

Rick Sheviakov

November 05, 2020

SUMMARY

Rick Sheviakov was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1943. He grew up in Berkeley, California where he attended school through high school, graduating from Berkeley High in 1960. While attending San Francisco State College, he joined a CORE-led Freedom Ride from Nashville to Jackson, Mississippi. Rick was among the youngest Freedom Riders. He was arrested upon arrival at the Jackson Greyhound station and jailed at Parchman prison. He recounts his nearly 45 days in prison. After his release, he transferred to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, earning a Ph.D. in school psychology. He returned to California, working at the Marin County Office of Education from 1970 to 1999 when he retired. He lives with his wife in San Anselmo, California.

LOCATION

Recorded via Zoom teleconferencing system. Rich Sheviakov was at his home in San Anselmo, California. The interview team was in their separate homes throughout the San Francisco Bay Area during the “shelter in place” order due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTERVIEW TEAM

Lead: **Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña** ('22)

Instructor: **Howard Levin**, Director of Educational Innovation

Introductions

Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña

Hello Rick, my name is Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña and I'm in San Francisco. We are interviewing Rick Sheviakov on Zoom. Rick, as you know, we are here to record our conversation with you with the intention of publishing your story as part of Convent and Stuart Hall's Oral History Production class. We are recording video of this interview and intend to publish this on our school website, as well as other nonprofit education websites along with a text transcript. This means your story will be available once published to anyone via the Internet connection. If you agree, please say your name, the date, and if you agree to allow us to publish your story.

Rick Sheviakov

My name is Rick, last name is Sheviakov. The date is November 5 (2020). And yes I agree that you can publish this.

Jean-Luc

Can you give us a short one to two-minute overview of your whole life? Yeah, it's a big one. Just a quick one, a two-minute overview. Give us a summary of your life, the equivalent of one full paragraph. Start from birth and state your various geographic movements without stories.

Rick

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1943. My dad had been transferred and got a job in Vanport, Oregon, which is an island in the middle of the Columbia River. We were there for about a year and then he got a job teaching down here in the Bay Area. So at the age of about a year and a half, we moved to Berkeley. And that's where I stayed pretty much all the way through high school. I ended up graduating from Berkeley High in 1960. I went for two years to San Francisco State College because I had terrible grades in high school, I couldn't get in

anywhere else. After two years, I got good grades at State and transferred to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. While at State, this was in '61, I was a Freedom Rider in Mississippi, which we'll talk about some I assume. I stayed at Wisconsin for eight years ending up getting a bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. in school psychology. I knew that I was going to come back out here to the Bay Area. I applied for a job pretty much anywhere in California. I ended up getting a job in Marin County. I worked at Marin County Office of Education from 1970 to 1999 when I retired, And I've been retired ever since. I married in Wisconsin and divorced when I first moved to California. I married a second time here. I have a daughter who's now working up in Seattle.

Jean-Luc

Great nice yeah, thank you for that little summary.

Howard Levin

That was perfect. That was one of the best summaries I've ever heard.

Rick

I got an A-plus, huh?

Jean-Luc

A plus. Two thumbs up. All right, Rick. So let's take it back a little bit. What is the first memory you can remember, your very first?

Rick

My very first memory, I was under two – I'm unusual that way – we were living on Walnut Street in a little building in back of what was the REI Co-op – I forget what it is now, Cedar and Walnut. And I was standing on the toilet looking out the window over the toilet, looking at the Bay. At that point, it was a Safeway grocery store at Cedar and Walnut, or Cedar and Shattuck. I also have a memory of being on a piano stool, one of those twirling ones, and falling off. But we move up onto Euclid when I was two, so I know that was before two.

Jean-Luc

Thank you for that.

Rick

Most people don't remember that far back. I do.

Jean-Luc

That's impressive. Can you give me a little glimpse of what your childhood was like?

Rick

Childhood. Mainly It was myself, my mom, and my dad. As I mentioned to you the other day, I have an older sister, half-sister, who's 17 years older than I was. I remember her when we lived up on Euclid up above Codornices Park, she got married when I was three-years-old. So she kind of moved out and I was really related to her more as an older sister than as anything else. We never really had a brother–sister... she related to me as a brother–sister, but I related to her as an aunt more than anything else. But I do remember her wedding. And then she moved away. And so basically I was a single – we both were only children. I was raised on Euclid. My dad taught at San Francisco State College from the late 40s back on the old campus downtown, which is now a UC extension, up until his retirement in '62, I think, '64, '62, somewhere in there.

Jean-Luc

How was your dad like?

Rick

My dad was a school psychologist, which was always weird. The sad news for me is that he was an alcoholic as well. And so there was always this sort of absent father, where it took me a long time to realize why he wasn't there. But many times he was not present. Not physically, he was physically around, but he just wasn't around mentally. And it seemed to get worse as I got older. And I think that's why I was happier in elementary

school, much less happier in junior high. I suspect that's when his alcoholism got worse. Then as I say, in junior high and high school, I did not do well in school. It took me four years to get through two years of high school Latin. Failing it three times. My Latin teachers got to know me really, really well. I ended up with – my final grade was a D, which passed, and that allowed me to waive out of the foreign language requirement as an undergrad at Wisconsin because I got a D in my second year of high school Latin.

Jean-Luc

Nice.

Howard

Hey, Rick, I'm partly trying to demonstrate to the others what a backup person does. So here's my first backup question. You mentioned that it was weird that your father was a school psychologist.

Rick

He was a child psychologist.

Howard

Why did you describe that as weird?

Rick

Most people thought that he was therefore psychoanalyzing me. And he really wasn't, He was more absent than anything else. So it was strange because everybody would say, "Oh, your dad's a psychologist, he must he must know all about things." And he did, he was rather well-known, especially in the psychoanalytic community. But that's not how I knew him. Our, our daughter had a similar disconnect, because I was not a psychologist for her because I'm a psychologist also. And so her friends would say, "Oh, your dad must psychoanalyze you all the time." And no, that's not the case. We're dads, in good and bad ways all at once. Not professionally. In fact, I tried very hard not to psychoanalyze her, whatever that means. Psychologists are supposed to be mind readers. We're not.

Jean-Luc

Do you think that your relationship with your dad kind of... do you think that improved over time?

Rick

It got better towards the end after he retired. I think I got some distance. I think I was able to let go of some of my depression around his alcoholism. And he and I had a couple of really interesting conversations as I was in graduate school because he was a full-on Freudian psychologist, and I was a full-on behaviorist. And we had some very interesting discussions about how we would approach – we both focused on children – how we would focus on a child and what would be our approach in dealing with a child. And it ended up that while we came at it from very different theoretical points of view, what we would actually do with that child was very similar. And that was kind of nice.

Jean-Luc

How do you think your parents... did they have certain beliefs?

Rick

Absolutely, absolutely. My dad, as I told you the other day, both my parents came from Russia, they were raised in Russia under the Tsar. My dad was in the White Army, and he was a machine gunner fighting the Bolsheviks, the Red Army. He was captured. Strong, strong. They both came from fairly well-off families. My father's father was a professor at University of St. Petersburg. And my mom's father was a dentist, and in those days, dentists could be full-on doctors, and he ran a hospital in Irkutsk in Siberia. So they were well educated but very progressive. They came to this country with basically no money, but very, very few prejudices. For example, when my parents got married in the '30s, Lead Belly sang at the party at their apartment. Lead Belly had just come up from the South and was just sort of getting known in Greenwich Village, and they lived in the Village. But there's this long history of lefty labor politics that ran through my family. Friends of all sorts of persuasions. One of the jokes was that we knew so many Jews that I was an honorary Jew even though we

were not Jewish. We were not religious at all. My parents in Russia, religion was a state religion, you had to go to church, and confess each year if you wanted to be in school. It was a farce. It was a joke, but they did. So when they left Russia, they left religion, and that's pretty much how I was raised, is not religious at all.

Jean-Luc

Do you think that through their beliefs, that's how you came up with wanting to do something about some of the segregation that was going on?

Rick

Yeah. Clearly, yeah, there was a strong morality. You're also dealing with a time of culture that was, at least for me, soon after the Second World War, the Nuremberg trials, the incredible reaction to the rise of Nazism, and – how can I put it the – the awareness of what Nazism and how that needed to be fought and guarded against. Very, very strong. We had friends who had tattoos on their arms, who had escaped or had been freed, more freed than escaped. It was a strong tradition. My father was involved in early labor organizations. His sister ended up working for the US Army as a translator and as a result needed security clearance. And so the FBI would come and talk to my father. And they were very interested in a lot of the labor organizations, which under Hoover were very suspect you did not belong to a labor organization. So there was that long, long history within the family.

Jean-Luc

How did your neighborhood cooperate with different people of color?

Rick

That's interesting about my neighborhood. I was raised up above Codornices Park, halfway up the hills of Berkeley. And in the 50s, Berkeley was very, very segregated. There were real racial lines with Sacramento Street and West, certainly down around San Pablo being pretty much all black. And then, as you moved up through the foothills, you had gradual whitening, if you will, but certainly people of color, Asians and Hispanics. And then he got into the hills, mostly white, there were very, very few Asians. There were a couple of Asian kids in my elementary school class, including one family who I found out later had spent time in an internment camp because they were Japanese Americans. I did not know that at the time, I was just a fourth grader, what did I know about internment camps? But I found out later, yeah, he had spent some time in our camps. And its that awareness that there were in fact the camps. So that was an issue.

Jean-Luc

Do you think your that awareness of inequality in the United States, growing up in this area that made you kind of aware of what was going?

Rick

Yeah, I think so. And then as I was saying, the other day, I read Martin Luther King's book. Actually, I heard Martin Luther King speak when I was a junior in high school. And then, between my freshman and sophomore years, in the summer of '61, I read his book *Stride Toward Freedom* on the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and I realized that I had no real direct experience with Jim Crow and that I wanted to see it, to sort of feel it. And then as I thought about it, I realized I would not be able to stand by and not do something. And that was really the motivation for calling CORE.

Jean-Luc

When you were in Berkeley High, in the little autobiography that you wrote, you said that many social clubs had racial lines. Go more in-depth into that.

Rick

There were social clubs and I was aware of them. But I was so much of a non-person in high school – and I think it was depression over my dad's alcoholism as I look back at it – that I really was... Berkeley High was this high school of 3000 students. That's a huge high school. The Berkeley auditorium was our high school auditorium and it took all of us, we could fill it. But there were clubs and I knew some kids who were in the clubs, and there was a party scene around that. But I wasn't close friends with them. My social network was

basically, I was a music major in high school. I took band, I took orchestra, I took a year of harmony, I took a year of history of music. I was in concert band, theater band, I mean theater, orchestra. All of that stuff. And that's what got me into State because in those days to get into State College, you needed 15 A's and B's. Well, I had 15 A's in music, and C's, and everything else. And then D's and F's in Latin. Now it would be Community College.

Howard

Rick, before you move beyond high school, could you say a little bit about the, describe the immediate neighborhood you lived in Berkeley, and in particular, talk a little bit about the racial and ethnic composition of the community and the school?

Rick

Hillside Elementary was pretty much all white, a couple of Asians, Japanese and I think one or two Chinese. But basically, it was all white. It was just north of campus. And it really picked up that whole north of campus vibe. So that was pretty much all white. The neighborhood was all white. My parents had a vacant lot next door to them and they built a little cottage on that lot and rented it out as a rental. And we rented it to what we think is the first black person who lived in the hills. We're not positive. But we got some gas for it and mailboxes got vandalized, that kind of stuff. That was pretty much it. Then I hit what was then Garfield Junior High, which is now Martin Luther King, and that was my first experience with any sort of multiracial other kid. We had multiracial people come to the house, my folks had a lot of African Americans who were friends, but none of my peers, none of my friends. But Junior High was my first experience. And that was fine, except I was not happy in junior high anyway, so that made less of a difference. But that's when I started in band and met a lot of kids because band is a great leveler, that way, great equalizer. And then Berkeley High was one high school for the entire community, and there was this massive influx. It was fine with me. For others, it was not so fine, it's my understanding. I had no troubles personally having friends across racial lines. But there were very clear lines.

Getting back to those social clubs, the social clubs were pretty much – the white ones were the hill white kids. And the African Americans – in those days they'd be Negroes – pretty much hung out in Independence Park, between City Hall and the high school. And that's where a lot of smokers were, that's where a lot of shop kids were. Berkeley High in those days had auto shop, we had a daily newspaper that taught linotype to high school kids, so they can come out with a skill. I think those are all probably long gone now, sadly, really sadly. But again, the racism was subtle. I was telling Jean-Luc the other day, as a senior, I buddied up with a friend, with a fellow who was black. He was a transfer student, he transferred to Berkeley High as a junior from Washington. And because he was black, he goes into the counselor for his orientation getting signed up for classes and the counselor said he tried to get him into the shop classes. He said he'd be happier in the shop classes. Because he was black, right? He's coming from Washington, give me a break. You know, that just did not make sense. And then later – his mom had graduated from the University of Chicago with her doctorate there – he wanted to go to Chicago and the head counselor refused to write a letter of recommendation for a black student to go to the University of Chicago. So the racism was there, but it was, it was a much more subtle thing in the '50s. Much were [unclear phrase], you had to know people who then told you the stories. Which in many ways it's kind of like today, those stories are still not told. We're now finding out because of the police, some of those stories, but a lot of the other stuff is not coming out.

Jean-Luc

Going back to your...

Rick

Yeah, you want to go back to school.

Jean-Luc

I will get there, I promise. But going back, how did it make you feel when your friend was treated differently as yourself?

Rick

You know, it's interesting. A lot of those stories. I didn't hear about it until afterward. He was just my friend, my buddy. We survived through an awful, awful year of high school physics with just a terrible teacher. Oh, my God, he was bad. Frank did better in that class than I did. I think I ended up with a C and Frank I'm sure got a B or an A. He ended up being an honor student, by the way, after the counselor tried to get him into shop classes. He ended up with honors English and some other stuff. But a lot of that stuff – our relationship was not about race. It was about being buddies. And so race was, it was there, there was an awareness. But it wasn't that – for me at least, I can't speak for him – but for me, it was, yeah, I was aware of it. I didn't like it. But it was like, "Well, that's what it is, and it's what Frank has to deal with, and that's too bad, but he's dealing with it. And he's dealing with it very well." Yeah. One of the – we're going to get to it a bit, I think – but one of the interesting things about the Civil Rights Movement up through the '50s, the dominant feeling, thinking about the racial stuff that was going on as well, "That's just the way it is." And the Civil Rights Movement really challenged that, starting with the sit-ins in the lunch counters, then the Freedom Rides and other stuff. That was the major challenge, it was, "Well, that's just the way it is." And we as the kids were saying, "No, it doesn't have to be and we're gonna do something about it."

Jean-Luc

That's awesome. Yeah. I know you were describing a little bit about what was going on with Frank. Is there a specific story that you remember that you would like to share about him when you were with him? Is there a specific memory?

Rick

Oh, God, this is hilarious. We went in 1959, he and I went to the Monterey Jazz Festival together. This was I think, the second jazz festival that happened. This is real early. We wanted to hear the Modern Jazz Quartet. My parents had two cars, we took one of them down to Monterey and stayed/slept on a porch of a friend of my folks in Prunedale, I think that is where they were. Did the Jazz Festival, had a good time. We came back. And as young dumb kids, we ran out of gas coming back home. I don't even remember how we ended up getting home or getting gas. But I remember running out of gas on 101 somewhere south of San Jose. It was just like, "How dumb can you be, you run out of gas on the way home from the Monterey Jazz Festival?"

Jean-Luc

That's awesome. So it was like you guys trying to figure out, "What do we do now? We ran out of gas?"

Rick

Yeah and this is before cell phones. You know, there was no racial quality to that. It was, "Here's two dumb high school kids who ran out of gas."

Jean-Luc

That's awesome. Can you explain... You said that in 1959 when you're in high school that you heard MLK speak, right. How was that? What did you feel? Was there something memorable that you remember while hearing him talk?

Rick

No, not really. It was down in Asilomar. It was part of an AFC, American Friends Service Committee Youth Conference. As a junior, I'd taken a class in high school on semantics as a part of an English requirement. And I loved it and the teacher was really, really good. In fact, I got one of my better academic grades, I got a B in an academic solid, which is unusual for me. So she sort of turned me on to the AFC, to the Youth Program, and I went down there. And I just remember hearing him and just hearing about this – his speech was basically about the Montgomery Boycott. And it was just like, "Wow, this is really interesting. This is kind of different. This is unique." And, you know, I'm so happy they did it. Later, I found out a whole lot more about it. But it was just opening up to a possibility that whole thing of, "That's the way it is, " didn't have to be.

Jean-Luc

So that feeling that you can change what the norm is that kind of really pushed you to want to keep on going. That's awesome. So did that feeling that you had... While you were in college, you said that you had like two

options, that you could fly back to the Bay.

Rick

Yeah. Yeah. So my dad was teaching at Teachers College Columbia for the summer, and they were flying back to the Bay Area. And I was either going to fly back with them or since I had read *Stride Toward Freedom* during the summer, I thought, gee, I really don't know anything. I don't have any direct experience of what Jim Crow is like, being a Northern white." So I thought well, I'll go down and take the bus. I'll take the bus to the South to see it, just to make it real, because really it was academic it was distant.

Howard

Quickly, just make sure you're clear about exactly what timeframe you're talking about right now.

Rick

This would be the summer of '61. This would be June, July. June is when I read about it in '61. And then in mid-July is when I started the Freedom Ride thing. That's the time period I'm talking about right now, July '61, early July '61. The more I thought about it, I said, you know, I'm not going to be able to simply witness, I'm not going to be able to stand by. Again, Nuremberg is a big piece of that thinking, "I'm not going to be able to stand by and not do something. I'm going to go down there, and it's just going to make me so angry to see this, that I'll have to do something." And at that point, this is when the bus was burned at Aniston, there was a lot of violence going on. And I thought if I do that some local rednecks are going to come in and just beat the tar out of me, and that's probably not a good thing to do for me. At least I'm going to get arrested, at the very least I'm going to get arrested for being in the wrong waiting room and doing whatever it is that I thought I might do. So that's when I called CORE, we had a national office in New York City, and said, I might as well get a lawyer to have some backup. So I called CORE, I said, I'm going to be going in the South and I think I want to be a Freedom Rider. Because I knew I'd get some support, I'd get some backup, some people behind me, so to speak, some witnesses to whatever is going to happen to me.

And so I went down and was interviewed by Jim Farmer and probably Jim Peck, I'm not sure, there were two fellows. And that was on, I believe it was a Tuesday. Thursday, I was told, "Okay, we'll accept you as a Freedom Rider. Get on a bus," it was either Friday or something like that, "and go to Nashville and get some training." And on a Saturday, I was arrested in Jackson. That fast. I was in the Jackson waiting room for probably a minute, minute and a half before I was arrested. There's a whole bunch of stuff around that. We called ahead to tell them we were coming, but we were non-violent. And so they were there waiting for us. I was at the tail end of the Freedom Rides. Of the 430 or something who were arrested in Jackson, I was probably the late 380s, 390s. They knew what the score was. It was like, "Yeah, here's another load. Well, we'll send them off to Parchman."

Jean-Luc

They just kept on coming.

Rick

That was the whole goal, from CORE's perspective. My goal was I knew I had to do something CORE's goal and SNCC was to change the Kennedys. That was really the focus was to get national publicity down there because the Kennedys were refusing to implement the Supreme Court decision integrating the waiting rooms in interstate travel. And they were sort of pussyfooting around.

Jean-Luc

Can you – so I'm just still trying to understand – what led you to want to do this? Can you explain where this feeling of "I have to do this," and "we can change" come from?

Rick

It was kind of, as I said, I just realized this is so unfair. I realized, you know, also that it was, as I said, I was a year out of high school. And my friend Frank had just graduated from high school and had been accepted at Chicago. And I realized that amongst other things with Jim Crow, if Frank and I traveled together, as we had got done to the Monterey Jazz Festival, we could not travel together in the South. That's an infringement on my

rights, let alone his because it would be my rights to travel with who I wanted to travel with. And it was just like this is just wrong. How can you not see that?

Jean-Luc

Right. So that relationship and seeing what you were able to do, but what he wasn't able to do that was a big force.

Rick

Yeah.

Jean-Luc

And so when you picked up the phone for CORE and saying okay, I'm going to do this, how was the process to get in? What did they require?

Rick

Minimal. They were so happy for bodies to go down, I think their main concern, there were two main concerns they had. They wanted to make sure that – in those days if you were under 21 – you could not be younger than 18. And if you were between 18 and 21, you had to have your parents' permission. So the first concern was, will your parents agree, will they sign permission for you to go? And I said, "Okay," they did. They were reluctant, not reluctant, they were scared, that's probably more accurate, but proud. But the other one that they had was they were very concerned that they did not want anybody going down who was a communist, because the whole red-baiting that was going on in the South, that "all the Freedom Riders, all the civil rights people, they were nothing but communist agitators." And so they were really wanting to be very clear that I was not a communist. And once they knew that my parents were in sport and that I was committed to nonviolence, they were fine with it. That was the basic issue. That was it.

Howard

Hey, Rick, can you take yourself back to that moment when you were talking to your parents and trying to get their permission? Can you kind of summon up that – whether it was a minute or five minutes or an hour – what was that conversation like?

Rick

Ah boy. I don't remember it much. There really was not a – how can I put it? I think and so I can't do much more than that – I think it was a fairly short conversation. It was like, "Oh, well, have you thought about it?" Yeah. "Is it dangerous?" And I explained to them that I thought probably not, because, at that stage, Mississippi had decided to fight the Freedom Movement, legally, not with the mobs. So it was really a pack the jails thing rather than go down and get hit by the dogs and the fire hoses. That was more Alabama, Alabama was much more into the violence. And that backfired on Alabama and Mississippi decided, "Okay, we're not going to do that. We're going to do it legally instead." Yeah, they were concerned. They knew the South, they had been in the South, they knew what the South was like. I think, you know, they were appropriately worried. And they were proud, clearly that, and very supportive.

One of the things that my dad did is he then wrote a, did a mimeograph – this is back in the old days when he had mimeos – he did a mimeographed letter to all our friends, telling them what I had done, or what I was doing, what I had done, and urging them to write to the Kennedys to change the policy because that's really where the pressure was. And a lot of folks did. There were letters. In fact, I still have the letter that the White House sent back acknowledging my dad's letter. It was basically, "Thank you very much for your input. Goodbye."

Jean-Luc

Rick, do you think you could show us that letter? Do you still have it?

Rick

No. But because I gave it to the Civil Rights Museum in Jackson. They have it. I have a scan somewhere. Basically, it's on White House stationery, a little five by seven little half sheet and just says, "Dear Mr.

Sheviakov. Thank you very much for your letter, we'll take it into account. Sincerely yours." It was minimal. But eventually, they did change. That happened – I was arrested at the end of July, I think the feds – the Interstate Commerce Commission, which is really who had to do the rules – I think that happened in October, is when the Interstate Commerce Commission said the waiting rooms had to open. And that's what did it.

Jean-Luc

So the process from assigning to court to go on the freedom bus, it didn't take that long then?

Rick

It really didn't, as I was saying, it was less than a week from the initial phone call to CORE to being arrested. I mean, bam! It was the end of the summer, my parents were getting ready to fly back to San Francisco. So it all kind of came together.

Jean-Luc

Could you tell us what it was like, you know, the first time when you got on the bus when you got on the Freedom Bus, what was it like?

Rick

Realize it was not the Freedom Bus, it was a regular Greyhound bus. And there was only – let me think about it – I think two or three of us came down from New York. We were joined by some others when we hit Nashville. We did our training in Nashville. And the training in Nashville was, I think start to finish was maybe like 12 hours. It was not lengthy. Believe me, it was not lengthy. It was not extensive because it didn't need to be. Scripted is probably too strong a word but close to it. The whole situation was well laid out. And it was known what was going to happen at every step of the way. We met up – we hooked up with some others, interesting people. And then from Nashville to Jackson, we were again on a regular Greyhound bus. And at that point, the buses themselves were already integrated, the interstate buses. It was the waiting rooms that were not. The Interstate Commerce Commission had implemented the Supreme Court decision for the buses, for the transportation, but not the waiting rooms. And that was the push that we're working on. Let me think about this. There were probably 12 of us who went down as a group. Two ended up not being arrested. One was arrested but turned loose by the judge. Interesting stories there. And then the rest of us went to jail. We were convicted.

Jean-Luc

Could you go back and talk about what was that like in the 12 hours of training? What did you learn?

Rick

Not a whole lot. I barely remember it. There was some role-playing, there was some lecturing of the summation, for lack of a better word, was walking a picket line at a local grocery store. The students at Nashville, and really the Nashville students, Diane (Nash) and a whole bunch of other great, great people, were the heart and soul as to why the Freedom Rides continued on after the violence in Alabama. They had already fought the lunch counters and won and integrated the lunch counters in Nashville. So the next line of attack was hiring. So we were picketing a local grocery store so that they would hire more Negroes, more blacks. I have a real problem with the language of what we call racial people, people of color, and we can talk about that later if you want but it's very perplexing. I have a real problem with it.

So we're walking the picket line and being nonviolent and some local high school toughs, whites, came by and started cat-calling and harassing us. They threw eggs at us. And one fellow pulled a knife, he stood in the line as we were walking and stood in front of me, he pulled a knife so that if I walked straight ahead, I would walk into the knife. He had the blade open, it was about stomach level. They had spat on us, they had thrown eggs at us. And we ignored it. And I just walked around them. At that point, things were starting to get a little tense. And there was one of our trainers who was off on the side who was sort of supervising us, honchoing, etc, etc. And so as things started to boil up, he sort of called out to one of these tough guys – they came in hot rods, and they had white t-shirts, rolled up sleeves, cigarettes in the sleeves. You sort of think of the Marlon Brando types, whatever your stereotype is. So he called out to one of them and he said, "Hey, Larry, what kind of a mill do you have on that rod of yours?" I have to translate, that's '50s slang. What kind of an engine do you have in your hot rod? And the guy says, "Oh, I got a..." whatever he said it was. And by hooking up with him, by

establishing a connection, talking about hot rods, the emotion and the violence went down, and they went away. It reminds me there's a poem that I had heard somewhere with the friends, Edwin Markham did it, I think he's from San Jose. "He drew a circle that shut me out- Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle and took him In!" And that is the essence of nonviolence. That really is what it's about. I am missing that in some of today's stuff. I'm really missing that. I'm not seeing the nonviolence. And nonviolence is absolutely the way you're going to get some changes. That's a long way from your prompt, but I went down a little bird walk. Sorry.

Howard

No, that was wonderful. Thank you.

Jean-Luc

That was great. Really awesome. Thanks, Rick. It's interesting how in the protest, there's a lot of tension, but when your leader started talking about the hot rod, it decreased. So what were your thoughts on that when you first saw that, this big mob, and then it just went away?

Rick

It wasn't a big mob, there were five or six punks, and we probably outnumbered them actually because there were 15 or so of us. I don't know. I don't remember. Sorry.

Jean-Luc

So when you got on the bus, could you give us a visual map when you got in, what did it look like?

Rick

It looked like a bus. There was another Freedom Rider – you got to remember, I am a let's see, I just finished my freshman year in college and I'm a male, and I'm looking at this very attractive female. Gee, I wonder where my head was? And the other part of this and why there's so little memory, if you will, is we got on the bus, my memory is like 11 o'clock at night. And we slept until the morning when we got into Jackson, and we were arrested. We slept on the bus. It was an all-night bus ride, it was a red-eye. So there's not a whole lot, there's was not a whole lot of attention other than I remember being very interested in chatting up this other Freedom Rider.

Jean-Luc

What type of conversations did you have?

Rick

I don't remember. What does a freshman inexperienced guy trying to get close to a gal do? Not a whole lot. He's pretty inept.

Jean-Luc

I know what you mean. It's tough.

Rick

They are all thumbs.

Jean-Luc

Who were the others on the bus? Could you describe them?

Rick

Others on the bus. Interesting crew. A fella who ended up being my cellmate, my roommate, was a special-effects guy for television (Byron Baer). He had been a student at Cornell and then worked Off-Broadway in theater, and in television. And amongst other things, his job was in a movie, he was the one who made when the machine gun raked across a car, he was the one that made it look like the bullets were actually penetrating the side of the car. Or he did commercials. He talked about doing a commercial, I think for Comet, where the Comet was supposed to clean the stain in the sink. He's the one who made the stain go away even though it

didn't. That was his job, it was to sort of fake commercials. But a very progressive guy, a very inventive guy. He was kind of a junior engineer. He was the one who ended up sneaking the radio into prison, into Parchman. He also snuck in a whole bunch of other stuff. We can talk about that later if you want. Other riders. There was We-jo (Widjonarko Tjokroadisumarto), who was an exchange student from the University of Washington. His father was the former ambassador from Indonesia to Pakistan. He was one of the ones who could not be arrested. We're convinced the FBI stepped in and just made it, "Nope, you're not going to touch him." Which to us spoke as to what kind of power the FBI and the feds really had in the South.

There was Norma Wagner, who was blind, full-on, white-caned blind. She also was not arrested. I think they didn't know what they were going to do with her. And she couldn't tell which was the wrong waiting room anyway because she couldn't see. There was a fellow (Hilmar Ehrenfreid Pabel), a writer from Quick Magazine, which was comparable to Look, and he was from Germany, an interesting guy. There was Judith (Judith Norene Scroggins), who was the gal I was pursuing, for lack of a better word. Let's see who else was on the bus. A black guy... I love these senior moments. I'm blanking on the names, I have to pull the list up. There were about three, four other people. And we were all arrested together. We were basically an all-white group except for We-jo, who was Indonesian and they couldn't figure out what he was or wasn't. He ended up... [image, [Ten Freedom Riders Challenge the Colored Only Waiting Room in Jackson, Mississippi](#), July 29, 1961]. Yeah. Okay, that helps. That's from the book Breach of Peace, right?

Howard

I'm not sure. I'm not sure where it comes from.

Rick

Yeah, I think it's from Breach of Peace. I'm pretty sure that's what it is. I can go get the book if you want. I have it fairly handy.

Howard

That's okay. I just thought that seeing the faces might give you some reminder. I will. Again, I'll cut out my voice, but at some point, we're going to ask you about your mug shot, but we'll do that later.

Rick

The one in the center, 21256, that's my cellmate Byron who snuck in the radio. And you can see his cheeks are kind of puffed out because he had stuff stuck in his cheeks. It was quite hilarious. His son and daughter were quite intrigued by that. We-jo didn't even get a mug shot. They couldn't figure out if he was black or white since he was Indonesian. So he kept going back and forth across the two waiting rooms and he couldn't get arrested because they didn't know which one he shouldn't be in. Plus, I have to say, being diplomatically connected through his dad, the FBI had to be involved, had to be involved. So that was part of it also. But yeah, it was fairly quick. The whole process was, as I say, I think a Tuesday I was contemplating, I think I called CORE on a Tuesday. And I think on Saturday I was arrested. It was wham bam. Yeah. I can't say a whole lot about it, because it was so fast.

Jean-Luc

So when you went to Jackson, were you ever scared of the backlash from white segregationists?

Rick

Not really? Again, it was so well – what's the word, scripted is not the right word. It had happened so many times, that it was like routine. Really. I think there were maybe three or four segregationists in the bus station. But the word had gotten out from up on high in Mississippi. Let me back up to this. After the violence in Alabama, which really was pretty hellacious and was very embarrassing to this country and really bad. It was all over the news. The Civil Rights Movement really benefited from the nightly news. This was the first time a lot of civil rights stuff got televised into everybody's living room at six o'clock on the nightly news. So that's what forced Kennedy to send in the National Guard for protection. And in that process – Kennedy was barely elected and part of why he was elected is because the South at that time was Democratic. The Dixiecrats, who really were very conservative, but they were Democrats, because it goes back to the fact that Lincoln was Republican, and they just were going to do anything but be a Republican, so they're going to be a Democrat.

So there was a backdoor deal made between Kennedy and I think Senator Eastland, who was the senator from Mississippi, which was, "As long as there's no violence which embarrasses the Kennedy administration, you can do whatever you want in Mississippi, just no violence."

So the word came down, fight it legally, which is what happened. So the National Guard protected the Freedom Riders into Jackson and then once they hit Jackson, everybody was arrested, very quietly, very civilly, very politely, if you will. Officer Ray came. [momentary drop in recording] "I order you to move on. Do you understand the order? Did you hear the order? Do you understand the order? Do you refuse the order?" Yes, yes, yes. "You're under arrest." That's it. And I remember, they've already had 200 to 300 other folks come through. So it was really routine by the time I was there. So there was really not much. And that continued all the way on through my experience. Being at the tail end was a very different experience.

Jean-Luc

When you arrived in Jackson, was there a good amount of Freedom Riders who were already there?

Rick

Okay, let me back up a little bit to that. So a breach of the peace is a misdemeanor. It's disturbing the peace. The initial Freedom Riders very early on were given short sentences thinking that would discourage them. But SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and CORE said, "We'll just send more people to pack the jails. If they're going to fight it legally, we'll pack the jails." And that had been the strategy in Montgomery and throughout the South. What the folks in Jackson did is simply escalate the penalties. And the maximum penalty in Mississippi was four months in jail and a \$200 fine, which is what we were sentenced to. By the time I was down there... and the other part of that is, you could either serve out your sentence or you could appeal. If you wanted to appeal your conviction, you had to appeal by the 39th day, otherwise, you lost the right to appeal. So a lot of Freedom Riders, a vast majority of them did the appeals process and appealed at the end of 39 days.

So by the time I went down there, already the city jails had been filled and there was no more room for more Freedom Riders. So they rented space in the state penitentiary and moved out the death row prisoners from maximum security and put us in maximum security. So many people were still being arrested, there was no more room in maximum security. So they moved the white males out of maximum security into a first-offenders camp, which was this giant barracks room. And I did half my time and first-offenders camp. And then as people bailed out, the numbers went down towards the end of the summer And I got moved back into maximum security. Blacks were always in maximum security. And women were always in maximum security. But the white men spent – a lot of us spent our time in this large barracks situation. So it kind of varied depending on when you were arrested. But early on, yeah, all of us, all of the Freedom Riders were in maximum security, which is two people six-by-nine cell. You don't leave it except for twice a week for showers. No outside exercise, nothing.

Jean-Luc

Wow. So when you went into jail then, how did you feel? Were you kind of nervous?

Rick

It was pretty much... I was told, this is what will happen. And it's pretty much what happened. There was nothing to be nervous about. I mean, again, it was a known commodity. I was told in New York what was probably going to happen. I was told in Nashville what was probably going to happen. And it all happened just the way they said it was.

Jean-Luc

So you're all kind of like expecting this to happen like this?

Rick

Yeah, and it's what happened.

Howard

Over the course of the... I'm a little unclear on how much time this is all taking. From the moment of getting off

the bus – you got off the bus and it sounds like you got immediately arrested. Walk us through and say what day it is, maybe what time it is, from the moment you walk off the bus into Parchman. Is that hours? Is that days? Explain that.

Rick

I understand. I'll try. Best as my memory can do this. I think I was arrested on a Saturday. And Saturday, of course, courts are not in session. So I think either Monday or Tuesday I was arraigned and convicted by basically a Justice of the Peace. No jury, no nothing. And then probably the next day, it would have been Tuesday or Wednesday, we were taken up to Parchman, probably Tuesday or Wednesday, having been arrested on a Saturday. I figure I spent about... and then my 39 days before I could lose the right to appeal started on that Monday of conviction. And so that started that clock and I appealed on the 39th day. It took a day or two for that to happen, to finally get that paperwork and to get me back down to Jackson to be released. So I think I spent about 45 days total in custody. Plus the... yeah.

So while waiting to be arraigned, what was the jail like? The jail in Jackson was just this large holding cell. We were together as a group. We could talk to the other prisoners, the blacks, were on another floor as I remember, we could shout to them and they could shout encouragement back up to us. When we ended up in Parchman, massive security. If you can imagine a giant 'H' with four wings. And the white males were in one wing, black males were in the opposite side of that H. And then the other wing was all the women. And then the final part of the H was the actual death-row and the death chamber, which was their gas chamber. And so we could speak to the blacks who were on the other side of the H, and the women could speak to the men on the death chamber side. But we couldn't speak to the women and the blacks couldn't speak to the women because you couldn't go across the crossbar of the H. That's where the administrative parts were.

Jean-Luc

What were you talking about when you're in jail?

Rick

Oh, God, any number of things. Singing a lot of songs, a lot of singing, which did a lot for our morale. It used to drive the jailers crazy. They eventually realized they couldn't stop us. Early on the earlier Riders, they tried to stop them from singing. And again, got some violence around that. But by the time I was arrested, it was, "Yeah, okay, they're singing again. Big deal." Again, I'm going to break it out in terms of first-offenders camp versus maximum security, because it was a very different quality. First-offenders camp was this giant barracks with beds down the middle, and you could walk around, you can do laps. Someone had discovered how many laps it was to be a mile and people were walking miles and getting exercise. And then there's sort of like a communal bathroom wing off the side of that. It was a brand-new facility, they just built it and moved us in. What we were talking about, was interesting. For the white males, there was a lot of expertise. Again, at 18, I was one of the youngest kids there. We had five anthropology grad students from Michigan, or were they from UCLA? I forget from where. Anyway, there were a bunch of folks with bunches of knowledge. So we set up a little mini-free university, and if anybody knew anything about something, they would give a little class on it. And I learned – or I didn't learn, if I learned I forgot it.

One of the highlights were these three guys, two or three guys, who knew the different versions of the Bible, the different translations. And they would have this discussion on the pros and cons of different versions of the Bible. Well, I was raised without any Bible experience at all. It was a whole new world. "Oh, my gosh, you mean there are different Bibles? I thought there was just one." That alone was just earthshaking. And that there are differences and differences of interpretation across different translations of the Bible. I had no idea. I thought there was just the one. The "these and the thous." So we had people who... Byron talked about rigging special effects in television and all kinds of weird things.

Jean-Luc

What would be your favorite class?

Rick

It wasn't a class per se, it was very informal. "Okay, who wants to talk today about something?" So it was very

informal but it just opened my mind up. There was great discussion, which I had never heard of before, on *The Catholic Worker*, which most people don't know about. A very progressive group, very progressive. And Dorothy Day. My wife is Catholic, she knows about The Catholic Worker. I never knew about it. College really is meant to be a mind-expanding place. And indeed, for me, that was a lot of what I got in the Freedom Rides is incredible mind expansion as I picked up all this different stuff that I didn't even know existed. Once we came back to maximum security, we lost the mobility. We couldn't see each other. It was quite a different experience. We still did the talking and still did the singing, but did a lot more bunk time. Because you got two people in a six-by-nine cell and you can't leave that cell for anything. It's hard to get your exercise in.

Jean-Luc

Singing was a big part you said.

Rick

Singing and talking and sleeping. When I went in – now I'm about 5'10-1/2", 5'11" – I was about my height. I'm now about 165 (lbs), I was thin as a kid, so at 18 I weighed 130, which is not much. When I got out. I was 120, I was skin and bones. My clothes hung on me. Because the food was so bad and there wasn't much of it. And you didn't get any exercise. So when getting up from lying down on a bed, I'd get dizzy, I'd have to get up very slowly. There's that kind of stuff. Yeah, that's me in 130. [Mugshot of Rick at time of arrest]

Howard

We're kind of going out of sequence a little bit, but that's okay. Talk about the moment of this photo. What do you recall, what do you remember?

Rick

Not much. No, I don't. It was all very quick. They did a little interview. The sheriff or the chief of police interviewed each of us. They really wanted to know if we were communists. That was their big schtick. They would have loved it if they could have found a communist. And there may have been some communists I don't know. But were all certainly, "No, we're not." And most of us weren't, I can tell you that most of us were not. A lot of socialists of varying stripes, and I certainly consider myself a democratic socialist more than anything else. It was, I don't know, three to five questions at most. And then taking the mug shot. And then off to the holding cell, to that cell where we were for the rest of that day, Sunday. I remember Sunday, a priest and a rabbi came to see if we needed any religious doings. I went with the rabbi just because we figured he'd be the most receptive, it's probably the best word. And he was, he was pretty receptive. The priest apparently was less receptive but he was willing to come to see us. Nobody else was, we were too dangerous. And the priest and rabbi came to see us up at Parchman too. The rabbi sent letters home to all our parents saying that he had met with us and that we were okay and in reasonably good health. The parents tried to get him to convey messages back to us and he was very clear that he could not do that, that he'd lose his rights. And he could not convey individual messages. He could just say, "I've met with the Riders. They're all in good shape. Your son/ daughter was one of them. And I saw them." That's all he could say. But a couple of years later, his synagogue was firebombed. So you know, he was doing something good.

Jean-Luc

Oh wow, geez!

Rick

If you want to get back to the script, we can do that.

Jean-Luc

I just have one question I'm kind of wanting to ask. Do you think you can give us a little taste of one of the songs you sang?

Rick

Naw, I'm terrible. No, I really can't. The songs are all out there. I went to the Civil Rights Museum in Jackson. It was quite well done. But one of the things that I was not happy about is – and they would have these songs singing in the background as you went through these various exhibits – and especially as people nowadays

sing *We Shall Overcome*, they sing it as a funeral dirge, rather than as a defiant anthem. And it really is defiant. But unfortunately, it's in a minor key and it's real hard to be defiant in a minor key, but it is. There's a bunch of songs that are really very upbeat. *This Little Light of Mine* is a very upbeat song. *Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Stayed In Freedom*, a very upbeat song. People now when they sing, tend to sing it in a real slow dirge quality and that's really not the way it was. It was uplifting. And I'm kind of sad to see that. In my story online I talked about when I heard the demonstrators in Tahrir Square during Arab Spring singing, I thought these guys are probably going to be good, they're probably going to be successful because they're singing. It's really hard to diss a group that's singing. It's hard to claim they're bad people. And I miss that in a lot of our other stuff. At least I'm missing it in terms of us getting covered through television media. I missed the joy that I remember from a lot of that stuff. But I don't sing. Be thankful. I sing along, but that's it.

Jean-Luc

So you said that through singing, even though how hard it might be even like when you're in jail, it uplifted everyone.

Rick

Oh, yeah, it wasn't hard at all. It was easy. My voice blended in and you didn't hear it.

Jean-Luc

One quick question just about the jail. Could you give us what a typical day would be like when you were there?

Rick

Okay. Typical day. Lights are on 24-7. Let me back up. I'm going to talk about maximum security, rather than first-offenders camp. Your six-by-nine, two people, bunk bed. Not much room. You got a toilet, you got a washbasin. And you put a finger on a hole at the washbasin and you got a little spigot to get a drink of water. Toilet paper is handed out, very precious. And that's it. Lights are on 24-7. No air conditioning. It's hot in Mississippi in the summer. Wake up. I don't know what time it is, probably is sun up. Breakfast is grits and maybe some canned fruit and some chicory coffee. I learned to take chicory with my coffee. And probably some milk. I don't remember that as well. Lunch would be the big meal. It would be beans. Maybe hardback, if you're lucky. We got meat two times every three days. And maybe some canned fruit that came on a tray, little compartments of the tray. Maybe some white bread. The only thing that we could not stand was okra. That was really nasty, slimy stuff. The way to ruin beans is to put okra in them. That was the one thing we just... we flushed that down the toilet. We just could not do it. We did not want to send it back because then the authorities would say, "Oh, we're feeding them so well, they're not eating it all." So we made sure that we had the plates really clean when we sent them back. But there was not enough food. And dinner, it was not memorable at all. Maybe more beans, maybe some cornbread. It wasn't much. During the morning we had some energy, we'd do some singing some talking. You could talk to the people in the cell next door to you. You had to shout to be heard two or three cells down. We could pass notes, notes were hard. We had several guys who were playing chess, and they'd call moves back and forth, you know, "Queen to rook five." Several of the guys did not need chess boards or chess sets. They could play in their head. And then we might do the lectures in the morning. After lunch, a lot of us slept for a couple of hours. And then maybe some more singing or talking. And then dinner and then go to sleep. That was kind of a typical day. I should talk about this, too. We had no reading materials except for two things. We had the King James Bible. And we had a pamphlet written by the president of Delta Airlines called *Race and Reason*, which was why the race should be separated. And we were allowed to read that, we were allowed to read the Bible. You can still get *Race and Reason* on Amazon, it's still available. I assume the Bible is probably still available too. And that was it. So I read the Bible. First time I read it. I haven't read it since. It was an interesting book. So that was kind of it. That would be a typical day.

Jean-Luc

Rick, were there any specific stories in all your time in jail, was there something that stood out to you, one specific event?

Rick

Let me think about that. Well, Byron. Not so much one event but a series of events. Byron was a really interesting guy. Years later at the Freedom Rider reunion, I was talking some of the stories about him. And some of the young kids who were there decided his real name was MacGyver because it fit. He was a MacGyver. So when we were first-offenders camp, as I said, it was brand new, and there was a problem with the toilets, and as often is with new buildings. So they had to come in and redo some stuff with the plumbing or something – and this is in the floor, it's a cement floor. So he goes in there – they've fixed the plumbing and they poured new cement – and he goes in and takes the towel and puts it on the wet cement, and picks up some of the wet cement in the towel, and then takes it off and dries it. And so I asked, I said, "Byron," we weren't cellmates yet, we were we knew each other, but we weren't really that close. I said, "What are you doing?" And he gave this famous line of, "Well, you never know when you might need some cement." Well, okay.

So we end up going back to maximum security. And we're not given much time to to get ready and there's nothing really to pack. But part of what we had was we had a toothbrush and an envelope with some tooth powder in it for brushing our teeth. So he empties out his tooth powder and puts his powdered cement where the toothpaste was, toothpowder, and uses that to carry it back into maximum security. And we're in maximum security. And previously before our time in maximum security, the guards at one point had turned fire hoses on the folks in the cells because they were singing too loud and so forth. And so he was concerned about that because he had this radio that he had smuggled in, a small radio about the size of your thumb, yeah about that size. So he was concerned that where to store it. We had periodically were given a broom to sweep out the cell so he broke some straw off the broom and wet the cement that he had and created a little shelf. The bunk bed was made up with for angle, right angle brackets then held up the second bunk. So he created a shelf underneath his bunk in that 'L' that he could put his radio on in case they firehosed us. And that is the example of you never know when you might need some cement. And it ended up being very useful. I was kind of hoping when we went back for the reunion – I was able to get into our old cell, but they converted it into single tear resin bunks. I was hoping I was going to see if that little shelf was still there but they had pulled it out. I knew it probably wouldn't be but I did look for it. But yeah, that's probably some of that vignette that you're looking for. "You never know when you might need some cement."

Howard

Can you explain a little bit more? I'm still confused. How is he getting stuff in? He smuggles things in his mouth and stuff but where did he get it to get it into his mouth?

Rick

All right, that's another whole story. So when we were in Nashville, actually before Nashville, he, as we all did, knew we were going to go to jail. So at home, he got ready. And he figured out how he could smuggle some things into jail. And what he did is he got a whole bunch of onion skin paper and he got a matchstick and some really thin pencil lead and some thread and then wrapped all that up in tin foil and stuck in between his cheek and gums. Which is why he was puffed out because that's where it was. He even had a piece of a razor blade in there that he snuck in. Yeah. On top of that, the radio. So when we were in Nashville, he talks to someone, they go and get a, in those days, transistor hearing aids were really just coming into play. And they were built into glasses, in the frame of a glass. So he goes and gets a hearing aid, takes it apart, gets the hearing aid out of the glasses, hooks up a tuning coil. And then there's a thing called a finger cot, which is like a rubber thing that goes over your thumb. And he put it one on one side and the other on the other side, stuck it up his rear, and smuggled it in that way. Which created a problem whenever we were getting moved because he had to insert it back in and stick it back up his rear end again. Originally he got some spirit gum and was going to basically stick it – attach it to the back of his scrotum and call it a third testicle. But it didn't quite work. It didn't look right. Because he knew that at times we'd have no clothes so that's when he ended up sticking it up as rear. But that's how he smuggled things in.

He wrote letters out. He wrote letters that he then smuggled out. He also had a way of writing secret messages to his wife and his two kids who are still at home in New Jersey. Our letters were censored and had to pass through a censor. And so he would take this really, really fine pen that was also stuck up, wrapped around this thread and wooden matchstick, and he would puncture letters, over a letter or under a letter and he could spell

words out. And if you held it up to the light, you could see it but you had to really look for it. He also devised a way with using the razor blade, he cut off a piece of soap, and he could write with soap. And then his wife had a way of raising that so you wouldn't see it, but when his wife got it, she knew that there was a message coming and could communicate with his wife that way. And he wrote a very nice note to my folks saying that I really was okay and that things were all right. And so that was Byron, he was my cellmate. He ended up later after the Freedom Rides, he did some civil rights work in New Jersey, got his arm busted in New Jersey by some company goons, when he was picketing with some farmworkers at a farm and the company goons broke his arm. He ended up getting elected to the State Senate in New Jersey. And the story at that time, and probably still to this day, he's the only state senator in New Jersey to serve time before he went to the State Senate. And then he ended up being the President Pro Tempore of the State Senate in New Jersey.

Jean-Luc

Wow, so he really made a name for himself.

Rick

Yeah, if you will, he was pretty big stuff in New Jersey.

Jean-Luc

And that's really cool. I understand why he's called MacGyver. Moving a bit on after you're in jail. For the trial for your release, were there any local police who were trying to stop you? Or were there any obstacles from trying to get out?

Rick

I'm a little confused. Try that question again. I the trial for my release?

Jean-Luc

When you were trying to get out of jail, were they trying to stop?

Rick

No, no. In fact, one of the problems, which was all part of Mississippi strategy, since we were out on appeal, you can't appeal without a transcript. And we were convicted by a justice of the peace magistrate with no transcript. So all the Freedom Riders who had previously bailed out had to come back down to Mississippi to be arraigned formally to then, later on, come back down for a jury trial. So my release was right at the time that all the former Riders were being arraigned, there is a grand, large arraignment, so there were a lot of us. In fact, there was a huge rally at the Masonic Hall in Jackson, where all the Riders got up on the stage and so forth. So yeah, it was a little different I do know that when I flew out of Jackson to either Houston or Dallas and then from there on to San Francisco when I left. And on the plane out of Jackson, I was sitting next to these two little old ladies for lack of a better word. And I'm chatting away, and being very nice and being very social and so forth and we're getting acquainted. "Where are you from?" and all that other stuff. And then one of them said, "Well, what brought you to Jackson?" And I said, "I was one of the Freedom Riders. And without thinking, her first response was, "Oh, no, you're too nice." And I said, "Yes!" Which was my goal. Again, draw that larger circle, bring them in, show them a different way of looking at things. Yeah, it was fun. I did have to go back, I think the following spring, for a jury trial. So they could create a transcript. Twelve white men very quickly convicted me, reconvicted me. And then I posted bail, again, a larger bail. And that's what then went on to the Supreme Court along with a bunch of other folks when the conviction got reversed.

Jean-Luc

Wow. And so once you were released, did you do anything else to support civil rights?

Rick

Yeah. When I went back to San Francisco, that was my sophomore year at San Francisco State, I stayed with CORE, San Francisco CORE. The field secretary was Genevieve Hughes. And she was one of the Riders on the bus that got burned in Anniston (Alabama). Wonderful gal. She needed a break after that. So they sent her out to San Francisco to organize. We did a lot of open housing stuff. Two couples would go trying to rent and break down some color barriers and document discrimination that happened in rental housing. So did that in

San Francisco. This is before the Auto Row demonstrations, which were when I already was at Wisconsin. It was still early stages. There was a marvelous – this is the early days of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and they had a black minstrel show called *Jim Crow a Go-Go*, that was phenomenal, that we went to. I did that. When I went to Wisconsin, I'm one of 35,000 students and struggling mightily against just finding myself. And at that point, with the war becoming more and more significant, the Vietnam War, that really took over a lot of... between the Vietnam War and the rise of Black Nationalism, there really was a different shift in my life. And it went much more into dealing with the war and not getting drafted. And trying to try to stop the war. And so pretty much civil rights, I did not do much with civil rights since '62, probably.

I've done a little bit recently getting involved in some of these memorial events, some of these reunion events. There were two reunions at the 50th year reunion. There was the one in Jackson. But then also there was the one in Chicago after we were on Oprah. And that was an impressive reunion, the one in Chicago because the more radical left-wing of the Freedom Riders did not go to Jackson. But they all went to Chicago. And Chicago was good, it was really good. That was taped, it was videoed, and for some reason, the video never got published. And I'm really sorry about that because all the early people got up and told their stories, their oral histories. The Diane Nash's, the Jim Lawson's who did the training of this thing is in Nashville, all of that stuff. The Tom Hayden's. What's his face, I'm blanking on the name. Anyway, yeah, it was an amazing reunion, much more so than Jackson which a lot of the more progressive, more militant Riders did not go to because they did not want to give Haley Barbour any good publicity. That was the concern about the Jackson reunion. I'm so glad I went just because I got a chance to go back to Parchman.

Jean-Luc

You said that you were with Oprah. Were you on Oprah?

Rick

Yeah. Oprah Winfrey as part of the 50th reunion – 50th anniversary – was able to contact a whole bunch of Riders. I don't know if she contacted us all, the ones who were still living, and offered us free airfare to Chicago, and hotel accommodations for two nights to be on her show. And so we were on Oprah. A lot of that show is posted online, if you Google "[Oprah Winfrey, Freedom Riders](#)." I was just in the audience, she interviewed a lot of the individual Riders. Carol Ruth Silver was one of the people interviewed. You folks are going to take a shot at her. That was the real... Diane Nash was there. Some really good people. So yeah, we were on Oprah. It was an all-day, one-shot shoot without break. You get 150 people who are 60, 70-years plus with 70-year bladders and some of them in walkers. It was an amazing experience.

Jean-Luc

Nice.

Rick

Yeah, it was quite good. And I was never a great Oprah fan until I was there for that show. She won me over, she's an amazing lady. Absolutely amazing. So that was good.

Jean-Luc

Nice. So out of everything you've went through, out of all your experiences, what has the Civil Rights Movement taught you? What is something that you took away?

Rick

Good question. Great question. When I went down there, there was debate, I won't say a split, there was spirited debate on whether or not nonviolence was a strategy or a way of life. And whether it was a tactic or a way of life. And I was very clearly at that point in the strategy camp. Part of that is why I could not be a CO (conscientious objector) because I couldn't sign off against all wars. I still remember the Second World War and I said, no, there are some wars I think they're okay to be part of. Vietnam. No. Second World War. Yeah, that's a war I can support. Versus others who really were into nonviolence as a committed way of life. The nonviolence as a way of life folks tended to be more religious. And what I've learned since is they were right. That it really is a way of life and it's the only way. That's what changed. You can feel the emotion.

Howard

I wanted to ask you about the emotion, especially as a psychologist. You exhibit moments of emotion throughout this whole interview. Can you talk about what is it that sparks that for you?

Rick

What is the spark? Interesting question. I had not thought about that. Deep meaning is probably the best one. I'm not sure. I guess it would take someone else observing me to let me know, give me the feedback. I'd be curious. Certainly talking about my dad, my folks. Some of the disappointment. Deeply meaning personal would be probably the best I can say. But I don't know. Yeah. You got others?

Jean-Luc

Yes, I have a few more. You said before that you're retired now. Are you still trying to promote equality in the US or how are you doing it?

Rick

Well, yeah, that's interesting. I'm feeling fairly futile in many ways. I mean, I vote, I advocate, I talk to people, I give money wherever I can, I do all that stuff. But I get real depressed sometimes. I look at the current election. Here we had all the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. I thought, "Man, this is fantastic!" We got all age groups, we got all cultural groups, we're marching together. We're nonviolent, except for the Antifa people who come out at night. This is wonderful." And then California cannot vote right on affirmative action. And it looks like it's going to go down in defeat. I'm going, "What the f... is going on?" I don't get it. If ever there was a time when we should have flipped the Senate – not only did we not flip the Senate, we lost seats in the House. What is going on? Trump was so bad he had to lose. But I don't get this really strong, strong conservatism. The only thing I can come up with is when the Riders were looking at a theme for what could we do, as part of the reunions. Ray Arsenault did a wonderful job with his book in finding all of us. And there's now Freedom Rider Google Groups, we can communicate with each other through the internet. We can now speak together more, we can have a discussion, we can speak together with a voice on some topic. So word was put out of this is something we should tackle. And my suggestion was we take on Fox News as the current incarnation of the White Citizens Council, which was the legal arm of the Klan. That didn't happen. But I still think that that, indeed, Fox News is probably one of the most... That and then the fact that Twitter and YouTube are encouraging so much negativity and conservatism that really shouldn't be. And falseness.

I go on a daily walk up and down our hill and there's this marvelous sign on this front yard, "Make Lying Wrong Again." We're going in the wrong way. So I don't know what to do. I keep hoping that the young ones will come up with something. CORE certainly had a vision of needing to change the Kennedys. And we certainly had the Supreme Court decision in our hip pocket. So there was a focus. But I'm not hearing a focus. What I'm hearing is "defend the police." And I'm not so sure that's necessarily the right thing to do. I think the police need to change. My hunch is that the black community probably wants the same police protection that the white community gets, which is not necessarily defunding, but just certainly a different orientation. The police need to change but they've been okay to me, because I'm white and they protect me, reasonably enough, but at an incredible cost. And they don't protect a whole bunch of others. So I do not know the answer. I wish I did. And I'd certainly get back and support it. I don't know that marching per se is the answer, but I don't have a sense of what it is. I wish I did.

Jean-Luc

Yeah, we'll do our best to keep on going. Yeah, we'll do our best. But for now, thank you so so much, Rick, for coming out and having us interview you, it means so much. I'll be in touch with you every now and then, whenever you want. Thank you so much.

Rick

I'd be curious about some of the other folks. To me, it's a dialogue. I would love to hear from some of the other classmates, some of your experiences, and some ideas you guys have. And what can we as the older generation do to support you? Because it's your world, it's going to be your world. It is your world already. And what can we do to help?

Howard

Does anybody want to quickly weigh in on that? Sorry, we're going a little over but that you all for hanging in there. Does anybody want to address Rick's question? How can he help?

Jean-Luc

I think sharing your story really does help to show that when you were part of the Freedom Riders, you were around our age or very close to it.

Rick

18.

Jean-Luc

Right, exactly. So hearing the stories really shows that we can do something similar to that. And I think that really helps.

Rick

It just takes the right issue, and I keep looking around for what the issue might be. As I say, I'm not so sure that defunding the police is necessarily the answer. I know that the cops need to change, no question about that. Is the focus necessarily school resource officers? I don't know. I've worked with one or two who were quite good. They can be good. But a lot of them are terrible. And certainly, the kids of color are telling me, "this isn't working." Okay, great. Let's make it work if it can. If it can't, yeah, we'll get rid of it. Yeah, I'm not sure what the answer is. But I'm sure you guys are going to have some discussions amongst yourselves in days to come and get in touch with me. We'll chat away. Now that I know how to Zoom. Thank you for teaching me how to Zoom.

Jean-Luc

Of course, of course.

Howard

We really appreciate it and anybody else can weigh in if you have something to say. In my concluding note is that I do hope to try to get together, to bring together the various people that we will have interviewed. It may not happen until later in the year. It would be great if it could be physical, but who knows when that'll happen?

Rick

We're all waiting on the vaccine.

Howard

This will probably be after the class is over – our class ends next Thursday, a week from today – but at some point between now and the end of the school year, I am going to invite you guys back and all of the people that we interview to have a kind of a panel conversation and to include some of the students from last year.

Rick

Okay. Alrighty.

Howard

So thank you so much. Really appreciate it. We will be in touch.

Jean-Luc

Thank you.