Interview with

IGAL ROODENKO

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Chapel Hill, N. C.

by Jacquelyn Hall and Jerry Wingate

Transcribed by Gerry Cohen

For the Southern Oral History Program

Igal Roodenko: I'm Igal Roodenko, born in New York in 1917, went though the New York City School System. Went off to Cornell in the early thirties and got a degree in Horticulture, and shortly after I got out, we got into World War II. I found myself being a conscientious objector, and was recognized by my draft board as one, but after a little while, felt I could no longer cooperate with comscription. I felt the state, any state, has no right to conscript people for any reason, least of all organized murder. So I refused to do alternative service any further, and ended up with a three year jail sentence, of which I did about twenty months. When I got out in early '47, I almost immediately got involved in a CORE project, the first CORE project in the South, the Journey of Reconciliation.

That is what brought me to North Carolina and Chapel Hill, where I was arrested, and we had to do a sentence of thirty days on a road gang, of which I did three weeks up near Reidsville. Then after that, I became a printer, a pretty good printer. I eventually had my own shop up in New York for about fifteen years, taught typography at Pratt Institute part-time for a couple of years. Continued my involvement with the War Resisters Leagure all this time, on the executive committee, then vice-chairman, and for four years, national chairman.

I sold my shop a few years ago, and spent most of my last few years traveling for the War Resisters League. A great deal of talking and organizing. This is my major committment now, not so much to the War Resisters League as an institution, but to the idea that the human species has two or three generations at most to learn to live with itself, and otherwise if we don't learn to deal with our conflicts in a non-lethal manner, we stand a very good chance of destroying ourselves, perhaps destroying all life on this planet. To me, the key word is non-violence. It is a much misused word, but until we find a better word, I am addicted to it. There is my bio.

Jerry Wingate: Igal I think that because of the overwhelming personality of Dr. King and the dramatic events of the late fifties and early sixties, most people believe that the civil rights movement began in the early fifties with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and know very little of the civil rights activities of the forties, much less the thirties, A. Philip Randolph and that crowd. But in April of 1947, you were involved in a dramatic happening, the Journey of Reconciliation, the first freedom ride into the South. How did that get started? Who planned it, who organized it, what was the idea behind it?

Roodenko: I'd have to go back a little. The World

War II experience for a lot of pacifists was a very difficult one, first because the war against Hitler was probably as justified a war as anyone can probably deal with, intellectually. So those of us who were pacifists in spite of all the good reasons for not being pacifists had to do an enormous amount of soul searching and re-thinking of how do we justify non-participation in a crusade against such a manifest evil in the world. Of course there are a lot of pacifists who come out of what I consider a rather narrow religious way of thinking which says that as long as my soul is clean and my fingers are not dipped in blood, why that is alright, the world is evil and will continue doing its evil things, and it's not my primary business. There was a socially aware group, or individuals within the pacifist context who could not think that way at all, who were very active in the anti-Hitler activities in the thirties, the boycotts, the demonstrations, and the petitions, and so on. We were later called by the establishment premature anti-Nazis. It wasn't quite the time, the time was to be called by the State Department or the White House.

At any rate, here we were refusing to participate in the war against Hitler, and we had to find ways to rationalize and so the World War II period, those of us who were in CO camps and in prison--I'm not saying very many of us were involved in this-- but quite a number were involved in the soul-searching. We found that we had to

find positive alternatives, that pacifism was not simply nay-saying. Now, alongside of that came the extraordinary example of Gandhi in India. We found for the first time we knew of, a person who was not only committed to non-violence, but who was committed to what we thought we were dealing with, the questions of the roots of violence and the roots of war: with the sources of conflict, of bloody conflict within the community, within the family, within the indivudual, long before the guns actually started shooting. We tried to find ways to connect the Gandhian experience, and the Gandhian insights and approach to the American scene. At times, we had very silly ideas about getting people to spin their own cloth, and things like that, that was silly.

Finally, we came to the conclusion that the area in American life which most called for the Gandhian approach was the area of racism. The traditional methods of dealing with racist problems until then, which was that/of the NAACP which was quiet education and so on, didn't seem enough. We were impressed by some of the dramatic acts of civil disobedience that Gandhi engaged in against the British government. We already had the experience of civil disobedience, by being in prison for refusing to be drafted. So that the combination between the two seemed to be a logical one.

Some of the people who came out of prison then in the mid-forties organized the Committee on Racial Equality,

first in Chicago, and then in New York, and quickly engaged in local activities. There was a roller-skating rink in Chicago that refused to allow blacks . . .

J.W.: These were primarily whites?

Roodenko: Yes, these were white, middle-class pacifists, and largely religious, Christian. So they worked on this roller-skating rink and won. So we worked on this swimming pool just outside of New York City that didn'y allow blacks in, and there were a few heads busted and people jailed, but we won that too. The Palisades swimming pool was opened up. Then, by '47, the idea came along that we ought to get into the belly of the beast, that is, into the South. We had this very simplistic Yankee attitude that this was really where the discrimination and the hatred and so on were, and that while we weren't perfect up North, we were pretty good. It was the old missionary attitude, my soul is alright, it is those poor heathen African souls which need saving. So the Journey of Reconciliation was started. The specific idea was that, in 1946, the Supreme Court passed the Irene Morgan decision. Here was a black woman who contesetd the Jim Crow seating in public transportation and won, the court holding that if one held a ticket going from one state to another, the Jim Crow laws were an undue burden on interstate traffic. We were very excited about this, but within a year we decided we wanted to find

out how much the bus companies, Trailways and Greyhound, were living up to this decision. So we very carefully planned this Journey of Reconciliation which was to last two weeks. We got interstate tickets, starting from Washington, down through Richmnod and down into North Carolina, across North Carolina into Kentucky and Tennessee, and then back through Virginia to Washington. We broke up into two groups, one group going Trailways and the other Greyhound. We would stop each night in a town and generally have a public meeting at a college or a black church, and then proceed the next day. Each day we would decide on two guinea pigs, a black and a white would sit together in the front or two whites would sit in the back, or two blacks would sit in the front. The others on the trip, and there were about twenty or twenty five of us,* would act as observers, so that if and when these cases came to court they could act as witnesses. We were pretty apprehensive at first, at least I know that I was. Yet, there were some courageous souls who sort of set the pattern from the very first day, Conrad Lynn an absolutely outspoken black lawyer; Wally Nelson, a black activist and pacifist for many years; Bayard Rustin, black organizer for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who traveled throughout the South for many years, during the thirties, as an anti-war organizer. The others of us got a little courageous as it went along. What happened in most of

*Altogether, about six to eight each on Greyhound and Trailways.

these things is that we would sit down according to plan and the bus driver would tell us we couldn't do this, and then we would tell him as politely as we could that we were going on the Supreme Court decision, and we recognized his right to be as--we didn't say it this way--to be as prejudiced as he wanted to be, but you can't enforce an illegal prejudice on us. We insisted upon sitting where we were sitting, and the only way we would move is if we are placed under arrest, in which case we would be able to bring this situation to court and have it adjudicated, under the law.

Sometimes the holdup was very brief, and sometimes it was stretched out. The Greyhound buses were very cooperative, in the sense that when they saw how determined we were, they overlooked us as much as possible. They ignored it, they did not occasion any arrests. Trailways were much more difficult about this, and there must have been six or seven arrests in the course of the Trailways trip, but the charges were all dropped except in our case, and this is the Chapel Hill arrest.

The orginal plan was for Joe Felmet here, and was it Andy Johnson, Andy was black, for the two of them to sit in the front of the bus, and I was sitting in the back, somewhere over a wheel, and Bayard /Rustin/ was sitting somewhere behind me, and there might have been two or three others in the bus, I don't remember. Then the bus driver got into the bus, ready to take off, and he

looked around, counting his passengers, and he saw these two people together in the third seat behind him, and he came over and told them they couldn't do it, and Joe and Andy went through the verbal confrontation. This was kind of stretched out some, and finally the driver decided the only thing he could do was go out and call the police, and the police station was just across the street from the bus station at that time. The police came in and they asked Joe, who was sitting on the aisle, to get out of the way so they could arrest Andy, Andy had said he would not go voluntarily, they would have to take him. The tone seemed to be that we white folk understand what it is all about, don't we Joe, and Joe of course would cooperate and get out of the way, but, of course, Joe didn't. So they had to lug them both out, and this held up the bus a while longer, because the driver had to go into the police station and sign the papers and go through the formalities.

Jacquelyn Hall: How did the other passengers respond?

Roodenko: They were--the nice middle-class white upbringing is that if you don't know what to do about a thing, ignore it. I do that. There was sort of a frozen non-response there. People obviously knew what was going on, but there was no response there. I'll get back to this in a moment. As they were taken out--and this is one of those nice examples of non-verbal communication--

Bayard and I were not supposed to know each other, and I monentarily turned my head, and my eye half-caught his, and without another word, we both got up together and walked down the bus, and took the two seats that had just been vacated.

J.H.: Were there other blacks on the bus?

Roodenko: I don't remember on that trip, but on some of the other trips there were, and the blacks on other trips when arrests happened would become most worried, and say in effect that you can't change the world, so be good and don't cause trouble, and come back and sit where you are supposed to. Those who would express themselves whuld express themselves that way.

J.W.: To the black people who were sitting in the front?

Roodenko: To the black participants in the trip.

J.W.: Was there a dialogue with those people?

Roodenko: It depended, because we were very good at talking when we were amongst ourselves, but it takes a little more when you are among strangers, and in a tense situation. Probably the most fearless person in the whole undertaking was Bayard, because he had been through a great deal of this before. When we came up forward, some woman said to us: I can understand the first two people refusing to move, but you two are deliberately breaking the law, the implication being that the first two happened

to be sitting there, and we were going out of our way to cause trouble. Bayard put on a marvelous accent and asked her what the moral difference was between a premeditated and a spontaneous breaking of the law. Then some young girl sitting in front of us said in a very lovely drawl, said I think what you two people are doing is marvelous, and I want you to take my name and address, and if you ever need my help in court, please call on me. Then Bayard, being a master of the dramatic moment, started a conversation with me, a sort of inside conversation, and controlling his voice, so even though it was a private conversation, everybody on the bus could hear it, in other words, he was going to have a public forum going on, a town meeting, or a bus meeting.

People started responding. The preponderance of the feeling was--and we felt this on many parts of the trip--was that people felt that, yeah. the law was wrong and that discrimination against blacks was wrong, but that to shake up the thing was to make things worse. I know that by the end of the trip, in Kentucky at one point, we had been driving along with the integrated thing for part of our trip and there were some more passengers who came on, or maybe the bus driver was changed along the way, and maybe this new bus driver wanted to break this thing up, and some white passenger spoke up and said, don't give them any trouble, these people have been sitting together since Roanoke or wherever, and nothing

has happened, and you the bus driver are the one making the trouble. That is the kind of experience that has been meaningful to me over the years, that when one gets involved in programs in political change, which requires a certain amount of courage and self-righteousness, it is very easy to fall into the trap of saying that all the others, the masses, are brain-washed and stupid and negative, but the experience of those two weeks on the bus trip were a real gut learning for me, that you have to find ways of saying what you have to say without rubbing peoples faces in the dirt. If you say it in the right way, you are going to find an enormous amount of support for what you are saying than if you stand up and defy the whole system and the world and the establishment and everything else.

J.W.: What happened after the arrests. I'm interested in how in 1947 the local citizenry in Chapel Hill reacted.

Roodenko: Well . . .

J.W.: Were there any demonstrations for or against the thing that had occurred? Did it get a lot of media attention?

Roodenko: The demonstrations that happened were not planned, and had a pretty heavy impact upon my sweating ssystem. We were being held, we went through

this whole routine again, we were booked, and the bus pulled out, and bus station and the jailhouse were just across the street from each other, and we were standing in the front window of the police station, waiting for the whole procedures to be completed, and we saw a growing number of people around the bus station, muttering around and milling around, and looking in our direction, and we were beginning to feel safe in the hands of the police.

J.W.: Whites?

Roodenko: Yes, and largely, well, the center of this were the cabbies, the people who hang around the bus station anyway. Jim Peck, who was on the trip but who had not been arrested, went out to make a phone call, or to get something, and he was jostled a little, but he responded quite calm and he came back to us, and nothing further happened.

Then, suddenly, Charlie Jones came into the police station, and the procedures were completed. Charlie Jones was a minister in Chapel Hill and still lives here, and probably the focus of integration. Of what integrationist feeling there was in the state of North Carolina, he was it. He had integrated his church before anyone else had. I am told that two elderly parishioners of his picketed his church every Sunday morning during services because he had integrated his church. The Congress of Industrial Organizations, the

state structure, wanted to hold their convention, and his church was the only place in the whole state where they could meet since it was an integrated body.

J.H.: Someone called Charlie . . .

Roodenko: We came to him when we came to Chapel Hill.

J.H.: Did you have contacts in other places in the South where you were going?

Roddenko: Oh, yes. Part of the whole Gandhian thing was that we had a whole battery of lawyers that we could call on. Several in Richmond, Spottswood (Robinson)

J.W.: Robinson, it was.

Roodenko: Yes. The ACLU people and the NAACP / people, people we could call on in case of trouble. Part of the structure was not knowing what would happen, the people in the trip who were not the guinea pigs at any one point were absolutely ready to call on help in case anything should happen. Charlie was one such contact. He hustled us out of the police station and into his car, and he lived on . . .

J.W.: Had you gotten out on bail or something?

Roodenko: I think so. Just as we were coming out, we saw a bunch of these guys pile into two cabs across the street . . .

J.H.: I wonder why you weren't locked up?

Roodenko: You see the story had started coming back,

what the bus drivers did, this was the end of the first week, they would call the home office. The national office for Trailways was I think in Richmond, and the national Trailways office and Greyhound began to see that this was not an accident, this was part of a scheme and they were very afraid of getting into legal things. You can lock up an oddball, but if you have a whole structure behind him, you don't know what kind of contention and litigation you are going to get into. I think this is why Greyhound just said, "Lay off."

J.H.: Is that just an assumption that Greyhound had instructed not to lock up?

Roodenko: No, I just think that the police said, we are not going to do anything unless the driver presses charges, and the driver did not know what to do unless he asked the parent company, and Trailways said no, don't let it happen, and Greyhound said, no, keep it cool as you possibly can. Charlie lived on what is Franklin, and there was a back alley between Franklin and the street next to it, and he packed us into his car and rushed down this back alley and we got through the back door into his house. Just as we got in and rushed to the front window and started closing windows and doors and pulling down windowshades and things, these two cabs drew up in front of the house, and eight or ten men started to cross the lawn with clubs or sticks or some-

thing, in a sweat, and another car came up, and some guy talked to them, and they left. Our assumption is that this guy said let's not do this in open daylight.

We sat around not knowing what would happen. There were a few anonymous calls in effect saying, get those nigger-lovers out of town before dark or else there is no accounting what will happen to you. Charlie had been smart enough. He had three or four daughters, and he had gotten his family out of Chapel Hill several days before, just in anticipation of what might happen. Finally we found someone who came along in two cars and just scooted us out of Chapel Hill. The assumption is that Charlie saved our lives or at least our limbs. There was no violence coming out of that. Then we proceeded on with the rest of the journey.

J.W.: You wound up doing some time though?

Roodenko: Yes, finally we were brought to trial.

J.W.: Did the Greyhound people go ahead and press charges?

Roodenko: Trailways did.

J.W.: They brought you back or called you?

Roodenko: We were out on bail and the date was set, and we came down to Hillsborough County Court, was it?

J.W.: Orange County.

Roodenko: Orange County. Andy Johnson skipped bail.

He was frightened, and I think the authorities were perfectly happy for him to skip bail. They didn't want a thing to do with this / this for one thing, and some of them knew that ultimately the Supreme Court would hold in our behalf.

Bayard and Joe and I stood trial and were given thirty days.

J.W.: What was the trial like? What arguments did the prosecution use? Could you give some detail about it ?

Roodenko: Simply that there was a local ordinance.

J.W.: Was there any media attention centered . . .

Roodenko: No, not at that time.

J.W.: Were the local citizens interested at all?

Roodenko: I don't think so. At that time, we were pretty scared. In contrast to movement trials in the sixties where we tried to get as much attention as we could, we tried, we wanted this thing to go over as smoothly and as quietly . . .

J.W.: How long was it from the demonstration to your court trial? Was it weeks, months.

Roodenko: A couple of months. That is routine experience in political trials everywhere. You break the law and they drag out the cases and sort of try to deal with these things one person at a time, with the hope that / the public will have forgotten about the issues. The judge could understand Bayard as an uppity nigger, I suppose,

and could underatand me as a damn-fool Yankee, but he couldn't understand Joe, because Joe as a southern boy should have known better, so he wanted to give Joe six months. The prosecutor had to remind the judge he couldn't give more than thirty days under the law. (laughter) Then we appealed, and I don't know just what the legal structure was. The appeal was before a jury.

J.W.: The Superior Court, . .

Roodenko: The Superior Court, and that was in Durham . . .

J.W.: Hillsborough.

Roodenko: Alright.

J.W.: were you kept in the pokey while you appealed?

Roodenko: No, the bail was continued.

J.W.: Did you spend some time there in the Orange County . . .

Roodenko: No.

Joe Felmet: We made bail immediately.

Rood nko: I had the feeling that they all wanted us to go away. They would have been happy if we had forfeited the bail and the whole thing would have been forgotten. But the trial was a peculiar one. The arrangement beforehand was that I was to be the witness in the witness chair. We got into a lot of contentions about what our intentions were. The lawyer said, no wait a minute, your intent could be to burn down the White House, but unless you start talking, really planning the thing, it is pure nonsense.

The whole question of intent under the law is a very ticklish thing.

Felmet: The legal thing was that the prosecution was trying to show a conspiracy to violate the segregation statute, which is a misdeamenor punishable by two years in prison.

Roodenko: I don't remember any of that at all.

J.W.: You lost the appeal?

Roodenko: We lost the appeal, and I suppose enough time has gone by so the fact can be brought out that the lawyer we had--I don't remember his name: he was the oldest and most prominent black lawyer in the state and was called the dean of the black bar in North Carolina.

J.H.: Do you remember his name?

Felmet: I do, but let's leave his name out of it, he's dead now, why embarrass . . .

Roodenko: Yes.

J.H.: Why would he be embarrassed?

Roodenko: He couldn't be embarrassed, but let me tell you what happened. He had a couple of assistants, who were black professors of law in Raleigh. Isn't there a black law school?

Felmet: No, in Durham.

Roodenko: They were pretty sharp, but this older man who had been practicing law for thirty years, and this

was the first time he had had a white client, and this was the first time he ever went into a courtrooom and saw blacks in the jury box, and he had such a sense of importance about the whole thing, and wanted to shine in the thing. So, understandably, he would not listen to the younger guys in this, who I think were more competent and cooler about the matter. So we went through the whole thing in the course of which he had forgotten to mention the Irene Morgan decision of the Supreme Court. So that when we were found guilty, and the thing was brought on appeal to the (State) Supreme Court, they went out of their way to say that since the U. S. Supreme Court decision had not been raised, they need not act upon it, and therefore the convcction was sustained.

Then finally, the thing dragged out for a year and a half . . .

J.W.: Was that how it was, Joe?

Felmet: I think I can clarify the legal situation. The Supreme Court reviewed the written record from the Superior Court and because our lawyer had not brought out the evidence that we were in interstate commerce, that issue was not before the North Carolina Supreme Court, and as Igal says, that issue was not considered by the North Carolina Supreme Court.

J.W.: So, when you lost the appeal, what happened?

Roodenko: Then we had to start doing our thirty days, so Joe and I went down, and we surrendered, and we hung around a local jail for the better part of a day and maybe a night, and were finally toted over to the road gang over at Reidsville.

J.W.: How was that decision made to put you on a road gang, rather than hold you . . .

Roodenko: That's an administrative decision of the state.

J.W.: Do you think they saw this an additional form of punishment to put you on a road gang? In those days, was it humiliating to put you on a road gang?

J.H.: It was very common.

Roodenko: I think that was the routine for a misdemeanor, local drunks and petty crime, and minor things, you were put out on the road. I saw this old newspaper man on the road with us, who served twelve thirty-day sentences and in a course of one year, because he would get out on good behavior after three weeks and get drunk in the next day or two and be right back again. That was the routine thing for minor crimes. By the time I was coming down there, I was really frightened. A good friend of mine in New York said, Igal, you are going down to a place and you are going to be in a place where people take their white supremacy quite seriously, and you are not going to fit in there, and if you are out

there on the road gang, it might just accidentally happen that someone might just accidentally drop a sixteen pound sledge on your back or your head. My fears got enormously built up, but we had no choice. Maybe we had a choice of skipping bond or something, but that was no choice for me, I just had to go and do it. I remember the first night on the road gang, it was just one large room with a catwalk running through the middle of it. The trustees on one side and the less trustworthy prisoners on the other. Double bunks, pretty crowded, and another building right next to it which was the mess hall, and that was the sum total of the physical plant. There was some sheds for the trucks, and there was a sweatbox, and the warden's house a little ways off.

J.W.: What was the sweatbox?

Rood nko: Well, I never saw it. Do you know about it Joe?

Felmet: Yes, that was solitary confinement. I don't know that it was a sweatbox, but it was solitary confinement. That was where a prisoner had to stay alone . . .

Roodenko: In pitch darkness.

Felmet: I'm not sure of that.

J.W.: What were working conditions like on the road gang?

Roodenko: Well, I can tell you the nice side of it. We were doing the time in the early part of the spring, like this. We left New York after a three day snow storm, and we got down to North Carolina and the sun was shining. We spent some of the time in a rock hole, which was pretty much protected from the wind. We were stripped down to the waist with the sun beating down, good hard work. A few weeks of that and I came back looking like I had been down in Miami, and I think my mother was a little bit disappointed. I think she saw herself bringing me back to health after this harrowiing experience, and after the dissipated life of the city, this was a marvelous experience for me.

Felmot: Here is an amusing sidelight on this. Igal, an ethical vegetarian, had to eat Navy beans cooked in pork or not eat.

Roodenko: Well, it was pork and beans twenty-one times a week, and I wouldn't eat that, and there was very little for me to eat. There would be a little fruit in the morning, stewed peaches or something that the women in the women's jail (State Women's Prison) would put up. But there was a can of blackstrap molasses on every table, and the other prisoners wouldn't eat it, because they wanted the refined molasses, but I remember my mother said that blackstrap stuff is the most nutritious. So my meal consisted,

particularly when we were out in the rock hole, and they would send a trustee over to a nearby farm to get some milk and buttermilk for those who had the money. I lived on blackstrap molasses and biscuits and buttermilk for three weeks.

J.W.: What do you mean he got milk and buttermilk for those that had the money?

Roodenko: He would go over to a nearby farmer and buy the stuff, and the prisoners who had the money would buy the stuff. This was over and above the prison feeding.

Unidentified: Were the groups of whites and blacks separated?

Roodenko: No. The jails were segregated. We were in a white road gang. Bayard was of course in a black road gang, but he fell in with a group who were very supportive of him. He did quite a bit of organizing and agitating, and he did a sociological report on the thing that I haven't seen in a long time. His was a more positive experience. It wasn't too bad, it was pretty bad for Joe. One day he wasn't working fast enough to please one of the guards there, and the guard called him out and told him to dig faster, and Joe didn't increase his pace fast enough, and they warned him a second time and then finally they spreadeagled him and tied him to the bars for . . .

Felmet: All night.

Roodenko: All night.

Unidentified: That was the only kind of punishment you saw?

Roodenko: Yes. Two of the prisoners had leg fetters on, they had tried to run and were caught, this was before we got there. Chains, locking their . . .

J.W.: Connecting their two legs . . .

Roodenko: Every time they went in and out of the jail, the guard went over every link in the chain to make sure no attempt had been made to cut them apart. They slept in these things, and they slept in their clothes because of that.

J.W.: Were you treated any differently because of what you had done? Did the guards know why you were there?

Roodenko: I am sure the guards knew. The guards there like anywhere else make a pretense that they are just doing their job and they don't care what you did, their job is to keep the jail running. The prisoners found out soon enough. The very first night we were there, there was a guy who was called Peaches, and we saw him sort of moving around and whispering to the other prisoners and sort of looking towards us, and I got pretty paranoid. It was, it worked out alright though, after a time. Let me put it this way: the first few days, when people would ask me what I was in for, I said I got into

an argument with a bus driver, which was true, and they would assume I was drunk, and they didn't ask any more, and I didn't tell them any more. I thought I was playing it pretty cool. Later, there wasn't such a big population that you couldn't relate to all the guys there, including Peaches. I got to establish some rapport with Peaches after a while. Then then the story came out. Once some rapport was established, the fact that I had broken the law my way which was different from their way, didn't make too much difference. I remember getting into the first breakthrough with Peaches, a group of us were standing around talking, and some of them left, and finally there was just the two of us left, and we looked at each other a little warily, and he was in his own way trying to establish a little rapport, and he started asking me about New York. New York was an endless subject, and everyone who has never been there thinks it is the place in the world to go to. Finally he said,

he had been thinking about going up to New York, he heard you could earn pretty good money and he wanted to work on the docks as a longshoreman, and to get back to his forthrightness, I said, you know it is a pretty good job and pretty good money, but you know, I don't think youwill do very well there. He says, what do you mean, I'm pretty strong. I said, yes, but I am not trying to be critical, I am just trying to tell you what

the story is, that there are a lot of black people in New York, a lot of them working on the docks, and I notice about you that you are pretty headstrong, and it is just different up there than it is down here, and I think you would get into trouble. There was no moral judgement there, it was just predicting a situation, and he accepted that. The upshot of it was that the last night on the chaingang, the usual procedure is to short-sheet or play some games with a guy before he leaves, and that if I had any valuables that I wanted, he would keep them for me overnight. I didn't have anything particularly valuable, I had a billfold with nothing particularly in it, and I gave it to him and he kept it for me and gave (nicknamed Pooch) it back to me the next day. There was another kid/I worked next to down on the rock hole the first day, What we did down in the rock-hole, there were a few guys with jackhammers who would blast the rock and we would come along with longhandled shovels and shovel them into big pans which were picked up by big tractors and carried up to a grader that separated the bigger rocks from the small er ones, and after about five minutes of this / this other kid said to me:

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

You sure don't know how to chain gang, and I said what do you mean? He said it is a funny thing about these rocks, as many as you shovel one day, there are just as many the next day. I said, I am glad you told

me that, I sure don't know anything about the chain gang, and anytime you see me working too hard, you just tell me, I would appreciate it. I got through ten minutes of shoveling these rocks and felt like I had done a days work and I wanted to quit. He helped me get into the right tempo and the right pace.

J.H.: Igal, were you familiar with that expose about the Georgia chain gangs that was written during the thirties. I am wondering if the experience turned out to be much less terrifying than you had been led to believe by documentary . . .

Roodenko: Two things, one, I believe that all expreience tends to be less horrifying than one anticipates. I think a lot of things are just like a dentist's drill just before it makes contact. You are sitting there in a chair, and the thing is whirring, and you say, I will die. Then finally, it makes contact, and it is bad, but it is not as bad as your imagination built up. Then, the other thing is that it was more than just exposes, back in 1940 I worked for a year in Albany, Georgia for the Agriculture Department in an experiment station, and for a couple of weeks there was a chain gang with chains and literally the striped suits, and the things you see in cartoons nowadays, working on the roads just outside of the laboratory. So I knew

this for real. What I said about that nice liberal ignoring what you don't know about, I was horrified and yet I was absolutely at a loss for what to do about it . . .

Unidentified: You didn't have a striped suit?

Roodenko: No, no striped suits.

J.W.: Igal, the early CORE experiences and demonstrations were a little ahead of their time in the civil rights movement, It didn't bloom until the middle fifties. The time was just not right. Why was the time not right then?

Roodenko: I don't know, I suppose one can become scriptural about and say there is a season for everything and God in his own good time. I don't know. I think that what a lot of people said to us as we started out on this journey and after it,is that you kids are a bunch of beautiful idealists, but you don't have any idea about what the reality is about. I remember one man saying, absolutely sympathetic and sensitive to the problem, do you think that in two weeks of traveling, you can undo three centuries of body and economic slavery? If it was put to us that way, we would have said, no we are not going to undo it, but we could start the process toward the undoing, and the essence of what we had to say in the dozen or so meetings we had and all the stops we had through these four states was to say, here we have

the first step, the first tread on the ladder: the Irene Morgan decision. Here are all you students. You go to school in Virginia and live in Georgia and you go home on holidays, and do it. Start spreading this pattern of not putting up with it. With a minimum, you might spend a day or two in jail. It takes courage, and means setting up a whole legal structure of lawyers who can be contacted and support and so on.

J.H.: What kind of groups did you speak to?

Roodenko: Black colleges, black churches. We did stop at Black Mountain College, which was the one white institution we went to.

Felmet: And we spoke at a high school in Asheville. The thing I remember about that, I had never heard James Weldon Johnson's Negro National Anthem sung as beautifully as it was sung that day by a high school audience which was impressed by our presentation so much that the audience was virtually inspired.

J.H.: Did you speak to any interracial groups, or have any support from the YWCA's or the Southern Regional Council, or any southern based, interracial . . .

Roodenko: No.

J.H.: Did you try and get support in that way, and were unable to do it?

Roodenko: I don't know what the office was doing. It was mainly Bayard Rustin and George Houser who or-

ganized it, and what contacts they tried to make, I can not say. But I must say that at that time, the concept of civil disobedience was absolutely foreign to the American radical liberal experience. Absolutely foreign. I can go so far as to say that even in 1967, after we had so much civil disobedience when we were organizing a big anti-war march in New York City and a group of college students wanted to burn their draft cards and make that a part of the demonstration, SANE, and the whole big anti-war structure did not want this civil disobedience associated with it. They didn't absolutely forbid this, but they pushed the kids off to a corner of Central Park. This fear of civil disobedience was still so strong in '67 so you can imagine what it was like in '47. I don't want to minimize anyway the value of the more traditional ways of dealing with racial problems in the South, but it was just too much of a thing for them to accept. Now, whether actual contact was made with them, (other organizations) I don't know. Our approach was a very grassroots thing. We weren't going to, our sense was that we weren't going to deal with these big things on the top, we were going to go out and to the young male blacks particularly and say, this is the way it is to be done.

Unidentified: No white contacts anywhere?

Rood nko: We had the thing in reverse once. We came

down to Durham for one of the hearings after the whole thing was over, and we met some of the black law students and we would go out eating with them and went into some black restaurant in Durham, and they were very apprehensive and they put us into a little back room so that we couldn't be seen because that was illegal. I remember riding in a cab in Durham, and there were about six of us, and it seemed preconceived that the cabbie got lost. There was a very heavy intersection at six points or six corners there in the ghetto area, and heavy traffic there and he got stuck, and was acting like he couldn't do anything about it, and some kinda drunk black guy/came over and opened both doors, and said get out.

There was this black woman student and I sitting in the front, and three in the back, and he said,if any of us even look at one of your white women, you are ready to lynch us, and here you are riding through our part of town with black women. Catherine Johnson was the girl, and she was very outspoken, she yelled at him, you dumb nigger you don't know what these people are doing down here. They are fighting your battle, so get the hell out and shut the door, and he was totally abashed and left, and he went off.

Unidentified: Back in the twenties in sociology, the blacks and whites did eat together here in Chapel Hill.

Roodenko: I don't know about the twenties, but when I was here two years ago, I asked some of the people here in Chapel Hill to show me the place on the library steps where Eleanor Roosevelt sat having lunch with a black woman twenty-five years ago. I said if we radicals had any sense like the conservatives do, we would get together and put a bronze plaque there on the steps, and the people I asked didn't know anything about it. There are a lot of good things in our history that we ignore.

J.H.: Were there any women involved in the journey?

Roodenko: No. That was a deliberate decision that we didn't want to add another divisive element, and I don't know how we would think about it today, but the climate of opinion, the whole way of thinking is just completely different. I imagine it was probably wise at that time. I think it would be wise to have a sexually integrated project today.

J.W.: What was the followup to the project?

Roodenko: Nothing. We really hoped that slowly at first and then more and more students would start doing these things and breaking down the segregated seating pattern, but if there were any such, we never heard of it. We all went back to whatever our things were in Chicago or New York, and CORE limped along for a long time.

J.W.: What did all these groups that you spoke to,

did they not form, at the time that you were there, was there no attempt to get them to formulate plans, or was it merely inspirational, speeches . . .

Roodenko: Well, we tried to say, now here are the patterns, and if you are concerned about a better integrated society which is what we all believe in, here is the litigational and political efforts at this, which are legitimate, and we have to give them something to work on, and this was it. You can stand pleading for decency for a long time, and this can precipitate action, and this can bring out a lot of white elements in the community that will be supportive. I think that, in our audiences that were largely black, and listened to us with a great deal of pride and appreciation, but as if it was completely off on a different planet and had nothing to do with their own lives. Would you say that . . .

Felmet: Well, I wouldn't want to leave the implication that the journey was inefective . . .

Roodenko: No.

Felmet: It wasn't. I would put it this way. There wasn't a Negro in any of the four states we traveled in who isn't today aware that he can sit anywhere in the bus that he chooses. I am not saying that this is solely the result of what we did, but I feel that our contribution was significant in the climate that exists today in race relations in those four states.

J.H.: Do you see any direct lines of continuity between your activities and the black initiated southern civil rights movement, civil disobedience adopted by black students?

Roodenko: I can't prove it. I don't think there is any proof. Maybe there is some sociologist who can find some papers or documents that can prove it. I think that we started changing the climate. Let me think of an analogous situation: the first kids who burned draft cards or the first who refused to pay war taxes. The certainty in the country was that if you break the law, if you don't put your tax return in the mailbox by ten minutes to twelve on April 14th, then ten minutes after twelve the skies will open and an IRS agent will come down and get you; if you burn your draft card, if you think of burning your draft card. There was this famous FBI memo that J. Edgar Hoover sent out, that we want to create the feeling among these radicals that there is an FBI agent hiding behind every mailbox. In any kind of structured situation, the bulk of people really feel this, there is this terrible fear that if you break the law in any way, particularly the racial pattern, within seven minutes, the Klan is going to be there.

What we were doing, in effect was saying, now look, those things don't happen. The skies don't fall. In that sense, I think we created the mood, or opened up the mood

so that more and more people in their own way, whether they knew of our specific thing or not, felt somewhat more courageous or foolhardy to act on what they felt was right. So what the connection between us and Rosa Parks is, I don't know, and between her and the first sit-ins.

J.W.: Igal, of course, one of the principal participants in the Journey of Reconciliation was Bayard Rustin. Immediately following the Rosa Parks incident, Bayard was dispatched from New York, from the War Resisters League office as a representative of the War Resisters League to assist Dr. King in the boycott. I even heard one story about how Rustin talked King out of buying a gun during that period. Can you fill us in, since you were with the League at that time, on Rustin's involvement with King?

Roodinko: Not too specifically. I mentioned at the beginning that the World War II experience and Gandhi made us more open to the question of how we can apply Gandhian tecniques to the racial situation. So we were constantly looking for opportunities. Some years later when the first big March on Washington occurred, Bayard engineered /it/, partly because he was the only person whom the black organizations could trust, since he had no affiliation either with the Urban League or with the NAACP or the churches, the black churches. He was independent. We were constantly looking for these opportunities to engage in boycotts and public demonstrations against racist situations.

J.H.: Jerry, I'd like to go back and talk about the World War Two experience a bit. Is that alright?

J.W.: Yes.

J.H.: When you talked about the pacifists, you distinguished between your socially concerned pacifism and religious pacifism. Before World War Two began, were you a committed pacifist so that as soon as the war began, you knew that you had to come to terms somehow with conscription?

Roodenko: I don't think it was quite that simple. I had no formal religious training whatsoever, and I grew up in what would be called a humanist and vaguely socialist home.

J.H.: Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Roodenko: Yes, and it was just a matter of accident that I was born here and not in the Middle East. My parents were committed Zionists, and they had gone to the Middle East before World War I and planned to stay there, and then because all that country belonged to Turkey, when the First World War came along, they wanted to draft my daddy, so he didn't go to Canad , he came to the U.S. instead, and I was born shortly after that.

J.W.: He was a draft resister?

Roodinko: Oh, yes. It should be pointed out that a new generation of draft resisters comes along every three

or four years and they always act if they invented the thing. It's been around a long time.

Unidentified: I'm familiar with the First World War. I was in high school in 1917, I have a Quaker background, so I am familiar with pacifism.

Roodenko: I point out all over the country that an enormous number of people have one ancestor at least who came to the United States because they refused to serve in the English Army, the Russian Army, the Italian Army, the Swedish Army, the German Army, and that draft resistance is very central to the American experience and when people get up and start putting down draft dodgers as if it was some foreign crime, it is pure nonsense. There is no country in the world that has draft resistance as central to its experience as does the United States.

Yet, I didn't quite consider myself a pacifist in the complete term as I do now. I still thought in what I see now as superficial political maneuverings. I remember writing a paper at the outbreak of World War II in which I suggested that the pacifists dicker with the War Department and with the government, in which we would say we will cooperate with the war if they will integrate the Army. Looking back at it now, I see that this is pure nonsense. It is trying to mix things that didn't have anything to do with the realities of the situation. As I say, in the thirties I was away at school, and very much involved with

political action, helping organize the shoe workers in a little Pennsylvania town, and the anti-Hitler, anti-draft demonstrations, and boycotting silk stockings because they were made in Japan and Japan was raping China.

The Spanish Civil War — there I was ambivalent, pacifist in a way, but I was completely on the side of the government and against the fascist overthrow. I think I tried to do what a lot of well meaning people try to do nowadays, without making that absolute commitment to the thing; yes I am a pacifist, but. I know the Women's Strike for Peace had an enormous problem within itself at the time of the Six Day War in Israel. Until then they felt they were pacifists, and suddenly there was a war and their pacifism couldn't stand up to it.

J.H.: The Peace Movement then was very split, and most people who considered themselves part of the Peace Movement between World War I and World War II supported World War II.

Roodenko: Right.

Interesting. The anti-war groups which were not absolute pacifists fell apart and became very weakened. There was Fred Libby's group in Washington, the National Council for the Prevention of War, and he was into an amount of politicking with what were then isolationist Senators and Congressmen, and that thing fell apart. Women's International

/for Peace and Freedom/
League/ as great as it is now, did not take that great pacifist position.

Unidentified: The Fellowship of Reconciliation did hold their principles all the way through, didn't they?

Roodenko: Yes. The FOR and the WRL because we stayed absolutely pacifist, if anything, we grew, because at the outbreak of war, it meant that that big middle ground where people are ambivalent, simply wasn't there anymore. So people fell to one side into supporting the war, or fell into the other side of becoming absolutely committed pacifists. The groups that functioned within the middle and didn't have an absolutely pacifist position, lost a great deal.

I think, although I talk a great deal of ideology in politics and am fairly verbal, I think that people start with a hunch and spend a lot of time rationalizing the hunch, rather than the other way around. That is, the human being is an intuitive creature rather than a rational creature. We are rationalizing. Whatever it was, when the draft finally came along, I was working in Albany, Georgia at the time, and I had nobody to talk to, and I had this questionnaire to fill out and send back in ten days.

I'd sit staring at it night after night trying to add up the plusses and the minuses, am I or am I not a pacifist, trying to be very rational about it. What happened was that one night I would add up the plusses and minuses, and

I felt I had to be in the very front-line trenches against Hitler. The next night I would add them up and say, no, under no circumstances would I put on a gun and let someone else tell me to aim that gun. Regardless of what my head said, there was something else in me, which I will call conscience, which said under no circumstances can I put on the gun, the uniform, and point the gun. From then on, it was all down hill.

In contrast to that, I remember running into a professor of philosophy at the University of Jerusalem some years after that, a colleague of Martin Buber's. At one point in the evening I asked him whether he considered himself a pacifist, and he said, you know, I never really had to decide. I didn't say this to him, but here is a man whose function in society is to help young people think through the basic questions about what life is about, and the basic questions of life and death and organized warfare, he hadn't thought it through himself. You take a bunch of snotty eighteen year olds back in the United States, and the draft board says, you've got thirty days in which to make up your mind. Then they may change their mind, and they may do a bad job in thinking the thing through, but they establish some ground on which to stand and on which to function. I think this is important. This is particularly

important to bring up in intellectual and academic situations. The academic mind when it overreaches itself is trying to get more and more data on which to make a sensible decision. The gut part of the equation is forgotten. Just working above the surface of the water, you forget what is happening beneath the surface. What is happening beneath the surface is that you don't want to make the decision because you may have to face jail, you may have to make your life uncomfortable. Therefore, you spend a whole lifetime, you spend forty years gathering data.

J.H.: How many CO's were in jail during World War II, do you know?

Roodenko: There were about 15,000 draft violators in jail, and about half of them were Jehovah's Witnesses. They maintained they were ministers. They don't call themselves pacifists or conscientious objectors. Finally, the draft system, the government, came around to some accommodation. After World War II, they were not jailed as much. Then there was a fair number of what we would call technical violators, the kind of people whom I felt very superior to when I first went into jail. Here am I, conscientious objector, man of principle, and there are those draft dodgers. But one of the great enlightening experiences for me in jail, was that in a very few weeks of living with these draft dodgers, I began to see that the sharp line separating us

was a very snobby elitist, intellectual . . .

J.H.: Was there a class line between the two?

Roodenko: There was a class line in a sense . . .

J.H.: Poor people?

Roodenko: Exactly. Then, I began to realize that a healthy organism reacts to the draft in a healthy way and says no. Now, if you are middle-class and college trained and articulate, you say no with a twelve page statement to the Attorney General, but if you come from the wrong side of the tracks, then you dodge, which is what the experience of these kids was all their lives. They dodged the truant officer and the cop, and so on and so forth. From some abstract point of view, you can say that standing up and saying No openly had some greater impact on the social scene, but from a personal standpoint, any kind of resistance is justified. I think this is the essence of our draft counseling all throughout the sixties. A kid would come in, and we would say, yes you can go to Canada, yes you can get a CO, yes you can go underground, you can pretend you are gay, you can get a 4-F, you can do all of this. What I did/is this, these are the consequences, but you have got to find the best thing that is the most right for you.

J.H.: Can you talk about the experience of COs in jail during World War II, how they were treated?

J.W.: Could I go back a minute? There was something very important that happened during this era to the pacifist movement. I want to incorporate your question and ask a two-part question . . .

Unidentified: Before you ask that could you cut that off . . .

J.H.: Did you take any bus rides and which part of the bus did you sit on?

Felmet: I wasn't involved any more. When was the Jim Peck Freedom Ride into Alabama?

Roodenko: About '61.

Felmet: Almost that amount of time elapsed . . .

Rood nko: Almost fifteen years.

J.H.: What I wanted to know was, did you ride buses after that and did you sit where you were supposed to, or did you sit where you wanted to?

Felmet: I don't recall ever submitting to the mores with respect to that issue. I would have to search my memory to give you an answer to that question. I am satisfied that I did not have to make compromises. What, does that answer your question?

????: I wondered, after segregation was overturned, I wonder why, having been opposed to it, I wondered why I never realized I had the freedom to go and sit in a black waiting room. It never occurred to me that this was something I could do. If I had thought of it, I think I might have done it.

Felmet: Didn't segregation break down pretty quickly in this period, after 1947?

????: Not that I know of in 1947.

Charlotte Adams: Segregation break down in 1947?

Felmet: Yah.

Adams: No, I should say not:

????: Not in Chapel Hill.

Felmet: Uh, huh, oh.

Adams: 1947 was when you came to Chapel Hill on the bus?

Felmet: Yes.

J.W.: The question I started to ask you a minute ago, Igal, was a very complex one. After you got recognized as a conscientious objector, you went to the CO camp. While you were in the CO camp, something very important to the pacifist movement happened, and a bunch of you went to jail from the camps. What were the camps like? What about this big shift in the pacifist position in this period, and what happened in the prisons.

J.H.: What was it that turned you to the question of race at this point?

Roodenko: Well, race was before that.

J.H.: For the pacifist movement in general?

Roodenko: I thought you were talking about me personally. I was, like a lot of good folk, thinking of

the horror of racialism back in the thirties, when I was a kid. I want to alter one of the things you said. You said a whole group of people left the camps. It was not a whole group, there were ones, and twos, and threes. Each went by himself. The camps, to go back historically, the administration recognized that they were going to have a lot of CO's, and they didn't want to go through the terrible things that happened in World War I, when several dozen people were sentenced to death for refusing to participate. That whole period of the thirties, the anti-war movement, sort of modified and created a much more open situation. Whatever the reasons may be, they wanted a looser structure for dissidents, and when they set up the Selective Service System, wondering what to do with the CO's, they fell back on the very simple pattern. The Quakers and some other groups had work camps all through the twenties and thirties, in which largely middle-class white kids would go and spend their summers building a community center in some little Mexican village or working in Appalachia or in Algeria, or something. This was helping our poor brothers.

????: What were they called:

Roodenko: They were called work camps. Selective Service, and I think the President of Michigan State University was the original director of Selective Service, and a very decent guy, I think he had worked with the /American/ Friends/ Service Committee, set up this pattern of work camps.

But the guy died, and this was when Hershey was appointed. Hershey ran the thing for several decades. The thing that these people didn't understand, the Service Committee and the church groups that supported the camp program didn't understand, and this was the basic error, was that there is all the difference in the world between a voluntary program and an enforced program. When they tried to enforce this work camp system on the CO's they ran into an enormous amount of trouble, although large numbers accepted it. In the camps, they said they would ask the CO's to prove their sincerity by supporting themselves while they were in these camps, and they asked all of us to pay thirty dollars a month for our board and keep. The peace churches agreed if the young man couldn't supply this, they would ask his family, they would ask his church and finally, if they couldn't find the money elsewhere, the underwrote the program. They must have put $9,000,000 in this program in the course of World War II. Many of the camps worked, but there were, from the very beginning, dissidents. It started perhaps, or was highlighted by a group of Union Theological students, led by Dave Dellinger and George Houser and a few others, who refused to register in the very beginning, when the draft was signed, the day that people were asked to register. They were looked on as absolute freaks.

As we got deeper into the war, we began to realize--we being a very small number of less church types in the CO camps--that the camps were set up not because the government values conscience and respects it, but were set up because the government recognizes that the CO's were a bunch of troublemakers and dissidents, and even if they could force them into the army, they would be more trouble than they were worth, and the camp system was a means of getting us out of circulation.

They had rules that you could do your alternative service, but you had to be at least fifty miles away from any place you had ever lived in. So you wouldn't be a focus for anti-war activity of any kind. The other problem is that conscientious objection is pretty much of a middle class phenomenon. Here are people who are idealistic and dedicated and competent in one way or another, and they found themselves digging ditches. We didn't object to digging ditches per se, we objected to the tremendous waste of competence when there was a shortage. There were a lot of teachers who were CO's, and there were a lot of places in America that needed teachers and needed them badly. We weren't given anything in which we could put our efforts and our abilities. This kind of accentuated a growing dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the camp system.

The other thing that happened was that guys like Dellinger and Peck and others, who refused to have anything to do with conscription to begin with, went into the prisons, and then started a series of actions within prisons. The first was in Danbury, Connecticut, at the Federal priosn there, where a group of our people went on strike finally because of the racial segregation in the dining room. This was Connecticut, not North Carolina or Georgia. Finally, that was broken down. What was happening , you see, was that the heroes of the CO movement were all in prison and not in these camps.

I know what happened within me, and I think this is fairly typical. There is a great deal of apprehension because, I wasn't part of this crusade against this ultimate evil of Hitler, and there is this guilt feeling. Two, I wasn't serving in any other way. I was cutting brush down in the Eastern Shore of Maryland in a project, and later driving a truck on someproject in Colorado where the resident engineer said the only reason they are doing this thing was that they had free labor. If they didn't have our free labor, they wouldn't do it, it wouldn't be justified, the earthen dam we were building. There was the guilt feeling about not being part of our generation fighting Hitler, there was the frustration of our energies and abilities not being used. Then there

was the rationalization that the Selective Service System was not interested in recognizing conscience, but in keeping us out of circulation. Then, finally, I know I had the very conscious feeling that if the war suddenly ended and I hadn't made the prison scene, I would feel cheated.

Having come to that conclusion, I had to wait for the right moment. In this Colorado camp, there were a lot of troublemakers and we were running a contest with the camp administration. They were trying to get guys to leave and go in the army, and we were trying to get guys to leave and go into prison. We had a big score-board outside on the wall of the latrine, and we were always two or three ahead of them.* In the course of several months, about thirty guys broke, and refused to cooperate, left and didn't come back and were ultimately arrested and jailed. Finally, and it was a moment of--one has to wait for a moment of total ripeness, it isn't simply intellectualism, it is not simply a gut decision, it is something that you have to live with--when we got word that a group of our people and Dellinger was one of them at Lewisberg Penitentiary in Pennsylvania had gone on a hunger strike because of excessive mail censorship. This mail censorship can be really petty. They will let Playboy in and won't let the Peacemaker in, or something like that. That was it. I'd never met Dellinger, but

*Administration

he was one of my heroes. Murphy and Taylor in that Danbury thing were my heroes. Suddenly, that was the last straw. I went on a hunger strike and a work strike. In due time, in about ten days or two weeks, I was arrested, and charged, and released on bail. I went on trial and appeal, and I finally lost. I had to start serving a three year sentence. By this time, it was all down hill. The difficult moment was, am I or am I not a CO, which occurred years before. Then one thing follows another fairly easily.

J.H. Jerry, was that an answer to your question? What was the change in the pacifist movement.

J.W.: I think more significance is attached to it in historical accounts. It was the sort of real gut level political birth of the resistance movement, was when the first guy walked out of the camps. The letters he wrote about what was going on. For me, a younger person coming along and reading the history of the movement, a lot of importance was attached to it.

Roodenko: It is really Columbus' egg. He is sitting around with a bunch of people in Queen Isabella's court, and he is trying to sell his trip sailing to America, and he is being put down. They are saying it will never work, that it was impossible, so on. We hear all of these things about our projects. Finally he turns to someone and says, can you make an egg stand on its

head. Everyone tries, and no matter what they do, the egg just rolls over. He just taps it a little, so the bottom of the shell cracks and it stands. Everyone says, oh that is easy. He says, yah, but why didn't you think of it. I think the whole movement, civil-rights, anti-war, whatever we are talking about, the feminist movement, it is so obvious, once the first person does it. We were seething with the anti-conscription thing. Yet it never occurred to break the law. Once the person first did it, everyone tried to get on the me too bandwagon.

I think this is very important as a generalization of where we are now, and where we are to be from now on. Another way of saying it is that the problem we face now in 1974, is not that we need more information, what we need is more courage and imagination to act on what we know already.

Then things happen.

J.W.: What led you to escalate further shortly after you went to prison? You stopped eating for eight months, and that was another escalation. That story, and how . . .

Roodenko: I didn't get into jail because of all these appeals, and these other things, until a few months before Hiroshima in the spring of '45. Within

a few months, the war was over, and the United States government does not recognize the category of political prisoners. The attitude was that you broke the law, you had your trial, and now you have to do your time. But what was happening was that they were letting people out on parole. We began to see a pattern behind the parole. They would let out those who had organizational connections. Because there was agitation going on. There were people picketing in front of the White House. Jim Peck organized one where they went in prison uniforms and , in '45 or early '46, there was a demonstration with a coffin, getting ready to bury civil liberties.

There was a young Methodist minister named Roger Axford who came out of Danbury, and he decided he would go to the Attorney General's office, this was '46, and say, you ought to leave these people out of prison . . .

BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II

He /sort of worked his way up to some secretary or receptionist. They said, do you have an appointment, and he said, no. They said, the Attorney General is a very busy man. He said, that is alright, I will wait. They said, you don't understand, he is all booked up. No, I will wait. So he sat down and waited until five o'clock when they closed the office. They asked him to leave and he said, no, I will wait. Finally, they had to carry

him out and leave him at the doorstep at the Attorney General's private entrance. He sat there all night, and when they opened up the doors in the morning, he went back in, and this went on for three months. One or two other guys joined in. They camped out at his doorstep in sleeping bags. There was always someone there; one would occasionally go off for a bath, or a meal, or to sleep, but there was always a couple of them there. At first, they were beaten up a couple of times. Some marines came by and hurt them. Then some newspaper people came by, and the persistence of it was really beautiful. It reached the point, when the Attorney General would come to work and say good morning to Roger and Roger would say good morning to him. He didn't bother to go into the office anymore, he just stayed there on the doorstep. He tells me, one day Harry Truman was driving by and saw the sign and thumbed his nose at it. This kind of figures. (laughter).

His position was he was going to stay there until the last hungerstriker at Sandstone was released. There were eight of us on a hunger strike. The hunger strike had started some months before that. We had heard that there was to be a big demonstration in May for the release of all the draft cases, and we thought at Sandstone that it would be nice to have a hunger strike.

We were all publicity hounds, and we saw, we thought, that the story from Minnesota would support the story from Washington. As it turned out, guys at Ashland and Danbury, with no communication--ESP or something--got the same idea. What we didn't count on--was the ability for the media to get things mixed up--was that on the same day, some IRA prisoner in Ireland died after a prolonged hunger strike, and they had our hunger strike supposedly in support of him rather than in support of the demo in front of the White House. At any rate, the hunger strike started, and after about two weeks they started tube feeding us, and this became a very routine thing. During the course of the hunger strike, they started offering us parole. Here was Roger Axford starting his thing in front of the Justice Department. It became clear they wanted us out so they could get Roger off of the doorstep.

At first, because there we were non-cooperators, they wouldn't even let us apply for parole, then they said you can apply, and we said we didn't want too. Then, they tried to get people on the outside to offer to be our parole advisors. The warden called me in one day and showed me a letter from Norman Thomas offering to be my parole advisor. It in effect meant that if the government ever wanted to know where I was,

they knew whom to ask. Some of the eight hunger strikers who were really hurting in jail--it was a very heavy experience for them--one way or another got it. Accepted the thing. That didn't bother me, I take jail very easily, I am a very sedentary person and had a lot of reading to do. I can live with myself. I thought it was important for some of us to stay as long as possible, to keep Roger on the doorstep, to keep the agitation going. It was purely political. Finally, all of them had been released except me, and the deputy warden came in and said he had orders from Washington to release me. I asked him, was he asking me or telling me, and he said he was telling me I was going home.

J.W.: So you got thrown out of prison?

Roodenko: I got thrown out of prison.[laughter]

J.W.: How long were you . . .

Roodenko: It* was getting on to nine months.

J.W.: So they asked you to leave?

Roodenko: I gained weight on that. It was a pretty good diet they fed us. I lost most of my hair then.

J.H.: In your political activities in the thirties, before you went to jail, did you think of yourself as a socialist?

Roodenko: Yes, but socialism had a very strange meaning for me then. I don't call myself a socialist now . . .

*The fast

J.H.: Why is that?

Roodenko: Mainly because it doesn't mean very much anymore. There are too many varieties of socialists and there are a lot of bad things.

J.H.: Do you think it was the political climate of the thirties, or do you think it is you that has changed?

Roodenko: Well, there are a lot of people, including myself, who think of socialism in the same way my pious grandmother would think of paradise. You sort of get there, and then everything is nice. The hard questions of the interrelationships between individuals and government, the hard questions which have been raised by the Soviet and Cuban and Chinese and Algerian experience.

The kind of simplistic garbage that Buckley throws in his anti-socialist stuff, as if we weren't concerned with those types of questions. Anyone who isn't for his concept of the state must therefore be a total authoritarian and a Stalinist. That is pure bullshit. What does one mean by socialism? I look at my childhood vision of socialism, and I see I really was a nice little fascist, because my idea of socialism,while I was in high school,was that they, the anonymous masters of society, those who know everything, will give every child a test at a propitious moment to find out exactly what his or her aptitude is, and put that child in a little niche to grow up and live happily ever after. The freedom and

the unplannedness of the human spirit, that life is not living a routine or a program, but life is exploring, with a certain amount of mystery and uncertainty about it. Now I don't want to get off into a total personal trip, because obviously I am both a social creature as well as an individual, and there has to be a creative interrelationship. I don't know for instance, what does one do with anti-social behavior. We know the prisons don't work.

Simply to say, throw open the prisons, I know I wouldn't want to. I'd find some equivalent of prison. I might build a moat around my house, with poisonous snakes at the bottom of it, do something. The kind of thing that people say when they say socialist doesn't think of these things. I think that there is another false assumption in calling oneself a socialist, which is taking sides in what I see is an absolutely useless debate, the debate between those who say society makes the individual and those who say that the individual makes society. People argue this, and this is basically the difference between Freudianism and Marxism within the Western context. People who argue this argue as if there is an answer to the question. I say there is no answer to that question. I am both, and to say which comes first is like saying, is it more important to sleep than

to eat. Nonsense. I have to grow and I have to interact, and the way I grow is by interacting with the world around me, the society, and the way I have impact on the society around me is through my own growth, and my search.

J.W.: For what?

Roodenko: I don't know. For my own fulfillment? There are different ways of describing it.

J.W.: It sounds like you are an anarchist to me.

Adams: I wonder where Norman Thomas, did he have any influence at all, did he say anything that gave you any ideas . . .

Roodenko: When he offered to by my parole advisor?

Adams: Not only that . . .

Roodenko: Norman Thomas was one of my major prophets all the time I was growing up. It wasn't the word socialist that impressed, though at that time I did, but what was important about Norman Thomas was that he was such a whole and together person. The best about Norman Thomas was not the ideology of socialism, the best of Norman Thomas was the real clearheadedness of adressing himself to specific problems of the time, which is what makes Paul Goodman such a great person. Cutting ideological labels away: here is a problem, what are we going to do about it. I don't care what you call it, a capitalist solution, or a Christian one, or a socialist

one, or a Maoist one, now let's use our own best sense. and We have found again/again that if we put labels on our approaches to problems, that the labels don't let us communicate with each other anymore.

J.H.: But you are willing to use the label pacifism, and are willing to trace your whole life to the moment in which you adopted that word as what you were going to to be about and doing.

Roodenko: That is a label in itself . . .

J.H.: Did you see that, you don't see that as an ideological trap?

Roodenko: No, not quite. When I call myself a pacifist, and I mean non-violence, I see non-violence not only or primarily as an ideological thing, I see non-violence as a self-disciplinary tool. If I deny myself the right to impose my will or my sense of rightness on a particular problem, then I have to really find other ways of dealing with that problem. If I can't go and raise an army to fight Hitler or Nixon, then I have to find other ways of dealing with Nixonism. Non-violence to me is hardly anything more than the commitment of a fine watchmaker never to use a sixteen pound sledge in fixing a watch.

J.H.: It is not the answer to all hard questions facing society, an approach . . .

Roodenko: An approach, right.

J.W.: Do you think a lot of these things come out of

the anarchist school. You haven't told your early impression yet of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Roodenko: I don't think of them as anarchists. There is a side to anarchism which is appealing to me, but there is a side which is not. That is when it becomes ideological to me.

When the anarchist says destroy the state, and the goodness of people will come out, I think this is putting the cart before the horse. I think people have goodness and they also have evil, and I think the potential for both is in each of us. I think that the way you get rid of the heavy state is not by destroying it, but by functioning well socially and creatively, and then the need for the state falls away. If everyone on Mott Street where I live in New York would sweep th street in front of their own houses, then we wouldn't need the Department of Sanitation of the City of New York to come in and do it for us. If we dealt with problems of international cooperation, and I don't quite know how to do these things, then we wouldn't need a State Department, or a War Department to do it for us.

If we dealt with the problems of the bums on Bowery, and I live two blocks from the Bowery, and I am indignant that society lets them wallow in their own vomit, but I don't do anything about that indignation except feel righteous about it. The city comes along in a very poor way, full

of bureaucracy and red tape and in an indifference, and they put up a men's shelter and a women's shelter, and they put them up, and give them a pair of crutches, and they fall down when they are drunk, and somehow they manage. I am idealistic, and it doesn't seem to work somehow, and the city steps in and does it. To the degree, and one can put it in Christian terms or other terms, to the degree that I actually start living what I believe in, that I am not my brother's keeper but my brother's brother, or my sister's brother, to the degree that I start living that, then the state will wither away. Its functioning will become less and less necessary.

J.H.: When you look back over the things you have been involved in over your life, do you think of the project of your life as being personally satisfying? Are the turning points, the things you look back at with satisfaction, the turning points in you conception of morality, as opposed to looking back over the success of the movements that you have been involved in, at some sense of social progress? Do you see your approach to social problems as having been . . .

Roodenko: Justified?

J.H. Successful.

Roodenko: Not successful, but justified. I don't . . .

J.H.: In personal terms, or in the changes which

you and people like you . . .

Roodenko: I am pretty smug. I think it is true not only of me but I think it is true of most people that the things one regrets when one gets older are not the things one did, but the things one didn't do, all the opportunities one missed. I think I should have done more. I think not only should I have done more in some political context, but the only way one grows is by doing, the old John Dewey concept, that this is why your generation has an advantage. I mean, every generation has an advantage, you can sort of stand on the shoulders of the preceeding ones. The kinds of things kids do know, when the civil rights movement really got into Alabama and Mississippi in the early sixties, and I couldn't imagine myself having the courage to do that.

J.W. Now, or at that age?

Roodenko: Well, I sort of was past my Journey of Reconciliation. I sort of did my thing in '47. Here in Chapel Hill. Then I had gone back and become a printer, and the printshop was a marvelous excuse for not doing anything, because I was printing for nthe movement. I know in a historical perspective, we were being as courageous coming down to North Carolina in '47 as others were in going down to Alabama in '61, within its own context.

Adams: When the busdriver was asked if he would not allow people to ride where they pleased, and quoted the Supreme Court ruling, and said, I don't work for the Supreme Court lady, I work for North Carolina.

Roodenko: That's right. [laughter] I remember that.

J.W.: I don't want to open another whole long can of worms, but one thing, you in your life and in your times, the last few years it has been possible for you to become more radical in terms of your own homosexuality. We left this all out of your earlier experiences, jail and camp and the freedom rides in '47, but did this play any role at all.

Roodenko: Of course it did. I think I became aware of being gay when I was in high school, and it was the most horrible experience. I thought if I couldn't cure myself--that was the way I thought--that I'd commit suicide. I think that the awareness, the self-awareness, gave me such a sense of being an outsider, that the natural socializing qualities had to find a way of relating to the world, or otherwise it would have been the nuthouse or committing suicide. Being gay certainly made it easier to do time in prison. The sense of an all-male society is not difficult for me

with.
to live/ It took a great deal of the gain in the last few years to make it easier for me to come out. I was in my mid-twenties before I even came to terms with myself. I said, alright, you are not going to commit suicide, and this is you and this is what you have to live with, and this is what the world has to live with. I mean, that was an intellectual thing. The emotional thing was a lot more difficult.

Only within the context of the gay liberation movement of the last couple years have, has it been, possible, easier, to live within my own small circle of friends in the radical and peace movement, and within the world at large. It is still very awkward. When I am on tour, when I get into a situation like this, when I overhear, I overhear myself saying the things that I am saying, I have a certain sense of drama. Maybe I play things up a little to make things more interesting and dramatic. People said, wow, and I can sense this, wow, big hero, all the things they said. This has happened many times in the past, the question isn't asked. People have suggested indirectly that I must be a self-sacrificing saint, I gave up all the joys of a family and of raising children for the cause. Now, if someone asks me that pointblank, I would say, no that isn't it, I never had a family, because I

am not constituted to have one, I am gay, I never had any children, I never wanted any. Therefore, it is much easier for me to function this way. But I don't know what to do when I get this aura of approval based on a false assumption, that I have made this sacrifice. I don't know how to say, well, I'm just another guy, but my circumstances made it easier for me to do this. They don't know. To this date I don't know how to cope with this. How do I avoid being aggressive about it, the balance between being agressive about it and being reticent. I don't know about it, except I welcome a person putting it right to me like this.

I can say what I have to say.

Adams: Igal, when did Quakerism enter, or did it?

Roodenko: I had no contact with Quakers until I got to the CO camps in '43 . . .

Adams: You became a CO on your own?

Roodenko: Oh, yes.

J.W.: New York, and I thought everybody was Jewish.

Roodenko: The peace churches in setting up the camp system became a buffer between the radical pacifists and Selective Service. Anytime we wanted to take some action against Selective Service, the *Service Committee would be caught in the middle, they would suffer because they were getting it from both sides. There was a time when I was so angry with the Service Committee that I

*American Friends

used to say that only my vegetarianism kept me from eating two fried Quakers for breakfast. [laughter]

J.W.: I'm interested in how you may regard, for instance, the $2,000,000 food giveaway, the kidnapping, the sense that the SLA* was a relatively secret group, there was nothing for the white males of America to react against of this, essentially, this meant millions of food was given away, and more poor people fed, without right-wing social repercussions. I'm interested in what you think of this as regards an individual moral stand.

Roodenko: I don't think it is one way or the other. I think one can take social action without engaging in that kind of activity, without the moral righteousness.

J.W.: In that kind of activity, in the sense that it had a very, direct, pragmatic end in mind. It seems to me that this self-sacrifice is shooting at broader kinds of social . . .

Roodenko: I think that can be done without kidnapping.

The Panthers, for example-- I don't know whether they actually kidnapped or not.

But they discovered that every time they got into a confrontation with the state, even a verbal confrontation, it was the blacks

*Symbionese Liberation Army

who went to prison and to the morgue.

J.W.: There is a distinction between the SLA and the Panthers. Do you think that the Panthers were almost arrogantly visible, and that all the rest of the society could directly see and oppose, whereas the SLA has been sort of an invisible force someone, somewhere who picks up somebody.

Roodenko: I am even more opposed to that. When I start with the most important reality of our time, which I think I mentioned before you came, that the human being as a biological entity has two or three generations in which to learn to deal with conflict in a non-lethal manner, Positively, it means each of us must evolve to the point where we see ourselves relating to four billion human beings rapidly increasing, that we have to create some sense of community which involves everyone.

This comes from patience in politics, though it may lead to this greater conflict and confrontation, which is a greater breakdown in community. The extreme Marxist groups, the extreme revolutionary groups are playing the same kind of politics that Richard Nixon is playing. In effect saying, this world would be a better world if those bastards didn't exist. The only ones who can build community is us. Neither the great upholders of capitalism or the great upholders of Marxism can. Building

community is the most difficult thing. The reason I brought in the Panthers for comparison, is that after their period of great cockiness, that in places like Oakland, they saw it was not confronting the system, but seeing if they could get out of the here and now. Start building up community services among themselves. Feeding programs, and schooling programs, and local patrolling, their own policing, and so on. Taking some of the responsibility for their own lives in their own hands, instead of whining or screaming or petitioning against the status quo. I think the whole period of the sixties was like this. The general term for this alternative is consciousness raising, whether it is blacks, or chicanos, or women, or gays, or students, or whatever, in effect saying, wait a minute world. I count. I may not be any more important than Richard Nixon, but I am no less important. My needs are valid, and the consciousness raising frequently starts out by confrontation with the status quo, but if it is a healthy consciousness raising, they will say, OK, those bastards are going to remain bastards, but what are we going to do, what am I going to do right here. Whether Washington gives us a grant for a day care nursery or doesn't. This is where I think SLA is wrong. I think, and this is easy to say since

on hunger strikes, I have never gone hungry in my life. The rest of the world, where hunger is real. In America, the hunger is not that there isn't enough food, or that the food isn't available, but because we are such slobs as far as nutrition is concerned. It is impossible, too difficult for romantics like SLA to start working on a program of mutual health, so it is much easier to demand from the system to give us more, and if it wasn't choice cuts, then . . .

J.W.: I'm also interested in one of things, the life is too short to effectively carry out what you are trying to do, so Thoreau carried out his little thing with the state, and refused to pay taxes and went to jail for a while. then went off in seclusion. Considering that most us don't have the option of not paying taxes. Just the very concept of being able to change the whole environment that we are in. How do you feel about that?

Roodenko: That last part I feel a little shaky about, because I think on the one hand to start out with a determination to change the world is fairly much of a trap, because it is very easy to become self-righteous any way, and authoritarian, and very elitist, and lose sight of the real goal. This also is part of our Western

Judeo-Christian heritage, an Armegeddon that we have to hasten to, and from thereon it is smooth sailing. The biological instincts I have keep saying it is the here and now that is important, rather than that great big thing off in the future. How do we relate to growing food prices right now? That gets us into a lot of things. I was talking last night to Steve about negotiating with the University about taking a bit of land, a plot on Franklin right near the entrance to the University, and growing a half-acre of lettuces, and then when they are ready, selling them for a penny a piece in front of every market that sells scab lettuce. [laughter]

There are problems. You agree to sod over the area when you are through. You have leaflets and you have signs, and instead of having the traditional Christian-Marxist manner of admonishment, delivering a sermon, sinners, sinners, or apathy, or this same type of tone, and every time after the sermon the good Christians come up and say that was good sermon. The guys come up and say that was a very heavy rap you laid on us, and then everybody goes back to his own thing. We have to find forms of drama and joy in getting people involved. They are not really against, but there is a sort of lethargy, a continuum, a rutty way of living

from day to day to day, yes, the farmworkers are a very important thing, but my eating lettuce will not do anything right now. These kinds of things have sort of grown out of the last decade or so of activity. The Vietnam Veterans did a marvelous job of shaking people out of their ruts without antagonizing, although there was a certain amount of antagonism. I think if we approach problems of the here and now, we have done a great deal of it. The whole thing of day care, and of alternative schooling, and the alternative press. Everybody was going around talking about the kept media, and there was absolutely central to the American way of life that if the existing mousetraps don't work, then you build a better one. The underground press appeared in the last decade, and a lot of the papers are bad, and a lot of the papers are good, and most are mediocre, and there are supposedly ten million people who are reading the underground press every week, and what is more, the underground press has an enormous impact on the straight media. This is how, I don't know what the balance between the balanced society and free enterprise is.

The adherents of capitalism, the Buckleys, say that the reason capitalism has never succeeded is that we have never given it a fair chance, which is exactly what the Marxists say about the failures of Russia or China or

any other place else. This is what the Christians say, we never gave Christianity a real chance. A real Christian, this is the difference between ideology and reality, I presume. I'm not sure what the balance is, but my sense of democracy and my sense of people is that we spend less time splitting ideological hairs and more time getting on with the here and now, and things will begin to fall into place, and the balance will begin to achieve itself, or at least the extremes at both ends will begin sloughing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]