. They might--there are many favors that-- If ice cream comes to the camp and it's rationed, they might give this fellow that they want sexually his ration on ice cream. And favor him in various ways.

**JD:** Were there any men that you met that you had any conversations that you knew from the conversations that you had that this was a man who would think of himself as gay?

**RB:** Well, I'm trying to think. No, I don't know. I honestly don't know. For instance, in my outfit, we had a young man who was most effeminate. I mean everyone felt for absolute sure that he was gay. And because he fit the stereotype. Many of these people who think that gay men are always, the only kind are the effeminate kind that we all know. They're not many macho. But this fellow did. And when we stood, lined up for chow, when we lined up for chow and he would come from a distance, everybody would imitate him and laugh and cause all kinds of funnies. Well.

**AB:** Was it good-natured or was it mean?

**RB:** It was mean too. I was mean too, yes. No, it was not good-natured. Those things in my estimation are never good-natured. Only if there were other effeminate people and they were laughing at each other. Then, maybe, that would be good-natured. But these fellows were not that. Oh, they never beat him up, no. But then, at the end of the war, this fellow--I passed through Chicago and this fellow had me meet his girl friend. And she was the most beautiful girl friend in Chicago, I thought. And they married and he kept in touch for many years and they had one child after another. Of course, that doesn't prove that he wasn't. But I don't believe that this fellow would have--. Incidentally, Lena Home was his--he was white, but Lena Horne was beauty queen. And he had a picture of her. But if I could say that he might have been gay, but I didn't ever see--I lived in the same tent with him. I knew him. He was a very good friend of mine. And so we visited New Zealand soldiers in the neighboring camp and he became friends with

some of them. But I think it was fraternal. It wasn't anything else. I did not--I never, you see--I never talked with anyone who I thought was gay about gay life. I never spoke to anyone. And that's how I learned to tell. If we got to be intimate, in companionship--I don't mean sexually, necessarily, but in companionship. We'd confide to each other. And then you would tell him something and he would tell me. But we never--I never had that kind of relationship with anybody.

**JD:** What did you do with your gay feelings during all those years when you were in an all male environment like that?

**RB:** Well, I knew that I was in such an environment, I suppose. If a black person was among whites in that way too. Well, there were times when Jack In The Box didn't stay Jack In The Box and came out. Not any more than any male or female whom the lotus created with sexual feelings. I might tell you about some of these. The bedside manner but not the bed manner, please. There was--I used to love to walk. I am friendly and make a lot of friends. I like people without reference to the fair sex. But if someone pops up that I think is attractive--I might rap at the door, as it were. And I think we all do, so that's--I am not unique in that respect.

I would like to walk along the beach. We live near the beach. We can hear the waves actually. I was walking along there. We lived with the Navy, but please, in spite of what some think, we, the sexuality of people are not according to, I know they have a reputation and so do others and others and others. We all have sperm and we all have sex--what do they call it? Libido, the drive----so, all right, but just because you put on a Naval. Of course, it's true there is a subculture in some respects because of the ships. But anyway I was walking along the beach and this fellow was there too. He came after me. And in civilian life it happened that a fellow gay told me that he had met another guy who was also gay and when you met him, the fellow he met had a ring on his finger. And so he--my friend--took the other fellow's hand and said let me see the ring a little more. And, of course, they both knew what that meant. And I noticed on the beach that this fellow also had a ring. Perhaps one of these big old class rings that you see. He put his hand up and I took his hand and then we sat down. We sat quite, well, side by side. So that soon--we--I began to notice something rather volcanic occurring. He said to me, "Let us go." The shore was sand and just about half a block from the sand were bushes. He said, "Would you like to go to the bushes?" and I said, "I don't think so." But I did say that I regret very much that we are not in an urban area where we could get a hotel or something. But that cut no ice with him. He was determined. And I was determined to be cautious. It was like the moth flirting and flipping with the flame. There was a ship way out there and I didn't think that they could see us.

**JD:** Was he a sailor?

**RB:** He was a sailor, yes. Well, a land sailor. I think he was in the sailor Air Corps--air force, whatever they called it. Then he proposed to me to go to a certain place up the country where we would have more privacy. But we went there but there wasn't any privacy and we found it very difficult to walk back for obvious reasons. So I guess that I

saw him after that. And I liked him very, very much. He was very kind to me and he was somewhat younger than I am. He came from Iowa. Need I say, "Des Moines?" So but that's all. I saw him later but we never go together. But we were together then on the beach, I think that [people] in the 1890s might call spooning. That was it.

But there were other incidents too. And I might relate some of them. We used to go to the movies quite a bit. Almost every night there was a movie because we had very little to do when we weren't on work shift. We saw rain just recently in San Francisco. Well, that is the way that it rained there for just hours and hours and days. And, at first, I wouldn't go when it rained. Who could sit in the rain, cold rain, and look at a movie? But later everything looks good to you. So you went out there and sat in the open air and you had a poncho and you had other rain gear and so forth. I was sitting next to this fellow and it began to rain and so we joined forces in protecting ourselves. Although I knew I wasn't joining forces to protect myself especially, but we were all covered with ponchos and blanked--that is, raincoat blanket stuff. And so, whatever we did underneath those blankets was our own mutual consent privacy. And he seemed to be very interesting. He was a young Latin fellow. I don't know whether Mexican or Puerto Rican or Cuban. I just don't know, but to me he was very handsome. And slightly younger than I was and I saw him in his Quonset hut the next day. Apparently, he was the only one there. It wasn't fully occupied. And he said to me, "You know what happened last night?" And I said, "Yes, I am fully aware of what happened." He said, well, "I am not going to beg you for it, but I would like to be with you more. But if it is necessary to beg you, I am not going to do that."

And, of course, we would go to the show quite frequently together. One time he didn't come in and I asked him why he didn't come in and he said he didn't just like to go for naught. For nothing. He wanted something to result. So I think the next night we went--or a few nights after that. The movie, what was happening on the bench was much more attractive than what was on the screen, the show---. Anyway, I knew an empty tent that hadn't been occupied for a long, long time so I got up and he had been by that time been playing with all aspects of my body. Emphasis on the personable aspects. He said, "Are you going back to your tent?" I said, "No." So he got up and we went to this other tent and we consummated our love. Then we went back to my tent where we had some beer and a visit and we talked more. Later, he at various times he would ask me to--we were coming back from a movie, not in our area but in some other place and as the truck passed this particular empty tent he looked at me and smiled. And he asked me, "Would I go with him?" and I said, "No." See, I was cautious again. I wanted to go but I didn't. And maybe others have had a similar experiences where they were over cautious. But see, we lived--we did live then--and we do live now--in a society that won't mention the name of our love. And won't approve of us. And yet, and yet, the dominant or what is called in the mainstream, the dominant--I question the word "mainstream" because if you took all of the gays out of the society--there would be a minority left of those who participate in sex. And with the same gender there would be a minority left, not a mainstream. But we passed the place and I said, "No." And soon after that he left. That is, he left the camp. He was moved somewhere else. But not without giving me a set of

what we called "greens." Greens are green trousers and a green shirt that they wore for work. Fatigues, I always call them. Then there was a fellow, yes.

**[End of tape 3, side 1]**

**Tape 3, side 2: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**RB:** This is like 1,001 nights. Well, we see the surreptitious nature of the relationships. I always felt more comfortable going with someone outside my own tribe--that is, outside of my own outfit. Because once you got someone in your own outfit, that's--make a note of that--because once you did that at home then you became even more known. The chances for becoming, well, the relations between the fellows and their outfit, there were cliques and because you were Jewish you did not always, were not always allowed in certain cliques. As a matter of fact, you did not always receive promotions if an anti-Semitic group was in. We were fighting Nazism and we practiced racism here too and we were fighting racism abroad. I saw many military paper written, orders written, speaking about the "yellow nip" or "yellow gooks" which made me very uncomfortable. Let me try to collect my thoughts again.

**JD:** Can you tell another story about another fellow?

**RB:** Yeah, right. I am trying to think. Oh, yes, I have forgotten. Not that there are so many. I used to sometimes go outside of my theater of operations--that is, outside of my own camp, where the movie, where we had a movie for ourselves and go to some other camp.

**JD:** You could do that?

**RB:** Yeah, you were allowed to do that on the island. I was walking home. I was hitchhiking but I wasn't getting a ride so I was walking a bit. And I came to a Navy camp and they were a camp of Navy Air Force folks. And they were sitting on--it was night and they were spending the night talking to each other--there was about 15 fellows and they were sitting on a palm tree log which was on the side of the road. Really, the driveway was rimmed, bordered, on either side with palm tree logs. And I sat down there with them. I think that they were trying to tell me something, but they couldn't tell me directly. Again because of the surreptitious nature of the subject involved. One fellow, one sailor, said to another, "What happened to that guy that was supposed to come from such and such outfit to come here, to be here tonight?"

Well, they really weren't expecting any guy, but they were trying to tell me that--and knowing that I probably wouldn't believe it--that some fellow was coming to take care of one of the fellows sexually. But I didn't catch on really. I was naïve, and I still am, in many respects, naïve about life and after talking about, saying, well, "It doesn't look like he's coming" and looking at their watches, and all that sort of indirect talk meant to be directed to me. Well, I got up and began to walk away. They were all drinking beer and one fellow came to my side and gave me the balance of his beer. (Beer



was very valued because everybody wanted it.) I didn't care for it at all. But everybody wanted it and very little was sent overseas. And when fellows got it, that was very precious to them. So this fellow said, "Have the balance of this beer." And he thought he was doing me a favor and I recognized that. But I was wondering why he--you know, me a stranger--was wanting to do that. And I said, "I really don't drink beer." He said, well, "If you don't have it, I am going to pour it out. So you take it, it's for you." And we were talking and cars were coming and I was trying hitch a ride back home and he was trying to tell me something and I wasn't tuned in to his frequency. How stupid can you get? And looking for the same thing. But soon a very handsome-- well, this guy next to me was handsome too, but a very handsome fellow came and said to the fellow that was offering me a beer, "Haven't you asked him yet?" And the fellow looked down at his feet and the road, very shy, and I was even more shy, and so the fellow said to me, "This fellow wonders if you would be with him sexually."

**JD:** Did he actually say that?

**RB:** Or "take care of him." I think that was it. I got--no, he didn't say "sexually." No. But "would take care of him." That is, how many of the straight fellows would handle just like in prison--these many fellows who are straight want someone to take care of them and then they look at the person taking care of them as the gay person but they--nothing is wrong with them. They are just temporarily doing this, you see. They're OK. They're clean. It's like a fellow going to a prostitute. He is OK, but she is--he would never marry her, God forbid. To him she is, but she is good enough to use as a vent for his sex.

Well, anyway, there was a huge Banyan tree across the road. You know Banyan trees? Well most trees as you see, they grow, they have a trunk and they grow up like that. But a Banyan tree is an area even as big as this room--almost or half as big as this room--with not one main trunk--but many trunks. It's like a vine with many and there are many inlets for privacy. So we went there. And we had oral sex. That is, I was with him and he not with me. And then we were through--which he liked very much--then when when we were through, I said, "Where is this?"

I had asked this fellow who spoke directly, I asked him. "So how about you?" And he said "No, oh no, oh no." And his straight libido was talking to me. And he--but you know, the thing about all of us--now gay and straight is that we knock at the door of sex, and if it says "No," we still knock. We knock innumerable times. We'll never take a "no" for an answer. So when we were through, I said, "How about your buddy?" Course his buddy had said no. But he said, "I am sure he doesn't want to be with you, but I will check anyway." And so he did check and he says, "He's already sleeping." So he was already sleeping.

I remember hitchhiking along the way. You would think that I hitchhiked deliberately to find people cruising--and maybe that was an ingredient in the hiking, I don't know. Sometimes we are reluctant to reveal that it is. Because we have been told that sex is dirty and sex is--so "we are above sex," you know you always hear this is, "we

are above the bed," you always hear that. "I like you as a friend, not just to go to bed with." In other words, to go to bed is a terrible thing. So we are "above that." "We're above just mere physical, God forbid." Well, I was once riding with a fellow and I think he was about to, I was sitting next to him, and of course, many of us, men or women, or whoever, if we like someone, we might sit quite close with our thighs flush. I am assuming that you have done that too. And this fellow said to me, fingering my thigh, said to me, "Would you get off also when I get off?" And I said, "Yes." And of course that was it. But then after we went to a very deep ravine and had oral sex and then he said he wanted some money. And you know, some people were very much stronger than I was, but I ran and he didn't run after me. I think he was aware of the fact that if he got mixed up too near the time he was supposed to go home that would not be too cool. So, you see, that's what we faced. And I wanted to bring that out. That we faced--we always faced--the danger of that.

**JD:** Of the different relationships or situations you described, the one with the Latin man, was very different from those other two. Or am I misunderstanding? It sounds like it was much more.

**RB:** It was, yes. It was much more mutual. And whether he was gay or not, I don't know. And as I said, I did not have the time. We did not have time together to ask--to get a relationship. I have to have a relationship with a person to know that. Now that I look back at it, the way you mention it, it does sound that way. Yeah.

**AB:** Were you aware of other men around who did have special relationships with each other?

**RB:** No, I was not. No. I once went to a party that some of the Navy fellows gave. I used to chum with them so I was invited to the party. It was really held in a Quonset hut. And I am aware of the fact that there was one gay fellow there. At least, there was one fellow that they said was gay. And they all went to the beach, I guess, to be dealt with by this gay. Some went. There was one fellow who was hoping for me to go with him. And I would love to have gone with him, but I did not--and I regret it. I said to him, "When are you going home? When are you going to your tent?" And he says something about as long as I stay, he's [area], maybe a half a block. I went to the latrine and his buddy came in and said, "Hey, my buddy is looking for you to go to the beach with him." And that was quite an invitation that we don't always get. I was afraid to go so I didn't go.

There was a Shore Patrol--I think they call them "SP," Shore Patrol--in the Navy. Any Navy police is called Shore Patrol, Shore Patrol or Inland Patrol. Now they call it Shore Patrol. They used to ride in a jeep. I didn't know him, but I saw him many times. Once he picked me up and he said to me, "I wonder where I can get a good blow job." And that was an invitation. Which I didn't obviously accept, because of the possible implications. I think he might want to blackmail me or really condemn me. I must say that we lived with the Navy and the Navy had in its administration building, administration tent, it had--there were four posts driven in the. You might want make

notes on this. There were four posts driven-- I am a little teacher --there were four posts driven in the ground and chicken wire connected. And it was the queer prison. But prison was--I will never forget the word--Navy for cell or for whatever their prison word was--and they sure enough put in a fellow there for homosexual relations with others. And imagine what that did to everybody looking at the fellow who was there and there was a little pup tent there.

**JD:** Did you ever see anyone in there.

**RB:** Oh, yes. There were people there all the God-blessed time. Yes.

**JD:** What happened to them? Were they sent back home?

**RB:** I don't know what happened to them. What I think was that while there were stringent laws on the books-- or rules on the books, I think they went back to duty or they were shipped out someplace so the embarrassment would not be there. I am not sure. I don't really know.

**JD:** Is your sense that they were there for a short period of time?

**RB:** I, no, I think that two months and they were fed for the most part on what they called "piss and punk." Which means bread and water.

**JD:** Were they--was there just one person in there? Or?

**RB:** Yeah, one person at a time. Yes. And that's where they were.

**JD:** How did you feel the first time you saw it?

**RB:** Well, I mean it's was enough to--I spoke about the moth and the flame--and the flame came to be a flame thrower. I just didn't cotton to that kind of oppression at all. It made one--it was intimidating, to say the least. Yes.

**AB:** Did the guys ever talk about this?

**RB:** Oh, they laughed about it. They ridiculed. They probably themselves participated. But, you know, it's the same way as I talk in prison, as a professor from my Chicago University, for about 8-9 years. What I gathered was the same way as in the Navy--in a way I told you already--that the fellow who was serviced, as it were, (I use that term deliberately,) was the clean and straight fellow who was not--who was not guilty of anything. Supposedly. But the fellow who did the servicing, he was the "queer." He was the one that was the guilty party. So the fellows felt very clean. Those who were serviced. Of course, there were some attachments formed in that way too. But the nature of the attachment wasn't--the person who did the servicing had to accept a status where the other fellows laughed at him. And he was open, openly gay then, you see. Or openly acting as a gay, whether he was a gay or not. But if anybody else wanted him, the fellow

who had him would fight the guy. If anyone else wanted his services, he wouldn't go to the other fellow, he would stay. That happens in prisons too. Yeah. And in prison it's even more. The fellow is always protected against anything. Because if he is the gay person of a powerful fellow in prison then he's protected from any abuse. He, too, has special privileges that the other fellow can get for him. And they do, from certain guards and whatever. It's all totally corrupt. Honeycombed with corruption. Do you want to ask some more questions?

**AB:** Do any stuff that you want to ask, I mean about gay related sex?

**JD:** Did you ever hear of anybody getting discharged for being queer?

**RB:** After the war, I heard of one. I think they mentioned to me—this fellow mentioned to me--that he got a "blue discharge." Now I think that is a medical discharge--or Psychiatric discharge--and not necessarily one because-- one that was just simply gay. But I think he was put in the mental ward, psychiatric ward, for a brief time and then given this kind of discharge. I don't think he served any time or anything. Although there have been—I heard people serve time. The Navy had a rule that two men must not sit on the same bed at the same time.

**JD:** They did?

**RB:** Yes. At least I heard that rule on.

**JD:** That went on in the Army?

**RB:** What?

**JD:** That went on in the Army?

**RB:** Well, you mean sitting—or yes. Yes, yes. And that went on the in Navy, too, I am sure. But let's see, there is something else that I might want to relate to you. Oh, yes. Yes, yes. When I got to Australia, in Brisbane, I was in Brisbane, I got acquainted in my outfit with some, with two fellows and we never discussed gay life, but I believe that they were gay. They knew, we were enlisted men, they knew an officer, a second lieutenant and we all four or five of us got together and I remember I was delegated to—we were going to have a party. Not a party, but just to get together and enjoy our company, each other's company but not sexually—as far as I know, it wasn't.

It didn't turn out to be that way. And I just enjoyed the company, that's all. And so they designated me to get a hotel room where we could all be together. The fellow, the hotel manager, said, "And now no girls, no women. Don't bring up any women." I said, "Well, sir, I promise that we won't." I thought that was very interesting because I knew--I had a feeling--that the rest of them were as gay as I was. But they didn't. You hear a lot of such jokes. I think I told you that when I was being, just a night before surgery, the doctor came to me and said, "Now you won't be able to have anymore

children." But I wasn't. Some gay men are interested in having children. But I wasn't. I am 65 and I had never felt the possession in children- although I helped some children along the way, financially, and given some support and so forth.

**JD:** During your years in the Army did you keep in touch with your Communist Party friends?

**RB:** Yes, I think that the Communist Party had a policy that when you joined you left your party membership, so that there wouldn't be any trouble. You technically left it. Of course, you didn't leave your sympathies and your feelings. But when I went to St. Louis, I kept in touch with some people there that I had known before.

**AB:** When did you go to St. Louis?

**RB:** Well, Scott Field, Illinois, to study. That's not too far from St. Louis. It was very nice. I was able to get literature and in Washington State, in Seattle, too, I came across some people that.

**JD:** When you came back from overseas?

**RB:** No, just before I went overseas.

**JD:** You shipped out of Seattle?

**RB:** Yeah, out of Seattle. Yes. No, I didn't ship out of Seattle. San Francisco. No. Isn't there a field called Hamilton Field? In San Rafael? Now that's settled in my mind. That's where I was. I was in--I went to San Francisco just before shipping out. I cannot for the life of me remember the incident that I had, but I remember the incident, a sexual incident. But I can't remember it. And, you know, how we like to file these things, they happen to some of us. Not to all of us-- not to the young-- but to us older people. From another era. They happen so infrequently that we file them and we take them out every once in awhile when the season is arid. But you would not understand that. But I cannot, for the life of me, remember. But I know that something very wonderful happened.

Oh, yes, once we got up to Chicago and I went into a bar and there was only one soldier in the bar and he was the only one in the bar. And so we drank together and then I asked him, I didn't have a room to spend the night. I asked him if I could stay the night. Incidentally, during the war time, rooms were very hard to come by, so it was not uncommon to ask soldiers, fellow soldiers, your brother soldiers, if they had a room if they would team up with you. And that was of course a ruse to get the company and companionship of someone you might like. I remember in Seattle, there was a fellow in a restaurant eating, I think a Navy fellow, I am not sure, I think it was Navy. He was not the most desirable appearing fellow that I would have selected, but he was very nice. I asked him if he had a room for the night and it happened that I had gotten acquainted with some people that had an extra room and they were very patriotic and they always

gave it to a soldier. So I said to him, I do have a room and you are welcome to join me. And so he did join and he told me that he was married and had a child in Texas and he loved his wife very much and all that. But then, she wasn't there. So we loved each other. And then he, I remember at the conclusion of the experience, he said something which gave me to believe that he was gay, he said, "my but it's been a long, long time." I remember that. Yes.

One of my first experiences was in St. Louis. I didn't know what the word "cruising" meant, but we did it. At the soldiers' center, as you see now (if compared to my earlier life) I am coming out considerably. But I did in Jacksonville, too. I was making some friendships. But now I came out more and more. But then there would be a period in my life when I would retract too. I was very friendly with this fellow at this soldier place. Soldier Center. I don't know who proposed it, but he said—I think I asked him if I could spend the night there with him--or he asked me. I don't know which. He told me he had just been back to Tennessee to see his wife. He had just married and had gone back to see his wife. And we were in bed together and were sleeping together - hadn't gone to sleep yet, but we were in bed. I began to provoke him, I guess, by touching him somewhere, and he said, after fifteen or twenty minutes, he said, "Well, what do you want? After allowing me to do this for fifteen or twenty minutes. I was alarmed. I was afraid, too. I said nothing. He said, "Surely, you're not thinking because you have been stroking me all this time---." He was an alcoholic and he was telling me his problems of alcoholism. And, of course, he said, "I can't. I'd like to do something but I can't. I am loyal to my wife."

And I was about to tell him that the wife wasn't present. But I didn't mean to disrespect the affair that he had with his wife, the relations that he had with his wife. So at first he asked me to leave. It was about 3 o'clock at night. I would have left--I was about to put on my trousers. And he said, "Well, you can stay. But you will sleep and your head will be here and my head will be here and [we will] sleep at different ends of the bed." And we did. But then he began equate what he called my malady—he didn't use the word "malady"--with his. But he said, "I understand your position because I have a unquenchable desire also. And it's for alcohol. You have one for sex. Which can't be quenched easily."

So he understood that, although I wouldn't equate the two at all. But he did. In some respects I [would] equate it because both were looked down upon in that respect. I guess that's about all that I can remember right now or want to tell.

**JD:** Do you know what you were doing on VJ day that?

**RB:** Yes. VJ day?

**JD:** Whichever one.

**RB:** I remember Hiroshima day. I think, well, VE day came first. I don't remember what I was doing then. I was still in the army but I don't remember. You see, in Europe,

the allies had closed in on Germany. It was just a matter of days. And so it was anticlimactic when the climax did come. I wasn't a sudden surprise. Like the Hiroshima day. That weapon was kept secret, as we all know. And then suddenly released. And I remember we, somehow, we got up early. I got up at about 4:30 or 5:00 and there were fellows walking the beach and talking about it. They heard it over the radio as to what had happened.

**AB:** You were still in the Pacific?

**RB:** Yeah. We were still in the South Pacific. And they had heard what had happened, that this was a bomb that bombed one city and vaporized the whole city at one time. And that was something new for us. It was new for civilization- for all the world, as we all know. And so that was before Nagasaki day. I think a couple of days later that Nagasaki got it. So then they surrendered. But that was very awesome. And has been awesome ever since. Yeah.

**JD:** Were you aware of the--how long after the war did you stay in the South Pacific?

**RB:** After the war? Oh, no, after Hiroshima day and Nagasaki I think they began to say that those of us who had been in the army for the longest time, longer than the others, than some of the younger, the ones who didn't have as much time, we could go. So they processed us out. I think I was processed out in December 1945 and I don't know when VJ Day came, but very shortly after, it came. But we were sent to a certain camp in New Caledonia and then from there we took a ship back, although coming in, we took an airplane in. And I was frightened of airplanes. And so we boarded this airplane coming in and the propellers started to run and I said, "Gee, there should be- the sensation should be--like an elevator going a hundred miles an hours, going up in the air." That's how I thought. Don't you see them take off? So after about a half an hour, they were revving up, and I said to a crew member, "When are we going to take off?" And he said, "We've been in the air for half an hour." And I said, well, "What happened to the lift up? I didn't get that." And he said, well, "There is no real lift up." So after of that, I wasn't afraid. And that was very wonderful.

But, coming back, we were all on the ship. Of course, we weren't attacked at all. There was no---peace was at hand. But it was--I didn't know that there were not only one cellar down below--but five cellars down below. And so they had a machine there that cleaned the floor. The floor was linoleum. We had strong linoleum and they'd clean that and there would be dust from that and you could smell that. I did sleep outside on the deck. That was very, very nice.

[End of tape 3, side 2]

**Tape 4, side 1: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**RB:** I must say that while I was. He tried telling us once while I was in the service still--from one island to another by means of a ship, a battleship. No, not a battle ship, it

formerly had been a cruise ship from Hawaii to San Francisco. Cruises were. And many of us slept on top of the deck because of the fresh air and so forth. And I remember I slept very near--in fact, next to--under the same blanket as, one of the sailors. And of course something happened then. At my instigation. And then he picked up his ball and bat and left.

**AB:** In the middle of the night?

**RB:** He said that once he did that he couldn't sleep well, so. But nothing occurred on the trip back, because I didn't want to take the possibility of ruining my outgo.

**AB:** After the your discharge, where did you go to live? And what kind of...?

**RB:** Well, I'd like to mention just a few things before discharge, if you don't mind. With us were black and white troops. And when we got to Texas, the black soldiers were segregated--mind you, this was segregation and another troop train, the same troop train but another car, a white officer came to us and said, well, "Now you don't have to put up the n-i-g-g-e-r-s any more. We're going to be like white folks." We went segregated all the way back to Mississippi. When we got out it was a ceremony. It was a very beautiful, wonderful, handsome officer who with the ritual leader of ceremony. And I remember when he gave us our discharge he said, "Good fortune," to each one of us. Not 'good luck' but 'good fortune.' I remember that. That was very beautiful. That was the last discharge in the service. I am sorry for the humor and the pun. I think that that's appropriate. Well, without humor and without pun life would be an arid desert and we need to smile and laugh. If there is oppression, and there is, still is, we also had to have some funnies in life. And so, you have to excuse my efforts. Shall we take a break now?

[tape stopped]

**RB:** I am going to tell now, post-war life. And I would like to divide it into some categories just for convenience. One is going back to Alabama and living there. And also then going back to the University of Wisconsin. If you remember--in 1933 and '34--I attended my freshman year. And now I'm ready to go back under the GI Bill. In a different person, incidentally, with some things resolved through accession in the service, as you'll note.

[tape stopped]

**AB:** Any further danger with...?

**RB:** All right. I am going to be fully human, thank you. Going back to the University of Wisconsin--and then when I graduated and got my Bachelor of Arts--then I went to live in Birmingham, Alabama, the biggest city in Alabama, one of the biggest cities in the South. Where I wrote for radical papers, including Communist *Daily Worker*. And [for the] black press and the radical press and labor press generally. And then when the Korean War came in June of 1950--yeah, '50. There were efforts made. The Cold War



had begun. Even in the late '40s, the Cold War had begun. And efforts were being made to arrest Communist leaders. The Smith Act trials where people were arrested because of their thoughts. At least that is what many of us felt. Not for any possible revolutionary activities. And then I went, I left. (I'll fill all of this in.) I left Alabama and went to New York as a sort of a refugee because they were about to arrest me also. I think I was two steps ahead of them, as it were, in their rounding up radicals. I went to New York where an older radical couple had adopted me--well, not legally. I will use the word "adopt" through my interview, but I was never legally adopted by anyone. But they considered themselves as my father and mother. And I lived with them as well as with other Southern refugees who crowded in their 3 or 4 room small apartment. We slept on chairs and so forth. And then I decided, along with my comrades, that I would move back South. And I moved to North Carolina. And that's where I spent the Cold War. And I'll tell you about that too. But first, perhaps, we'll start with going back to Alabama.

I went back to Alabama and I worked on one of the Alabama daily papers. Incidentally, if I do not mention cities or persons, do not necessarily prompt me because I do so deliberately. I feel uncomfortable. One of the cases I worked for--worked on, rather, one of the assignments that I had was covering a civil rights trial. It happened that a black woman was a domestic servant in a white house in rural Alabama, one of the rural Alabama areas. And she was accused of stealing some jewels of her employers. And her employers, instead of taking her to the sheriff and having her arrested, they beat her. And tried to exact a confession that she had took them. She felt--and rightly so--that she should not have been beaten but she should have been arrested and have legal process take place then. And so she brought a civil rights suit against her employer. And it was a federal trial. And a federal jury. And everything seemed to be going along all right except that her lawyer brought in a black man, who no doubt they paid, and paid well, and he said, "If he knew the person"--the one who brought up the suit--but then "every man in the neighborhood knew her." And she was the wife of a minister. But what he implied, and he said outright, [was] that she was sexually with everyone. And so--once so discredited--well, she lost the case.

There was also at that time a strike of laundry workers. And it seems that, I was just a cub reporter and didn't know fully how to--didn't know certain court matters and court legalese--and so I would go to court to find out what happened. And sometimes I did not understand fully the court language. But I still didn't know what was involved except I think what was involved was that the employers of the laundry folk (most of the laundry folk were black) and the employers claimed that the pickets had committed violence against the laundries. And so they wanted them taken to court and jailed and sentenced. And there was a document to that effect. Which I did not understand and I was accused by my paper of not covering that. And the editor hustled himself to the court and got the material and wrote it down and wrote up the story. But they ascribed my--being a cub reporter--to the fact that I didn't get it. But that was the reason that I didn't get it. And not to any sympathy I had--may have had--to the strikers.

In those days, I think I might have mentioned--yes, I did mention--that I was working on the "right to vote" campaign and how you had to pay \$2.00 upon reaching the

right to vote age. And if you didn't pay the \$2.00 the first time that you reached the age, you had to pay \$4.00 the next election and \$6.00 the next until a maximum of something like \$36.00 to \$40.00 and many people, both black and white, could not afford the \$2.00 to start with. And yet quite a notable number of black people were paying up their \$36.00 and registering. Even then, they were making it very difficult for blacks to register. I went to register and as a white person all I had to do was sign my name and tell my address. But black people were queried and questioned. They had to--on the books about it--I think that everyone was liable to be asked to interpret the Alabama Constitution and the US Constitution. And then some extraneous questions, like how many bubbles in a bar of soap. Well, it would depend largely on the bar, wouldn't it? And how much water was used and all that. And, of course, it had great relevance to political issues. You can see that is obvious. Or how many gallons of water ran down the Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico after a good rain.

**AB:** They asked these questions?

**RB:** Yes. And one educated black, they asked him to translate French, and he did. And German, and he did, and Latin, and he did. And then they brought forth some Chinese and he said, "Yes, I can translate that too," and, "it says here in Chinese that you do not want blacks to vote." Of course, he wasn't able to translate Chinese.

**AB:** Did you worry for your job, the safety of your job, as you were being, as a white person, on right to vote stuff in Alabama? Did you have to keep that secret?

**RB:** Well, it was semi-secret. Radical work was semi-secret, yes. Yes, you did. You did by all means, because in 1948, the Henry Wallace Progressive Party came up and that was, many Communists were in that. And it was a left leaning platform and it called strenuously for an end to segregation. And Henry Wallace would go around campaigning and he would not talk to an audience that was segregated. That is, blacks had to sit in one place and whites in another. Actually, I remember he came to Birmingham, and I was in his--in the motorcade as a member of the Alabama Progressive Party of which I was very proud. I had by this time gone to the University of Wisconsin, but I was back home for holidays or whatever. I had served on an Alabama daily paper and so the Alabama daily paper, a very straight press, knew me. And they said to me as they saw me in the motorcade, they said, "What paper are you covering this for?" And I wanted them to know that all of the people in the motorcade were not news reporters, that there were some Alabamans, and quite a number, who followed the party. The Progressive Party. And so I proudly said, "I am a member of the Progressive Party." After that, I couldn't get my job. When I came out of school, I wanted to get a job back again. I had worked there previously before going to school. Now that I through with school, I thought maybe I would like the job back. I did not get it back. And when you did political/radical work in Alabama, you met in people's homes and small numbers and sometimes you even met in roving cars and there might about six of you together, black and white, in a car. But even that was dangerous because black and white were not supposed to be together.

**AB:** During those years as after the war when you were in Alabama, and again when you came back to Birmingham, when you were in the Party, did you join the Party right away after you got out of the war?

**RB:** Yes, I did.

**AB:** And did the other people that you worked with on political work, know that you were a reporter?

**RB:** Some of them did and some of them did not. Most of them did.

**AB:** Most of them did?

**RB:** Yes, and some of them were party members too.

**AB:** But the non-party members, how did they, black or white, how did they feel about working with a Communist Party members during the Cold War years?

**RB:** Well, the Cold War had not settled in yet. This was in '46, 7, 8. After '49, I don't know. It was difficult. It was, the black members, the black friends did not pull away from as much as did white friends pull away from you. They were fearful. As a matter of fact, the authorities during the McCarthy period equated friends, white and black friendship as a Communist. And that was the substance of the HUAC hearings that we had. They were hauled in because we had friends who were blacks.

**AB:** In the South?

**RB:** In the South, yes.

**JD:** Can you talk about those hearings, now?

**RB:** Well, that's later, that was 1956 and then later in 1958. And we will speak of them later. But in 1950, well, I went to the Progressive Party convention in 1948 and that was a rousing--if our spirit and our cheers would have won the election, it would have been won. We hollered ourselves hoarse cheering the candidates. I remember one black woman was the keynote speaker and it was almost never that a black woman was a keynote speaker in anything. She was to become the wife of Dr. W. E. B. Dubois, Shirley Green. Who has written a number of biographical works and black history. And Dr. Dubois and she went to Guinea to become editors of the Africa encyclopedia, the Encyclopedia Africana. And later, he died and she was she was kicked out of the country when there was a revolution in Guinea. But in 1950 I worked in Birmingham and it was very, very dangerous. The Klan was there, blacks were seeking, blacks were paying \$40.00 to \$46.00 (whatever the maximum was) to gain the right to vote. And many were, they were letting some in. Because there was pressure. Not very many, but more than had been. When, I am trying to recall, yes, so when I moved to Birmingham. I noticed that blacks had moved into so-called white neighborhoods. They were demanding...

**AB:** What year was this?

**RB:** 1950.

**AB:** OK

**RB:** Beginning of 1950. And they were moving, and those homes that they bought, they were bombed by the Klan. And the Communist Party, the Alabama Communist Party leader lived in Alabama at the time. And his home was--had a cross burned. Here I was writing with an open byline for a Communist press and I too was subject. As a matter of fact, one of my comrades said to me, "You know miners that go down in the mines that took a chance, they take a chance of their lives of ever coming up again. Each day they go down. And so you too. he said about me and my writing with my byline. I don't think I would easily do something like that today, but then I was more open in regards to wanting to do it.

**JD:** Was this at the *Daily Worker* or another paper?

**RB:** With the *Daily Worker*--that I also worked for. And especially they had, well, no it was for the *Daily Worker*'s weekend edition which was called the *Worker*. It had a Southern Edition. So I covered a great deal. As a matter of fact, I traveled to Atlanta, to cover material there and I traveled to New Orleans. And I was greatly disappointed when friends and comrades took me to expensive places to eat. To eating places in New Orleans. When you saw a desert glowing, a blue glow now the lights are out and you see some like Magdalene, it was really very beautiful. But I was the hardcore radical. We had a revolution to make! We weren't going to have the bourgeois Rockefeller Oysters to eat. So I didn't like their spending the money for that. But while I was there, we went to a small community, all French speaking whites and blacks, but French speaking. Called Uplissis, (sp?) and there, a black fellow by the name of Honeycutt was being tried and we had a committee to save his life. He was accused of rape and in the South, almost no white man had ever been accused of rape, but black men had. And they would get the death penalty if they were convicted. And, of course, an all-white jury that was conviction there because every white, especially racist white, would believe that all black men, all they thought about was thinking about how they could have sexual relations, voluntary or forced, with a white woman. That's all they were thinking about, so it was said. And so it was the death penalty was given to him. But I went up there and I covered the story. It was white young lady comrade who was with us, and we were very provoked at her because she would go up to the prisoner table and speak to him and that incensed the white people of the community and we were not safe there. We were not safe just being there because we were there with the lawyer of this fellow. They didn't like that at all. They wanted him out. They wanted him. They all believed he did commit rape. And they wanted him to get his just due in their estimation.

**JD:** I want to sort of step back and ask, why did you want a Communist Party during these years? Why did you think that your ideals or what you wanted, the way you wanted

the world to live--that the Communist Party was the organization that you should belong to? Instead of just working on the right to vote or whatever? Why the Party?

**RB:** Well, I believed first of all for a variety of reasons. I believed, I don't believe it so now, I should say, I believed that the Communist Party which was part of the Communist International of the Soviet Union and other Communist Parties, the Communist Party of China and other parties, represented the new wave of society. Of world civilization. And I wanted to be part of that. And you must remember that at that time the Communist Party was the Communist Party of the '30s that helped to organize the CIO, helped to organize a union for unemployed and Worker's Alliance and militantly fought for relief was in my estimation the only party, the only radical party and only political party that ever took up the issue of the rights for blacks. And we had then, and as you know now, we have very heavy segregation and racism. And they confronted it, head on. With their membership, among the white membership. They preached and continuingly against white chauvinism--that is, racism among the members--and also for black history and black rights. And that impressed the hell out of me. Because so much around me was not that. The conventional parties and the other radical parties were not--had no pity. The conventional parties were hypocrisies. And the others, the Socialist Party and the liberal parties were, had no effect, they were not effective, it seems to me.

They made some pronouncements, but that was all that they did. And so I believed that. And, of course, later I was to disbelieve some of that. But, at that time, I did believe that that was the connection I wanted. And to give it the utmost support. And blacks did not have the right to vote, blacks had to, you must remember this was before the '60s, blacks were serfs in and sharecroppers, blacks were in a system of peonage, that was p-e-o-n-a-g-e, that was when they worked on a farm for a white employer and he would not allow them to go off the farm to get anywhere else. They were required to be on that, and he had guards to see that they didn't go off. And then he also had the law to see that they didn't go off. He kept the books between him and them. They had to, they got their food from him, and so he knocked down more than he was supposed to so he kept them in debt and as long as they were in debt to him. They were not legally allowed, by law, to move off. And if they tried, the sheriff would come and make them stay. But even, in some places, it was even more blatant than that. And they would have guards along with the sheriff. And sometimes the employer would be the sheriff. And then there was the Klan, and I wanted to oppose that and the only group that I saw opposing it was the Communist Party. Of course, now, when you ask a question like that, you ask it in 1982. And you wonder "What in the hell does anyone want to join with an outfit like the Communist Party?"

**AB:** Actually, I wasn't asking because I wanted to know the answer, but because I wanted to know why. For different reasons.

**RB:** Yes, OK. That's why. My main motivation was the lack rights for many people in our country.

**JD:** What was the party roll in Alabama or in the South in those days?

**RB:** I really don't know that. That was not a figure that was often given. So I really don't know. But that would not have mattered to me if there had even been three. So I really don't know how many there were.

**JD:** Can you define a little more the--not just the kind of work you were doing with political work--but the kind effect that you were starting to get in the South? Both in the work of the racial stuff, but also the anti-Communist stuff.

**RB:** There was a very active Ku Klux Klan in the South. In the South, period. And Birmingham, especially. You know the South. To say the obvious, the South was the South of slavery past. But many vestiges of the slave system, the idea still remained in the feudal sense. The white employers were still boss men, they called them "boss." They were absolute masters. Even to beat some people in rural areas. Beat blacks in rural areas. And they were connected with the law in both the cities and in the country. Whites and blacks did not fraternize socially. At all. There were places on the back of the bus for blacks and the front of the bus for whites. Separate schools, drinking fountains, churches, all aspects of life were segregated. There wasn't one aspect of life that was not segregated to keep people divided. We felt that keeping people divided meant that then they could not unite and effectively work against the conservatives. Evidences of racism, the Klan, of course. They bombed homes. They were to bomb later--and you know, I think, the story where they bombed a church where there was a Sunday school class going and three or four of the little black girls were bombed/killed. They would kidnap people and beat them up.

They kept the propaganda going that blacks are rapists, that blacks steal, that blacks kill, that blacks are the only ones into crime and that blacks don't have true marriages, that they live very loosely. All of this, they kept going. And, of course, there are always the black jokes at the white people's parties. Always. So there was no difference between the tuxedo set, as far as I was concerned, with the white shirt and tuxedo, ties and all, and the so-called red necks. There were no differences at all. And the Jews who lived in the South fell right in with that. Or the Greeks or any so-called minority, white minorities. And yet to save their hides, they joined the grand racist chorus. And there were often fights between blacks and whites. Active fights. I remember a fight at a supermarket that was not in a mixed neighborhood but on the border of a neighborhood. White working class. A black and white man, drunk one Saturday night, started up on Saturday nights--made a sexual reference to a black woman, a young black woman--and she took cans of food from her shopping bag and threw it at him. That was a general fight. We were afraid to go outside for awhile. But those fights, these riots, could take place any time. And I must remember that I went to a black church protest meeting. I was the only white there. It had never occurred to me that anyone in the black community would be offensive. And they weren't offensive to whites who joined in the protest. I remember, also, that this was later by Paul Robeson--but this was later. He came to North Carolina, and sang at a black church.

**JD:** Were you ever attacked for your opinions?

**RB:** The nearest that I was physically attacked, was--I was very fortunate--because I was in the lion's den, but then the Lord protected Daniel, I understand. Why not everyman, there's a song that goes like that. And Paul Robeson sang it. He was a hero of mine. I mean, he is a hero of mine. Boy, the crap he took. I'll tell you more about that though.

**[End of tape 4, side 1]**

**Tape 4, side 2: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**RB:** I was in Birmingham for a year. In 1950, in June, the Korean War began. I think I was there a year and I left in June 1950. So I must have been there in June '49. That's what happened. I knew I was there for a year. When the Korean War came around, that was the occasion for arresting people for just being radical. We were fighting Communists overseas, are we not? Well, what are the one's doing here? In open freedom. But I had left by that time. I had left to do some research, historical research in Alabama. I was in the archives--it's a huge building--and you've heard of Tallulah Bankhead? And she came from Alabama. And her aunt, a very conservative, old white matron, presided over the archives. Her husband had been a historian, who was dead, she was Marie Bankhead Owens, her husband's name. And her husband had put out a direct, a dictionary, a directory dictionary of Alabama men and women. But mostly men, famous. But those who opposed the secession and favored continuance with the Union, they were not put in there. And those who were abolitionists were not put in there. What?

**JD:** Great.

**RB:** Someone just recently wrote me from Illinois that they wanted to do a full biography, but a dictionary. I might get to work on that.

**AB:** Is this in the state archives in Illinois?

**RB:** Yes. Of course, it was published, the book, the directory was published, so everyone had a copy of it. Not only the state archives, but of course the archives did. And he was head of the archives but he died and now Marie Bankhead Owen was head. And I remember a reporter from a paper I hadn't even worked on. Came up to me and said, "We saw your byline in Communist papers and we wonder what you think about the war?" and he wanted a comment. I knew what they were all about. I knew it was a prelude to my arrest. So I said, "I have no comment." And you might very well remember that in the event that you get into a very tight situation and they want some comment from you and you similarly would not want to answer. Or maybe you will want to answer something. And I got on a city bus to go someplace. And he got on the bus too. And this was the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and just previous to that I had spoken in a church. I spoke in a church in Montgomery that Dr. Martin Luther King took over. Huh? Later. He took over in '54 or so. But this was 1950. I got up. I was invited to speak. This is a college church. The professors from the Alabama State College for Negroes, non-

accredited at the time. Now it's accredited and it's called the Alabama State University. My, how we have come up. And the more things change, the more they stay the same. But at that time, carpet down the aisle and very middle class and no shouting. They had no shouting in church. Anyway, I spoke there. And I got up on the pulpit, the choir had just stopped singing and I got up to say the sermon of the day.

I quoted from Jeremiah. And I said, "I am Jewish and therefore I am going to quote from the Old Testament." I said, "The Lord had spoken to Jeremiah and told him to tell the children of Israel to give up their slaves. And if you give up your slaves, I will give you the fruit in your fields and rain in the season and you will prosper. All good things. But the children of Israel did release their slaves but then in a year or so they called them back. And made them be slaves again. So the Lord didn't like this and he spoke to Jeremiah again and He said, "Speak to the children of Israel saying: Thus sayest the Lord, you have made a compact with the Lord to give up your slaves and you have not given them liberty and for that reason I will give you the liberty of famine and fire and the sword and those that seek your lives will come and pluck your eyes out and your land will be like a desert. And the birds in the heavens will come and eat your bodies. And I spoke that in the church in Alabama, in Montgomery. In the state of segregation. And my people did not want me to speak there, did not want me to mess around with any of that.

**AB:** You say your people?

**RB:** My father and mother, my parents. No, not my fellow radicals. As a matter of fact, my fellow radicals approved very, very much. But mind you, I did not quote Karl Marx or any other Marx, but what my Rabbi had taught me. I was able to navigate within religious life like that because I did keep some aspects of the religious faith in the spiritual sense. Using it for progress--for the sight of progress. But then the next day I learned that my name had been placed on a list of the Klan. In the meantime, and I was to have to leave very suddenly--abruptly, as I say. In the meantime, my apartment, some Communist friends of mine took my apartment--that is, I let them use it. And the Chief of Police came up there. He was a Klansman at night. We said that there were policemen in view in the daytime and white Klansmen at night in white sheets. But since I was gone they couldn't find me. I was just ahead. Then I came to my father's and mother's house and word got around that I should leave very soon. I did and I told my father and mother that I am going to have to leave very soon because it is getting rather hot. And they understood what that was. They did not at all sympathize with me. They were on the other side. As a matter of fact, I mentioned my kinfolk, but one of them was very near the Klan in ideology. It appeared sure that he had a lot of friends within that realm.

And my father would come to me one time before this and said, "Is it possible for a Jew to be a member of the Klan?" And I said, "No." I said, "I have a book that exposes the Klan and tells how anti-Jewish they are with specific incidents." He said, well, "So-an-so," a certain person in the family, "ought to read that book." I said, well, "They had that book. I gave that to them." Then I knew who it was. And that white



person came to drive me to safety--or was he interested in getting shut of me too? There was a very good opportunity. Well, at any case, his motive and my motive were different, so I abruptly, strangely enough, I had pressed clothes and had gotten ready, gotten my clothes cleaned. I didn't know that I was going to make a trip. I went up to New York. They took me to another city. You've heard of Auburn University in Auburn? I took a bus trip from there to--but I said "Good-bye." I remember one sister as we passed her house and she was behind a screen door and she just said good-bye to me through the screen.

**AB:** Did she realize you really left the state in a hurry?

**RB:** Yes, I had to leave the state in a hurry.

**AB:** And this was in 1950?

**RB:** 1950, July. July 4<sup>th</sup>, please. The day that we celebrate for our liberty.

**JD:** Was this the first time that you had addressed an all black audience in church?

**RB:** No, it was--I think it was my second time that I had done that. But I had spoken to blacks before and to whites too.

**JD:** Did you receive publicity?

**RB:** No, I did not say that. I did not receive any publicity as far as I know. Then, when I left, I received a lot of publicity which I have not seen to this day, but someday I am going to look it up. I went to New York and spent a few months there recuperating and commiserating with fellow other Southern radicals.

**JD:** Can you tell me a little about that? Were there lots of Southern whites who were either CP members or just anti-racist people who had to leave the South in a hurry?

**RB:** I think I am going to have to assume that those who came up were CP people. They knew where to go. They knew what houses where people would be friendly to them and would take them in. And they had connections with some of the people who lived in New York. Specifically, that they knew, families, that would take them in. And so I spent and I got my baptism in going to Union Square and listening to the comments and debates, in those days they even fought physically. It was a very happy day for me when I could afford to get a coconut Good Humor lollipop. And enjoy that.

**JD:** That's my favorite.

**RB:** Really, mine too. There was a--when I had gone to the University of Wisconsin, I met a young couple from New York City and, lo and behold, their mother was a CP and I got to know her and she used to sell the *Daily Worker* on the corner near the Automat. And someone had taken toilet tissue and rolled it all around her and she said "they don't

know what good doctrine is." And she told me about the Automat and she said that there was a woman who went around and lived in public buildings in the lobbies and she carried her things in shopping bags and she was very poor and hungry and she went to the Automat to eat the scraps that people left there. And there was a very well-to-do (or fairly well-to-do) woman who had come in there and who wanted to commit suicide and who did commit suicide by putting poison in her food and she left a portion of the food on the table and this poor woman came in to eat. And since then I have written a story of that adding some fiction to it too. And that's the way that authors write, though, and I have called it, there is a song that radicals used to sing, the radicals don't sing it any more, the "International." "Arouse your prisoners of starvation, arouse your retched of the earth." And so I called it, the short story, "Prisoners of Starvation and the Retched of the Earth." But then the time came when I made up my mind that I wanted to go back South and party officials whom I met said, "Yes, that would be a very good idea." And so I went to North Carolina.

**AB:** How long were you in New York?

**RB:** Just for about two months, at most. At most two months. Too hot, humid months! About seven living in a small area, even smaller than this room, sleeping together. Oh, it was pretty hard, and the bathroom was always, people were, the bathroom had a musty smell to it. Like a towel that had been used again and again. It was wasn't very heathy.

**JD:** Before you go on to your moving to North Carolina, so far in these years we have talked mostly about your political work in the South. Can you tell us something about your being gay in those years?

**RB:** Well....

**JD:** Because before, when we were talking about the war, you said that you became much more gay later on.

**RB:** Well--and then I retracted too. Because I knew the difficulty of it. The Army, as authoritarian as it was and with as many rules as it had and as many penalties as there were, it seemed more open and there was seemingly more leeway for action in spite of all that. I was dedicated to work in the party in the South and I knew that if I messed around with promiscuity that that would hurt party work.

**JD:** In what way? Because of being caught by the police or...?

**RB:** Because that would have been one more avenue that the FBI would know about and be able to blackmail you with. As a matter of fact, for that, this brings up a subject I will now speak about.

The Communist Party, from what I was told--now you might get some Communist Party members who would differ from me--but what I was told was that the Communist Party if they knew that you were gay they would not allow you to be a

member. Especially during this period because then you became more vulnerable and you would be in a position to tell the authorities the names of party members because they would be able to come to you and say "We know you are gay and we are going to expose you if you do not ...." Huh? Therefore, they did not want that situation to occur. I understand that today that gay people say, well, "Go ahead. Tell everybody." And that's good. That's good. But it wasn't possible then because you didn't have the support then.

**JD:** Was this something that people explicitly talked about--or did you just figure out that the party didn't want it?

**RB:** Oh, no. We were told that. As a matter of fact, I was about to say more. Now the party had very few people in the South. As a matter of fact, the Korean War and the arrests--the arrests in the party in the South--of the party leaders--broke the party considerably. Of course, it was almost broken altogether. People--the leaders would be arrested and then, of course, the rank and file would become frightened and just leave and wouldn't do any action. Some of them didn't, some of them, but many of them did. But we were so few in the South, so few party members in the South, so few radicals, unaffiliated period in the South, that the party had a rule that said that if you're gay and worked in the South you could still belong to the party--but you must not practice your gay life.

**JD:** Who told you this?

**RB:** Well, the party leaders. I will not mention the names.

**AB:** In New York?

**RB:** No, this was in the South. But the word came from New York also.

**JD:** What was the occasion of them talking to you about this?

**RB:** Well, they didn't talk to me about it--talk to me specifically. But talked to everybody about it. As a matter of fact, everybody was told that. So I wasn't told that alone.

**JD:** Were you specifically--aside from what you were hearing within the party--were you specifically aware from reading newspapers or anything that the government in fact was going after homosexuals during these years?

**RB:** Yes. I don't remember specifically, but I do know that they were. Yes. I'll tell you. When I attended the University of Wisconsin--in the middle, from '47 to '49, during that time in Madison--police authorities, it was reported in the paper, it wasn't a large article but it was medium article on page 3, 4 or 5. I don't know more specifically. But the police had raided, they used the word "raided," a den, d-c-n, a gay den, a homosexual den and they found pillows on the floor. They found incense. They found

low lights and they arrested these folks that were part of that. And unnatural sex taking place. I remember that. And there were strict laws, at least locally. I don't know about federally. But locally concerning homosexuals. I don't remember. It's at the bottom of my consciousness. But during the McCarthy period there were people who worked for various federal bureaus and who were found to be homosexual and they were dismissed as such, as homosexuals. I remember reading some things like that.

**JD:** I am going to ask you something real specific now. One of the special values of doing oral histories is that sometimes people remember something specific and then we can go and check other evidence. Can you remember when, around when this happened, when you were in Wisconsin?

**RB:** Between 1947 and 1949, that's the best I'd say.

**JD:** And it was in a Madison paper newspaper?

**RB:** Yeah, it was in a Madison newspaper.

**AB:** That's where the arrests/raid, occurred?

**RB:** Yeah, it was the City of Madison. It was the University of Wisconsin as a matter of fact. But I do say, if you did research in newspapers, you would find such. And you have to take newspapers for a year and go through them. It's a tedious task and you must not--when you do the research--get tangled up with other news that you like.

**AB:** I know. (unintelligible)

**RB:** Sometimes newspapers are the best sources.

**JD:** Does this mean that throughout the post-war years, you, except for your feelings, you basically stopped acting on your gay involvement?

**RB:** For the most part. Not altogether. But very little, and which I am not willing to discuss right at this time. But very little. Because I was very aware, painfully aware, of the possibilities involved. The consequences involved for the movement.

**JD:** Did you ever discuss it with other people in the party, who thought it was hard or...?

**RB:** No, I did not. I knew it was hard but I did not. And that is, I might say, is the hell of it. That is the hell of it is that we do not even today have the chance to discuss these matters with almost anyone. We are all islands and we don't touch other people. I mean necessarily physically, but verbally, mentally, spiritually. We don't touch them almost at all. Sometimes, if you can bounce your ideas off to someone and see how it sounds--then you know you are not a hermit in life and that you are not--what you entertain in your mind--you want to see how it sounds to others. Are others thinking this too, you know?

I remember in the '70s I met a young fellow who was gay and he said when he became gay, when he felt he was gay he thought he was the only person ever in the whole world ever to be gay, until he found out obviously differently. But sometimes we feel that way, because we don't have that connection which we should have. I hope that other people reading this or seeing some of this will do something about it. I have found that even in the 1970s, there was not. I don't want to become diverted concerning that, but maybe I'll say something about that too now. I have found it most difficult to become just simply friends with fellow gays because you always have the feeling that they are male gays--that they are--that you are after them because you want sex with them. And you may or may not. You may just want someone to have ideas with. To compare. After all, we're all oppressed in the horrible cauldron. How about talking about it? And yet, it isn't so. You don't always have that.

**AB:** During that time, did you feel that this was unjust? Or did you just feel that this is the way it is?

**RB:** I felt that this was the way it is. Actually, your questions throughout have--some of them, have been very pointed in regards this very point--this very issue. And even when the gay rights movement began in the early '70s, I felt--and I felt in the 1950s--and I felt in the '70s too--in the early '70s when the gay rights began, I felt that the gay rights issues were not the vital ones. They were not the important ones. Segregation, unemployment, the issue of rights of women, civil liberties--these were the rights that were very important. And that gay rights were "Let us gain these more important issues," so I said to myself. And I saw my gay brothers getting up, rising up angry. Sometimes, they would leave a meeting because gay rights were not even discussed, properly or at all. I was asked whether it bothered me that I was gay and that gays were oppressed at this time. I did think it was wrong, but I thought the other issues like segregation and joblessness and the FBI going to universities and looking at term papers and theses and checking out students and the lack of rights generally were the important issues to work on--and so therefore this was put in the background, way in the background. Not on the back burner, but farther than that.

**JD:** OK, I do want get back to that but I just wanted to stay here just one more minute.

**RB:** All right, sure.

**JD:** Obviously, at some time during the '70s you changed your mind.

**RB:** Yes, I did.

**JD:** Could you just--rather than loose this train of thought--tell what made you change your mind?

**RB:** All right. I began to see around me many people who were coming out. I didn't read the gay press. I knew of it. I once in a great while saw it. Or anything written by gays as gay. Gay literature. But I happened, as I say, I speak to many people and I

become friends with them whether they are gay or not--and I talked to a young fellow on the platform, on the "L" platform in Chicago. And we got to be great friends. He and his friend. And I didn't know that he was gay at all. I really did not know. One time he invited me over to his house and he had a very nice house. I looked in his bedroom and there was a picture of a fellow, the fellow that he met every morning to go to work. He was an Asian fellow. That is, his lover was an Asian fellow. And then I got to know that he was gay. I told him that I was gay, too. I didn't come out and say that, I said wasn't Anita Bryant terrible, and you know how you can work into that. And then, he was Catholic and he belonged to Dignity. I would never catch myself going into a public gay place at all. One time he was reading a book that a priest had written on gay life. And greatly in support of gay life. A Roman Catholic priest, a priest who is a professor at Loyola University. That made such a big impression on me. It didn't have the imperator on it at all, I noticed that. He advocated gays living together and having relationships. He was opposed to the stand, the one night stand relationships. But he said we could have stable relationships. And he was very strong advocate. Well, anyway, I called him, I was so struck by the book.

**JD:** You called the priest?

**RB:** Yes, I called the priest. And he said, "Why don't you come and meet your gay brothers and sisters at Dignity?" You know Dignity?

**JD:** Ah-huh

**RB:** And so I said to myself I will. And I was told that he was the priest there. And I thought maybe I'd meet him. It's outstanding. All my life I was searching for, *Another Kind of Love*, is the name of the book. I might send you a copy. I'll try. It's a very beautiful book. I had never seen such by a priest. They are always on the other side of the fence. But when I came there, I found him to be very reticent, very shy and not very willing to talk at all. And so, that was a big disappointment. But, still, I joined. I didn't join it immediately, Dignity. As a matter of fact, they didn't come out and ask you to join. I was surprised. The Communist Party had asked you to join. Come on! Hey, come on. But Dignity didn't give a good god damn whether you were there or not. And that proved later to be my downfall in Dignity. I had tried desperately to make friends in Dignity. First of all, some of them said, "That man is Jewish." And they said, "What is a Jew doing here? Why are you here?" And, of course, the fact is that Christ was a Jew.

**JD:** Did you tell them that?

**RB:** Yes, I did. And then, I didn't know about communion. I wanted to take communion. The one very beautiful brother said to me, here we're bypassing all kinds of time. One beautiful brother said to me (he was giving out the service program) he said to me, "Can I take communion?" And he said, "You are in. If you feel that you want to, you in your brother's house," he said. "This is the house of your brothers and fell part of it." He formed a very nice relationship with me. But it was only one-sided. If I--it was me calling on him--oh, we never had a sexual relationship, but he would always tell me

about his sexual relationships and who he was meeting and who he was dating. And all that sort of thing. But I tried very hard to make friends there. One time one fellow came up to me in a meeting, he knew I was interested in black history and I lectured and talked on the subject, and wrote in the subject. (I had told them.) And he came up to me and said, "My father's black." Of course, he was white. Huh? In America, he was black too. And I got to know him. And we--but it was un-unilateral. If I didn't call him, he'd never call me at all. I just wasn't able to form a mutual relationship with anyone for friendship. When I--after two years or so--I left Dignity. I thought it was rather a hypocrisy, that the fellows would not take an interest in you personally. If you were sick or if you didn't come, "Where are you? You've been here two years. Now you didn't come. Where are you? Maybe we'll call you." But nobody called. Nobody cared. No one. But I did like the idea that Dignity did fight for gay rights. I liked that. And their newsletter was absolutely beautiful. Oh, you could just kiss every letter. But it just didn't do. Nobody cared. Nobody.

I talked about radical issues to some people and they were just as conservative as the Klan's people there. I remember the first time that I came there. It was gay pride week and we had had the gay parade. Of course, I did not attend. But I was very proud and the procession, the church, each day Mass begins. I must tell you about Mass because you don't know what it is. Each time Mass begins, you have a procession of the priest and the officials in the Mass. And here they held up standards with pink triangles and Lambda's and men and women were in the and black and white. Everything that I wanted was right there. And I thought that was beautiful, but in practice they the officials were not racist--they did pray for civil liberties and rights and women's rights and so forth. But the mass--I could never form a friendship. I felt that they might think I was trying to make them or score with them. Boy, it was hard. I gave up, finally. I finally gave up and I didn't go anymore. Because I couldn't equate. I couldn't continue to take in the beautiful words of the Mass. Well, it's the same thing at the Jewish Synagogue where they quote the prophets, "Why do you grind the faces of the poor?" And they do. Huh. People do. So I gave it up and I always used to meet some fellow on the bus. A gay brother from Dignity. And he asked why don't I come back. But he would not say that. He would not call me. But only when he met me would he say that. So it didn't mean very much to me.

[End of tape 4, side 2]

**Tape 5, side 1: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**JD:** Well, we'll come back to North Carolina.

**RB:** Well, we'll do that. I had a job working. I had so many jobs. Oh, yes. I had a job. My first job was working---I lived in one of the North Carolina big cities (not very big at that). But I had a job working in a real estate office and there were two men, white men, who had formed a real estate office and they called their company "Coast to Coast Realty." It was just a 2-by-4 outfit. The room was as big as from the door to there. And one day my boss asked me to go to the stationary store to buy a map of the United States

and then these colored pins with colored heads and that I should pin them in to every major city in the country and I should tell people that we had Coast to Coast Realty offices in those places. He was a sharpie—or was he a sharpie? He had me design a letter that would go out to all motorcourts and motels saying that he had a client from Canada who wanted to take life easy and own a motorcourt—and was your motor court for sale? Well that, he got some of his humor in ‘try to take life easy’ and ‘take life easy if you owned a motor court.’ Anyway, we got letters from almost every motorcourt in the country saying, “Yes, theirs were for sale.” Why, because he had wetted their appetite. How much is this guy willing to offer, we don’t know. Of course, mine is for sale. “Let him come back. Let the real estate, the Coast to Coast man, come back and tell me how much he is willing to offer if he wants to buy one. We’re always for sale.” Of course, now if you didn’t offer enough money, we wouldn’t sell. But if you offered enough money, maybe we’d make a hundred thousand on this deal. As a seller, as one who owned a motor court and sold it.

Well, so we got all these letters saying they would sell. Now, in real estate law, you can draw up a contract with someone. Say you have a house to sell. We can draw up a contract and in the contract it can say that I am your agent to sell it and no matter who else sells it, who else you give it to, I get a cut. Even if you hire five real estate agents (or you sell it privately), I get the cut because I am in the contract. So that is the kind of contract he drew up with these people. So here he is in North Carolina and he had motor courts in all of the 48 contiguous states. And everyone wanted to sell.

**AB:** This guy’s really smart.

**RB:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. But they were smarter. He drew up the contract and he sent them the contract that was the hook. The bolt had been given. If they would only bite the hook. If they had signed authorizing him to be, the Coast to Coast Realty Company to be the agent then whoever sold—and in the whole United States with 5, 6, 7 hundred real estate offices, with motels. At some time through the year, some were being sold. So he was legally in line for some money. But, you know, not one single damned one signed up. Not one. He was a smarty. He also a furniture store and people owed him money for the furniture. And so he drew up a very hostile letter and sent out, “pay your amount.” And he had me sit on Saturday afternoon when I was supposed to be free—to be at his office to collect, to see that people come up and give their money. One very husky man came in and said through this letter, that very hostile letter, had been written to him. He said, “Did you send this to me?” And I said, “Oh, no, sir. Don’t hit me. My boss did, but not me.” He said, “I’m not going to pay this.” And he was half drunk. And then, we used to—I know—this is capitalism. Oh, yes.

We used to try to get real estate sales people to work for us on commission. We didn’t have to pay them any salary at all. If they sold something, they would get to commission. So he would go around town, my boss man did, and get every Tom, Dick and Harry to sign up as our sales person. Well, one time we got someone who was drunk or alcoholic and he signed him up and Sam Jones (or whatever his name was),



the new sales person, we had to let the salesperson, who never came around, but anyway, there were salespeople. And one day I was reading the paper and saw Sam Jones. He landed in jail after a fight. So the boss man said, "Cross his name off. We don't want any indecent people in this great and grand establishment. This is a good business, Mr. Feldman, and we can't have that. We're church people here."

Well, I soon realized I was the only one making any money. I made \$45.00 a week. In those days, you could live on that. So then I had another---I was fired from that---and then I went. I don't know the succession---but I went to a nursery horticulture where they plant. A landscape place. And the fellow and his wife and baby lived in that area---in the same---right adjacent in the same building as the nursery. It was a big building. He was alcoholic and he was very abusive and so I said to him, "I am going to quit." And he said, "Well, hang around for a little while." And so after a month or so he had someone take me in town, well, I didn't live there either. But once he invited me to his home and his wife was outside pasting with the child. And he said, "Sec, my wife doesn't want me to drink and she is out there now pasting around and trying to get me to obey the rules." I bring this in because what might seem sometimes as happy marriage and happy home, sometimes is not.

**JD:** You were doing?

**RB:** I was doing secretarial work.

**JD:** Where was that in North Carolina? Were you doing work with the party?

**RB:** Oh, that's why I was there. Yeah. That's why I was there. But we didn't have much time to do it and our enemies always thought we were full time, but we had---they should have known better---and they should have known that we had to work 10, 12 hours a day. Huh?

**AB:** What kind of work were you doing?

**RB:** I told you, I did secretarial work. And then I did secretarial work in this nursery. And then I got a job working for a Ten Cent store. I have forgotten which branch it was, Crisby or Kress or something, one of the two. And I was stock boy. I'd have to, I'd have a large basket and I would have to fill it with the orders that the young ladies downstairs would write up. Every day I had. And then, too, if they wanted something they would call and say, bring down a dozen hairnets. Huh. Or whatever they wanted. And I got not to like that. There was very heavy and hard work but I worked there for a long time. Then I got a job with a Jewish fellow. He was a tyrant. He just badgered his son. He had a furniture store that was a half a block square. Just a big business. And he'd, oh, he was so mean. He knew I was radical. As a matter of fact, the FBI told him. But he kept me on anyway. He had been a Socialist himself some time ago. But he was cynical now. He told me that he was, in his socialist days, when he was young, he had a grocery store in the rural section of Georgia. And there were no Jewish people around there and anyway he wasn't interested especially in Jewish people at the time. And so he met a

young lady and he was about to marry her. And he went to her home very often. He would not even ring the doorbell and went into the home. And one time he went into her home—opened the screen door and went in—and he heard his future father-in-law talking about him. His father-in-law was telling a friend of the father-in-law's that pretty soon he is going to have Jew babies running around. Huh?

And so my employer said he shut the door, slammed the door, and never went back again. Ever since then, he said, "If they want to call me a Jew, that's what I am going to be." And he gave up the Socialism ultimately. His Socialist ideas. He always used to taunt me. When black people would come in the store he said, "You mean we are going to build a new society based on them?" And he (unintelligible). And others. And he'd say, "Do you think black people understand this leftist music?" And he always criticized me about my clothes. Of course, I was most unconventional about my clothes. If I had a white shirt and a button would fall off. I'd put it back on with black thread—well, [with] whatever was handy. I'd never cotton to...

**JD:** Was the FBI harassing you?

**RB:** Oh, yes. All that time, all that time. Yes.

**JD:** What form did it take?

**RB:** Well, if I hadn't quit at the nursery—they knew already, my boss told me. At the real estate, they knew. Huh? And my boss told me that they knew also at the furniture store. And so, I left the furniture store. But before the furniture store there was another place, I must tell you. I went to work—I got a job working—for a hotel-motel supplier in this North Carolina city and they sold toilet seat bands and water glass covers and bathmats, this disposable paper blotter bathmat type. And many—and furniture and so forth—for hotels/motels. And I worked there as secretary and I also put together catalog books for the sales people. We had a group of—it was quite legitimate. They had a group of about 10 salesmen and, periodically, I would arrange a looseleaf book for them with the sheets from different companies that sold furniture and supplies. And, of course, they would have to order through us. We would take the name of the company off. And that would be for each. Then, too, I was secretary to the boss. And I also served coffee, in the right angle of the secretary. Well, I worked there and the boss knew that I was a Communist because the FBI had come and told him. And I will tell you how that happened too. It seemed that my boss had married a woman, a second marriage, and she was not very happy. She was younger than the boss and they had quarrels. And one time when they quarreled and I was apparently the right hand Friday of my boss. She had a quarrel with her husband, Alexander Petris. Who scraped the bottom of that barrel? Anyway, she said, what...

**JD:** I don't even know what that means.

**RB:** I didn't know either. Thank you. Well, at any rate, she called me up and said to get out. She called me by name and said you get your personal things together and get out,

you're a Communist. So I didn't do that. But I was troubled, but I knew too that the FBI might have told them. And the boss man, I went to my boss man's office, it was a glass enclosed right in the center, and I told him. And he said, well, he called me by my name and said well, "We have known for a long time---the FBI has told us that you are a Communist, but we've kept you on." And so, he says, well, but "You must get your things." "Oh," he said, "You can continue working here---if you take a loyalty oath." In those days, it was loyalty. Everyone had to take a loyalty oath no matter what you did. And friends of mine said, "You mean to say that you have to loyalty oath to sell toilet seat bands? That might infect. You never know you are going to infect people."

**AB:** Was this happening to the other, well, when you were in North Carolina, did you know other party members?

**RB:** Oh, yes. A few. There were just a few. Maybe five or so. Not more.

**AB:** And was this happening to them too?

**RB:** Yes, it was. They were having a tough time with jobs also.

**AB:** Because they were being followed?

**RB:** Yes, they were. Yes. The best way that the FBI has is to send--you know we are always recruiting, just like Christians? Always trying to get in converts. And so they sent in--they had a fellow--we had an ad in the liberal magazine called *The Nation*. Have you ever heard of *The Nation*? "Join the Communist Party." And so this young fellow....

**AB:** *The Nation* was willing to take those ads?

**RB:** Yes, then. Yes. Yes.

**AB:** Very unusual.

**RB:** That's right. Well, in the '30s it was even. It was quite so too. That was more liberal period in the '30s. *The Nation*--I don't know how it is now--I haven't read it recently, but anyway then they were still radical and liberal. But a young fellow found out that. I didn't meet him but some others did and I later met him. He was the FBI person in the movement.

**AB:** How do you know that?

**RB:** Well, I'll tell you. We know that very well. And anyone would know that. The head of the Communist Party in North Carolina was arrested by the federal authorities under the Smith Act and during his trial, this party, this so-called party member came to testify and testified openly as an FBI person. He had been a comrade one day and now the next day he was an FBI person.

**JD:** Did this trial occur in North Carolina?

**RB:** Yes, in North Carolina. And my name was mentioned. All the people's names were mentioned. Because [if] this informer was asked, "Who else do you know?" And he mentioned all of us. And so we were very open. And there I was a Sunday School teacher in the synagogue and adviser to a youth group, the AZA group (sp?) and also secretary to the local B'nai B'rith which is a Jewish fraternal organization. I was ousted then.

**JD:** After the trial, because that must have gotten a lot of publicity, were all of you sort of blacklisted?

**RB:** Yes, we were. Yes, exactly. Exactly. It was very difficult to get a job. I had, by that time, been working for another Jewish concern, a pawn shop. And I worked there and they fired me immediately. They said they would have to let me go. They weren't angry at me. They knew, even before. They knew fully. But they had to let me go.

**JD:** Did you experience other forms of harassment besides employment?

**RB:** Yes. Where I lived. They would go to my landlord and then I had to move to another place and then into another. Finally, I moved to the home of a woman who was from New York, a Jewish woman. But she was not Jewish culturally. She was married to a fellow who worked on the daily paper of the town in which we lived. But she had a lot of money and was rather independent and she was an anarchist in her mind. She was not Marxist, and she used to tell us the controversy. But, she said, I asked her if she had a room to rent. She did rent rooms. And she said, "Oh, yes. You come right in. We won't let those folks get you." And so, sure enough, I lived there without any harassment.

**JD:** How did she know that you were.....?

**RB:** Oh, she was a friend of some of the party people. Although she would argue with them. But she was very friendly because we were dissidents and she was a dissident too. So I began to live with them and they were very nice to me.

**JD:** What year was this, that the Smith Act trial was?

**RB:** In 19 .., I can't remember the exact year--in 1953 or 4, something like that. Then too, of course, I remember very painfully a representative of the Rosenberg case came up and wanted, and I, that to me, I wanted to see the person and yet I didn't. Because that person, he was being followed very much and that might jeopardize the small amount that I had. But, nevertheless, he was vigorous, and he came to the store in which I worked, the pawn shop, and he talked to my boss folks. And he went around town and talked to people. It was ironic. Oh, yes, I saw him later in the hotel. He sent word that he would like to see me in the hotel. It was most--if you have ever seen any Hollywood movies of conspiracy, meeting in hotel rooms and looking for agents and so forth. You

have heard of Betina? We spoke of Betina Apthecker, (sp?). Well, I had met her father and her father came down for the trial and he wrote about it for the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses* and so forth. And he was in the hotel and I went up to see him. I heard he was there too. And I went up there and stood--somehow he didn't really remember who I was. He allowed me to come into the doorway of his room and we talked. Mind you, you might say, "Well, why didn't he let you in the room?" Huh? Is that what comes to your mind?

**AB:** I was wondering.

**RB:** Well, yeah. But you see, he too was under fear of who would come to his room. Who would come rather unannounced, as it were. What other. Here he was at the trial and I think he testified too. And who would come up there. Huh? And then he wouldn't even answer the door.

**JD:** If you were being harassed this much, what kind of political work, if anything, were you able to do during this?

**RB:** It happened in one of the North Carolina communities, I think it was Winston-Salem where the tobacco factories are. In the 1920s, the white workers of the factory had tried to organize a union and half of the people that worked at the Camel cigarette plant were black and half were white. So when the white workers organized the AFL union, the black workers were not allowed to join that union so they kept the plant open. Then so that union effort failed. In the 1940s, the CIO came in, the CIO was still fresh and young and radical, and had been organized, really, by the Communists and left-wing people. And they came to North Carolina and they organized the Camel cigarette plant and there were people in the plant that were very anxious to be organized, both blacks and some whites. But whites were discouraged from joining a black union. That is what they called a black union. I remember there was a--I wasn't there then in the '40s--I came in the '50s. I remember to story of the organization. It happened that in one department, a fellow, a black fellow, was very sick and he asked the supervisor to get off, to be able to take off. And the supervisor said, "No, you may not." So the fellow unfortunately died. And so the workers in the plant, especially women, went on strike immediately. And so--from that nucleus, the union was organized. And the woman who lead that strike, Miranda Smith, she is dead now, but there is a very beautiful grave stone on her grave telling how she helped organize workers and worked for world peace. Just wonderful. And I have been out to the grave site for ceremonies many times, the black and white. Almost annually.

Anyway, they did organize a strong union there (and some whites did join) so they had about 55 or almost 60 percent of the workers. And for several years they had a union. But then the company was out--naturally in company style--to break it. And so they brought in the--they were going to have a vote--and they brought in the AFL. See, they wanted to divide that vote as best they could. They had a company union. They had no union. All these were to be voted for in the present then the CIO union. So they had four possibilities. So with the four possibilities, they were going to divide the vote. And

if they could raise the racial issue and divide black and white that would be lovely too. For them. And one way that they tried to do it was--it happened that a young black fellow at the time during the union campaign--was unemployed and committed a robbery in a small TV repair shop. And there was a white young lady in that shop and she began to holler. And he began to be very frantic. And so he clobbered her and she was unconscious and the police came in and arrested him and a white woman came in also at the same time and examined her for possible rape. Her statement was that she was not raped and then she was taken to the hospital. The report said that she was not raped, but later the hospital report was changed to rape. And he was accused of rape and the penalty for rape was death in the gas chamber. And so we felt that while a robbery had taken place, to be sure, rape had not taken place and so we were out to get a lawyer for him and we even brought it up to the Supreme Court and they refused it all along the way so he was gassed. I believe that his name was Clyde Brown. Clyde Brown. But that is what we worked on. We worked to get money. We worked to get community sympathy and support. But, in the meantime, you can imagine how this reacted to many white workers. They wouldn't then want to have anything to do--that substantiated all the racists fears--and we believed that was the function of this kind of trial and the whipping up of racism. And, of course, the union did lose. But we called ourselves the Peoples Defense Committee. And we did raise money and we did get publicity. I helped put out the newsletter.

**JD:** Did you get red-bated a lot?

**RB:** Of, yes, yes, yes. In the--in 1954 or 3--when the Smith Act trial was on for the chairperson of North Carolina party, all of our names, as I said, the informer, who was a member of the party supposedly, now he is informer. He witnessed at the trial against the chairperson of the North Carolina, of the Carolinas party, the North and South Carolina party. And he, remember I said that he had joined the party through the ad in *The Nation* and he then served as FBI witness. He got money for this, money to go to school, to the University of North Carolina. Buy some magazines, I am working my way through college. And he testified that all of us, and we were red baited at that time, I worked in a butcher market at the time, I didn't, I wasn't a butcher but I sold meats. "Local Store Clerk Named as Red." In the paper.

**AB:** How did that effect work for this trial? I mean, did it prevent you from...?

**RB:** You mean the trial of the fellow? I think that the trial was over by that time. I think the trial was over. The trial was over and, really, by the time I got into the litigation aspects of it, we were appealing to the federal Appeals Court, or the state Supreme Court and then finally the US Supreme Court. And so, I wasn't there on the original trial of it. But several Communists of us were red-baited through the newspaper articles. At that time. Then there was another time I will tell you about that shortly. Then I was fired but I got a job through a fellow who worked--who ran--two markets. He had meat markets. I worked at a pawn shop when this came in. I worked in the meat market, some of these things like a musical instrument that come together. I forget the chronology. But I worked for--in that meat market where we waited on trade. It wasn't a supermarket type

thing then. Anyway, by that time, then it came to be 1955 and HUAC was coming South, we learned that. And HUAC sent subpoenas to mostly to white comrades and one or two blacks to appear in Charlotte which was a neighboring city about 50-60 miles away, maybe more. And to appear in the courthouse and we spent, we had about 3 to 4 weeks while getting the subpoena and then going to the hearing.

**JD:** Did they only subpoena the Communist Party members or were other people supposed to appear?

**RB:** No. Just party members. They knew who they were getting. They knew we were party members without having to ask us: "Have you ever been..." Huh? They knew that. They had that information. But the reason that they called you there is to gain some political status for themselves. See, we're ferreting out Communists, huh. And vote for me. Richard Nixon got in that way--not as President, to be sure, but as Congressman. He got in. He rode over all kinds of people to get in his anti-communist stance. We then we went out to try to get a lawyer. And we couldn't get one because they were afraid. The lawyers were afraid of us testifying. Didn't you know that Henry Hay--is that his name, Harry Hay?--also was called during this period and when he feared that they might ask him something about his gay life and he told, revealed that to the radical lawyers who were taking the other side--they were taking the other comrades--that they wouldn't have anything to do with him. None whatsoever. They told him to go fish for himself. So what--what have we got to do with that.

**JD:** Did you worry that that might happen to you?

**RB:** No. I did not. It didn't bother me too much because I wasn't active sexually. But even then, I did not.

[End of tape 5, side 1]

**Tape 5, side 2: Eugene Feldman ("Richard Bernstein")**

**RB:** Supposedly, it's a Congressional committee. They want to get information so they can make laws. Although this particular committee never made any, never proposed any laws. They just wanted to harass people. It was the right wing's way of downing the left wing. But, finally, when we came to Charlotte and we checked into the hotel, the next morning, though it didn't seem that we had any attorney, we finally had one. There was a young lady attorney that came down from New York. And ironically enough, I had been to New York to visit the older couple that had adopted me, and to get away for awhile, and we were walking the street once, taking a walk. This same young lady we had met, and she said, "If you ever need a lawyer, here's my card." And she was the same one. And they harassed her. They said, "How did you get this lawyer? Just this morning?" Then they ask you--there were two categories of questions--one political and one data biography. The data biography you can answer all you want. When you were born, where you worked. But once they asked any political question of you--say, they asked you if you were a Communist Party member. And you said, "Yes! By god I am." Then

you would have to answer all other political questions they asked. Then they would say, "OK. Name the names that were in it." If you didn't answer that, then you were in contempt of court and you could go to jail for a year. Huh? So the best advice was not to answer any political [questions] at all because--once you opened that door--you had to then, according to the rules, answer all of it. It's good for you to remember that. You got it. Well, anybody hearing my voice all these facts.

Then I have a common Jewish name and the attorney of the committee is the one that questions you. And then the chairperson of the committee, the villain, really, in our estimation, demands that you answer all of the questions. And says, "You answer that." And tries to intimidate you. And he said, "OK" and he called my name, a Jewish name. No, first he called, I was up to testify, and I had testified and I had given some data of my biography and so forth, autobiography and so forth--and then he said, he asked, he called me "Mr. Jones." Mind you, there is a whole big audience there, huh. Many Klansmen in that audience. And so, your name isn't "Jones" and he mentioned my Jewish name. As to point out, as though if say someone were Italian, and he mentioned "Oh, Markaletti, (sp?) aren't you? Oh, yes." Markaletti, Markaletti. Just to call your attention. And I say that to call, to bring it home.

Well then when we -- our names were in the paper. The informer, the informer who had been within our club, and we had trusted and all. He came out there and mentioned, and they also had an informer who claimed he knew me. But I had never seen him before and he was someone they had picked up and paid and they didn't drill him very well because they asked him to point me out. And he could not point me out. They should have shown him pictures of me. Huh? And it happened again in Atlanta in another hearing. Well, we were all very well-labeled, as Communists. We were named. People from this town named as--in that particular daily paper--named as reds. And then our list would be there. Our names, and where we worked and even lived, and so forth. So try then to get a job. Try then to survive and live. It was hard enough when the FBI would go and intimidate employers. And your religious place, too. Although I had one rabbi who, when my name was mentioned at the trial -- "oh no, my names was mentioned in the --was about to be mentioned in the HUAC case--and had been fired in one city as religious Sunday school teacher and so forth--he deliberately picked me up and held me. He said, "We must defend our liberties and Jews have been the subject of defilement all these years and we are not going to allow it." And though he had almost physical fights with some of his congregants--and he even invited me to some of his services and gave me honors by being called to read from the Torah and the Bible and so forth.

**JD:** Was that why you left from Carolina? Because it was impossible to survive?

**RB:** No, I was just coming to that. I was just coming to that point. Mind you, the year was 1956--the date, the year of the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. When Khrushchev makes known the discrepancies of Stalin, you are familiar with the fact that he did that? Well, then, of course, the fact that we all lost our jobs and some of us were going to quit the party right then and there. But we were giving it thought. Some of us did then quit the party. We did not quit socialism. No, we did not



quit that. Nor did we quit our continuing fight for an end to segregation or our rights. No, we did not. We did not do that at all. But some did not quit the party, they continued. But that was in 1956 and since 1936 I had been a member. Many were then quitting the party. There was great debate in the *Daily Worker* concerning which way to go, and so forth. Then I went up to Chicago--let's say I didn't go directly to Chicago--but I prefer to leave the rest of it out. I went to Chicago and while I was in North Carolina, I had begun to put out a--mind you, in 1954, the Supreme Court had rendered this anti-segregation in schools decision. That broke the "separate but equal" regulation that had been involved before. And so a whole block, a whole flood, of cases were coming up and news were coming up concerning segregation. Segregation was broken left and right and still hadn't been broken.

But I decided that the newspapers were not reporting it all. And I decided to have a newsletter from the south telling about these, some of these issues. So I called it *The Southern Newsletter* and I began it in 1956. Mimeographed. You guys don't know what the Mimeograph is. Everything is Xeroxed and typed instant printed nowadays. But many times did I crank a Mimeograph was an honorable member of our party and the movement. Anyway, I mimeographed that and I was the only one on the staff. It was an individual effort. And then I engaged something of the Southern history and so forth. About white southern abolitionists, anti-slavery work and white southerners who opposed the Confederacy and fought on the Union side. And I carried this newsletter monthly with me. I had about 300 subscribers. Not a whole lot. Then a fellow in Chicago became interested in this. He had been a member. He, too, was a white Southerner. He had been a member of the Socialist Worker's Party. That was the Trotskyist group. Of course, Communist Party members were warned and told not to associate with Trotskyists at all. As soon as I got out, I never believed in that. I chose my friends wherever I wanted. And so, he invited me to his home and I lived there with him and his family and we put out *The Southern Newsletter*. And we continued it for about till 1961. From '56 to 61, which is a long time for....

**JD:** Was that the name of it, *The Southern Newsletter*?

**RB:** Yes, right. Although we had friends in Louisville, Kentucky and so we went once a month to Louisville. We drove there so it sent out from the south. Louisville being the most northern extension of the south.

**JD:** After you left the party, did you simply feel freer to get back to being actively gay?

**RB:** No, I did not. No.

**JD:** Why not?

**RB:** Well, I can't say altogether. But there seemed to be, I know that I had a lot of expression in the Army and I told you that it was more free. It seemed to me more free and more, the atmosphere was a bit different. But in civilian life it was rather oppressive. For instance, when I was a student at Madison, at the University of Wisconsin, in the

'40s, I did not mention this and I wanted to, I was active in the student branch of the party. I began to know a young fellow who I believe was gay. He went with a young woman, they were great friends, but he was very effeminate and I believe he was gay. I think he admitted to me that he was gay later. But he was not sexually attractive to me. But I was a friend of his. He was a left winger and he was the son of a refugee from Germany and had traveled to Europe quite a bit and he knew what was happening in Italy and the Italian Communist Party and French and he was first hand able to discuss that with me. And he too wanted to join the party. But the party would not have him because he was gay. They said he was gay.

**AB:** They said that to you? And you knew that was the reason, that that was a reason they used to keep people out?

**RB:** Yes. Well but that wasn't the way that I knew. I told you before that they said specifically from headquarters that that was one reason that they didn't, that they kept people out. That wasn't just hearsay. That was in the '50s, that was later on too. I think I mentioned that. In the 1950s I learned that those people who were gay were allowed in the South, only in the South to be party members because they lacked people in the South. If they didn't practice their gay life. That's the way the Pope wants it too, incidentally. That's right, he said you can be gay and we are going to be merciful to you, you can't help it that you are gay, you can't help it you're practice your Sodom and Gomorrah and these evil practices. You can't help that, but we don't you to practice it. But I continued to be friendly and he contributed to the party through me, that is he would give me some money. And he came from a very well to do family. Forest Hills, New York. Huh? How is Forest Hills?

**AB:** In New York City.

**RB:** Yeah. A well to do place?

**AB:** Quite (unintelligible).

**RB:** Maybe not now, but then maybe. They made fun of him and all that. That's why, that's one of the reasons I didn't reveal myself, because I didn't want to be made fun of. Yet here were people I was working with very closely, intimately, I was pledged, like the Declaration of Independence says "we pledge our lives, our fortunes" whatever fortune in life we are going to have we pledge it on the line, commitment. And yet, as I say this is hindsight. I was pledging it with people who had no sympathy at all for a very simple portion of my life. But that recognition of my gay life as being central did not come up until recently. And it is a central part, it is an important and central portion.

**AB:** Did the FBI continue to harass you even after you left the party?

**RB:** Yes, I gather that they did. I didn't notice it, but I gather that they did. I didn't have too much trouble getting a place to stay. But in 1958, I was called, in Chicago, the staff of *The Southern Newsletter*, and, us and a few other people, were called to

Charlotte, to Atlanta to testify again. What they wanted to do was prove that communists were the instigators of integration. It was a communist plot and integration was communism. And so that is what they were out to prove. And there too, they had an informer, who didn't know me and I didn't know him, and he was asked to point me out and they did their homework very poorly. But apparently in the minds of the racists, now there we had a black bishop who was also a lawyer, from Kentucky, and he was a republican. He had a big cross, and he was very rotund, and he had a big cross and a white collar and wore a crucifix and he as our attorney could not even get a meal in Atlanta, at the time. He had to take his lunch with him in the courthouse. I remember, in the audience were some white women who were from the right wing and the head of the House Committee on Un-American Activities was talking to them during the break. And they were saying, "oh we thank you Congressman for ferreting out these terrible reds." What they meant, what they really meant was that you are saving us from integration. God forbid, that a black should be coming up and taking over our homes. Marrying out daughters. That's what they, they had a natural fear. So yes.

Then I got a job right after that, I got a job in Chicago, mind you, my home was Chicago now, to work for a paper called the *Law Bulletin*. And that went to all lawyers. It was a law paper, daily paper. And then, too, I understand that you could, that lawyers could put legal notices in that paper and then that would take care of some legal aspects of litigation that they had, that they were bound to put in these notices. And so, my boss was very friendly to me. Hired me through an agency and I was working there writing some stories. (We called the articles from the paper "stories.") But one day he came to work and he wouldn't even say hello to me. And I knew that something was happening, that during the day he said I want to see you in my office. And then he said, "We hear" in the office he had the editor and himself. He says, "We hear that you did not testify, refused to before the House Committee. And we can't have you. So I was fired. Never mind telling them that I was upholding the Constitution. The Constitution had life; was supposed to mean something. It was in the Fifth Amendment that you are not expected to testify against yourself. So then I was hired by a left-wing Jewish organization. They had a school for their children where they studied the history of American labor and the history of Jews. And also, then I called to serve at a school, an independent high school, private high school, for dropouts in downtown Chicago. It doesn't exist any more. And I worked there and they didn't ever, they never questioned as to whether, my name was in a Chicago paper, but they never questioned it and I just continued to work. Later on that school was a blurb by the Encyclopedia Britannica. I continued to be on their staff as a teacher and I worked, goodness, from 1958 to 1975, I worked, although Britannica gave up too and then it became something else, but the same school. In 1965, you know CORE was very active and they were trying to--and I was in their picket lines sometimes. They were trying to prove that CORE was Communist so they mentioned my name and others who had been mentioned in HUAC hearings to prove that CORE was.

**AB:** Was that in the newspaper?

**RB:** Yeah, right. In '65, 1965. Ironically, I had just come up to the CORE office to volunteer my services to teach black history. And they said, "Oh yes, we know who you

arc. You don't have to introduce yourself. We saw your name in the paper in regard to us. But we're not angry at you because we are angry at those who smear us." They--by that time I was working for the Encyclopedia Britannica Academy. And the head of the Encyclopedia was Senator, former Senator William Buntan, (sp?) very much an anti-McCarthyite. And nothing was done with me. They didn't fire me at all. And by that time the McCarthy period was beginning to, did you say--who was at the SDS in '65, didn't we deal them quite a blow, a heavy blow. I think we did. There were some people who refused to testify at all and through the course of time, they were exonerated. And that was the last time that they put their show on the road. That was the last time.

**AB:** I remember.

**RB:** It was in Berkeley, they had come here and they had met with a great deal of resistance and in Chicago and in a lot of places. Everywhere they had mass demonstrations against them by this time. And the students were beginning to be active too and the anti-war movement was beginning. They couldn't. Now they're wanting to bring it back again.

**AB:** Did you?

**[Tape stopped and restarted]**

**AB:** I don't know if that question I tried to ask, something like--what is it that made you re-evaluate?

**RB:** The gayness?

**AB:** That you specifically made you think it's important to do this interview.

**RB:** Well, all right. I think I told you about Chicago, that I had joined Dignity for awhile. And I had read this very wonderful book and the book still sparkles within me. Even though the author wouldn't, I suppose many people came to him and said it was a wonderful book. I wrote a long letter. A couple of letters. Telling him that I had never seen such a book before in my life. Such open support, and it was wonderful.

Well, I got to know this young couple in Chicago, in Berkeley, or actually the fellow of the young couple used to be--well, is still a radical lawyer. He was a radical lawyer in Chicago and he handled Panther cases and so forth. We were very good friends in Chicago. He is not at all gay. He is not homophobic. He's not that. Anyway, he was a friend of someone who knew Amber. As a matter of fact, Helen, who she knew, worked at the bookstore. And it was Helen who suggested that I become part of the Oral History Project. On both counts, of gay and radical history.

**JD:** What, even that's a change because obviously you had let them know that you were gay? Something that you didn't do.

**RB:** I let my friend, the fellow, know and, of course, then he told her. Which is all right, I don't hold that against him at all. But it's not a public thing. It has its way of becoming public, unfortunately. How do you become--there's no such thing as being a little bit pregnant, as it were, and being a little bit public and out of the closet. It unfortunately results in open, and I haven't made that decision yet. I don't think I will probably ever make that decision. Because, actually, I do not, I categorize myself and yet do not categorize myself. For instance, I am Jewish, but at the same time I am not a stranger to the Mass. And I know what Christ looked for, I don't regard him as a deity. I think that is what separates me from being a Catholic. I am a Unitarian--with a small "u," that is--I believe, I would, if anything, believe in a--I'm going to be very careful now--as to what I say. Anyway, I would tend to believe in the spirit progress and I remember when I was in North Carolina, they asked me to be the chaplain of the Peoples Defense Committee. And I would never mention the deity's name. I would always say, "let us go forth into the world and be strong in our courage and bind us together." And some black woman said well you never mentioned God. So I haven't, I didn't know, but I did it deliberately. But I am trying to gather my thoughts now.

I think Helen was the one that suggested that I do this. And there might have been a bit of resistance on my part, that I didn't want to do it. But I felt, well, that one way to strengthen the movement maybe is to give our history. I think we should know our history. We should know the oppression that it was so that it motivates us to voice ourselves and struggle against oppression. That we have, that our lives are, especially a person as I, who all of their lives lived in the subterranean areas of life, with a very central portion of my life. And I think that it's not a fair thing to expect one to do and shouldn't have to do that and I think that we should be allowed to be open and the only way that we are to be allowed is to struggle for it. And so this is part of the struggle. Many--some avenues perhaps--I would not be willing to struggle. I might not be willing to get up at a public meeting and say that I am gay and as a gay person I think this and that and the other. I might say, "As a human being, I think that gays should be protected." Huh? I might say that. But I feel very strongly that there should be a struggle and I think this is part of it.

I know the value of history and stimulating that. Even now as you hear me speak, I am not speaking with as full force as I might. I am reminded of a pet cat at a house at which I stayed just recently. The cat, the male cat, would get down on its all fours and ready to pounce on something and make all the motions of pouncing and never actually pounce. And so here I am. But, when you consider that in North Carolina and through my radical life, I opposed forces that could blow the world up. And here I was contending against them and what did I have but just myself. My own flesh and my own blood. No weapons. Except the voice that could write and speak and they were afraid of that. So afraid that they had FBI people follow us and bother about our employment. Sometimes I said, "Well, hell, how effective are we, we who have done so little and yet they are after us." So they are telling us that we are effective. Maybe they feared that the relations in the South were so tender and tinder t-i-n-d-e-r that the catalyst that we were, the spark that we might make might set the whole thing afire. And so maybe we fueled that. I never was under any erroneous impression as to how strong we were or how not

strong we were. So that is my testimony to 1982. To my brothers and sisters, whom I haven't forgotten. And it has just grown, a person of great faith and hope. And will continue.

**JD:** OK. One thing about the--.

**RB:** Yes, you may ask.

**JD:** Do you want to say anything about how you feel about the use of this tape? Do you have any thoughts about that?

**RB:** Off the air I will.