



Confessions of an Unrepentant Maoist

By Ed Felien



Ed Felien being arrested in 1970 while participating in a demonstration to save houses from demolition.

I. How it all began

I remember when it happened. It was 1961. I had just started graduate school at the University of Minnesota. I was doing research for a History of Theater seminar. I was assigned a report on the Abbey Theatre and Irish drama, and the professor asked me to say a few things about Chinese theater. There wasn't much to say about China. There was the Peking Opera, a nineteenth-century stylized melodramatic opera with acrobatics and broad farce. And I thought I should mention that Mei Lanfang, the most famous of the female impersonators (all the roles were played by men), grew a mustache during the Japanese occupation so he wouldn't have to perform.

Then I came across a note in a book saying if one wanted to understand contemporary theater in China, one should read Mao Zedong's essay "Talks at the Yenan Art Forum." What's this? A head of state has opinions on art and theater? The only pronouncement I had heard from a head of state about art was Dwight D. Eisenhower's "I don't know much about art, but I know what I like," which was somehow a repudiation of modern art.

So, I managed to find a copy of the essay and sat down on the floor in the stacks and read it. It was amazing. Mao reduced all of art criticism to one simple question: "Whom does it serve?" If culture only entertained, without taking into consideration the struggles of working people, then it was taking the side of the established classes, the status quo. Revolutionary art had to consciously understand and sympathize with the oppressed class, or it was supporting the oppressors.

I will never forget the revelation. I was immediately reminded of one old-style actor on seeing a more realistic performance by Edmund Kean in the early part of the nineteenth century, and he said, "If he is right, then we're all wrong." And, of course, the more realistic method of acting became more popular, and the older, bombastic style of acting became outmoded. If Mao was right, then all the theater that I had studied, all the plays that I had acted in, and all the theater I had ever seen was reactionary. It supported the status quo. It reaffirmed the ruling class. It was directly opposed to the best hopes of my mother and father and my brothers and my friends who were working people.

I remember sitting on that floor in that University library and realizing that I had to choose. I had to pick sides. Would I be an entertainer and prop up the establishment, or would I work to create revolutionary art that would support my class? I had no idea where the second choice would lead, but I knew then that my life had changed.

II. The Bay of Pigs, April 1961

I was working for the University theater department box office delivering flyers for an upcoming show. I was climbing the long marble steps to the big auditorium on campus, and I noticed a small group of demonstrators holding picket signs saying, "Hands Off Cuba." I knew some of the picketers, so I asked them what was happening. They told me the U.S. had just invaded Cuba. I was shocked. John F. Kennedy invaded Cuba? It seemed unbelievable. I went inside to deliver my posters and when I came out my friends in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee were being pelted by snowballs by a group of right-wingers from Young Americans For Freedom. Like an idiot, I stepped in between the two groups and said, "I may not agree with what these people are saying, but I defend their right to say it." For a while that actually calmed things down as people

from the two sides began debating the question. It finally came down to whether the U.S. had the right to invade another country just because it was communist. I didn't think we had that right. The YAF kids were disappointed in my conclusion, but they didn't resume throwing snowballs.

Later, after November 22, 1963, when it became known that Lee Harvey Oswald had tried to organize a chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in New Orleans, the group disappeared. Oswald thought he could hasten the revolution by assassinating Kennedy. In fact, his actions fueled anti-Castro Cubans and strengthened support for an embargo that has seriously harmed the Cuban economy and the Cuban people for more than fifty years. Oswald committed what Mao called the military error. Revolutionaries and anarchists sometimes think they can bring about instant change by a bomb or a bullet, when what is needed is long-term political education.

Kevin Phillips in "Bush Dynasty" gives convincing evidence that the operations director for the CIA of the Bay of Pigs fiasco was probably George H. W. Bush. The boats launched from an island Bush had rented, and the two boats were named Houston and Barbara.

III. The March on Washington, August 1963

By the time of the March on Washington I was already too radical to believe I was needed or wanted. It was to be a mostly Black affair and communists and Marxists weren't invited. Organizers of the march had been fending off criticisms that the march was organized and dominated by communists. In fact, the FBI and the racist Southern politicians were actually close to the truth. A. Philip Randolph, the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and one of two organizers of the march, had run for state controller in New York as a Socialist in 1920, and Bayard Rustin, the other organizer, was a socialist and gay. So, no one on the left wanted to go to the demonstration holding up a crazy left-wing sign and screw up the message. Probably over 250,000 people showed up, 60,000 or so of them white.

I was in Manhattan staying with friends. We had our own march, around White Castle hamburger joints that had the policy of hiring just one Black person in an otherwise white crew. This was my first protest demonstration. I was arguing with my friend in the subway to the Bronx about how maybe this was unnecessary and maybe things would get better by themselves. I remember continuing the discussion all the while threading my way through angry young white counter-demonstrators, between mounted police and climbing under wooden barricades. When we finally reached the other side and the site of the demonstration, I found that the only other person on our side of the barricades was a very short young Black guy with a CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) t-shirt on. He was quite happy to see us. We picked up signs and started marching around the hamburger stand. I tried to talk calmly and cheerfully to the angry white guys screaming at us. They said, "What about Chock full o'Nuts, they only hire Black people and one white guy?" I tried to explain how the dominant white culture actually sets the agenda for racial discrimination in hiring. And I was sure that Black-owned Chock full o'Nuts would change their hiring practice as soon as White Castle changed theirs. Aside from the excitement of an angry crowd and six or so mounted police, the most interesting moment came when two baseball teams showed up. One white and the other Black. The Black team had won, and their prize was that the white team would treat them to White Castle hamburgers. We talked to the Black team members. They decided they could do without their prize and not cross our fragile picket line. It was the most important victory of the day.

IV. Graduate School, 1961 to 1966

I graduated with my B.A. in June of 1960. That was it. I'd done everything I was supposed to do. I'd been a good Catholic boy, until I couldn't handle the emotional, psychological and philosophical contradictions, and I just quit. I grew tired of the Jesuitical reasoning that conjured up arguments to make every natural question or impulse something somehow contrary to God's grace. Finally, like a house of cards, it collapsed, and I walked away from it without bothering to pick up the pieces.

I had been an Eagle Boy Scout—St. Helena's Troop 38. I enjoyed the camaraderie of overnights. But I chafed at the military structure, the authoritarian chain of command. Finally, by the end, when I was 15, I would find the campsite where the overnight was going to be, and the night before I would go there and bury a six pack of beer for me and my buddies to drink the next night around the campfire.

So, when I graduated from college in June of 1960, I quite reasonably assumed there was nothing meaningful left for me to do with my life. I began listening to Beethoven quartets and contemplating suicide. I was thoroughly enjoying my melancholia when I discovered my condition was a common literary device. "The Sorrows of Young Werther"—a young, beautiful, idealistic artist, contaminated and corrupted by an ugly world, finds no solution but to end his life. How perfect. How sweet. How stupid and mundane. How trite. So, I did that for a couple of months and then went to graduate school.

By the end of graduate school, when I had just about run out of courses to take, I managed to convince a professor to let me take a readings course from him. I would submit a list of books I wanted to read. He would approve it, and then I'd write a short critique of the book at the end of the quarter. It was a lovely way to earn credits, and I read Dickens, Marx's "Capital" Volume I and Karl Polanyi's "The Great Transformation," which begins: "Nineteenth century civilization has collapsed." Before World War I, crowned heads ruled all the nations of Europe. By the end of the Great War, they were all replaced with parliaments. I used the concept as the starting point for my Ph.D. dissertation.

V. My dissertation

Before the twentieth century, drama entertained by telling a story. The first modern innovation came with Ibsen with the introduction of social purpose to the story, and his plays used drama to prove a thesis: a woman's need for self-actualization—"A Doll's House"; the need to confront a community about its hypocrisy—"An Enemy of the People." I loved it that Ibsen wrote a new play every two years in time for the Christmas shopping season, and his characters always alternated between his two favorite polarities. First it was Gyntian, after Peer Gynt, an easy-going, morally compromised character who at the end of the play is met by a Button Molder who says Peer will have to be melt down with the other spoilt goods. This is contrasted in the next play by the uncompromising idealist, Pastor Brand, who takes his congregation to the foot of a glacier to consecrate a new and difficult faith, and, when he defies the avalanche and is about to be consumed by the mountain, he hears in the roar of his destruction, "God is love." The Brandian act of Nora in leaving her husband and children to become something more than a doll in a doll's house is matched in "Ghosts," the next play, by Mrs. Alving who stayed with her philandering husband and contracted syphilis.

The title of my dissertation was “The Evolution of Form in the Modern European Drama.” I used Aristotle’s elements of drama: plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle to illustrate the collapse of nineteenth century dramatic form and the beginnings of modern dramatic structures that represented significant leaps in cultural consciousness in the plays of Ibsen, Strindberg, Brecht and Beckett.

Ibsen’s plays follow the structures of the well-made plays of nineteenth-century melodrama, but by turning the plays into an argument he begins the process of alienating and calling attention to the plot. This forces the audience to see a plot unfold and imagine a different ending.

Strindberg wrote plays in that mold until he went mad in Berlin with Edvard Munch, and after that his plays took on a more expressionistic tone. Plot no longer is significant. It is arbitrary. “To Damascus” is a journey to and from in a series of epiphanies. The plot doesn’t matter. What matters is the agony of the protagonist. “A Dream Play” is a series of surrealistic tableaux with the stage finally exploding into a giant chrysanthemum. The dramatic focus was now the character. What happened in the plot was not as important as the revelation of the character.

Brecht began writing after World War I. German Expressionism in the theater in that period was dominated by learning plays like Georg Kaiser’s “Gas I,” that showed the exploitation and dehumanization of capitalism. The personality of the leading character is irrelevant to the central argument of the concept that must be explained. Brecht developed the Alienation Theory to explain this new theatrical device. The plot is irrelevant. At the beginning of the play actors explain what is going to take place, and each scene begins with a summary of the action. There are no revelations of character, no idiosyncratic psychology, only the unrelenting argument of the play. Plot and character are gone, only the thought and conclusions of the audience are important.

Samuel Beckett takes this progression to its logical conclusion. If life is meaningless, then thought is without purpose. We spend a large part of our life waiting—waiting for buses, waiting to see the doctor—all in the hope of getting somewhere or somehow better. We are waiting for Godot, a self-constructed meaning that we know is illusory. If plot, character and thought are no longer useful in understanding the human predicament, then all that is left is the diction (poetry) and song to accompany the spectacle.

I began my dissertation with the quotation from Bertrand Russell’s 1904 essay, “A Free Man’s Worship”: “That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.”

VI. Graduate School politics

But before I could write my dissertation, I had to pass my written prelims, a three-day ordeal that was more like a madcap game of Trivial Pursuit: What is a Dutch brush? (a six-inch wide paint brush). Frustrated at the banality of the questions, I perked up at one that asked what books

would you recommend to teach beginning acting? Of course, the answer that was expected was Stanislavsky’s “An Actor Prepares” and “Building a Character.” But I was more inclined to a Brechtian style of acting so I recommended Jerzy Grotowski’s “Towards a Poor Theater” and Brecht’s “Practical Lessons for Actors,” which were outside the normal experience of the Stanislavsky method acting techniques. I was sure I had done well on all of the other questions, so I thought I could take some liberties with predictable expectations. The head of the department called me into his office a couple of weeks later. He tried to explain how the answer to the acting question was wrong. I said, “You and I disagree on an opinion about what is an acceptable acting style. If my references are good and the curriculum makes sense, then my opinion is as valid as yours.”

He got up from behind his desk, went outside the office and brought in two other professors from the department. There was an awkward silence. I said, “Doc and I disagree on an opinion, and I don’t want to appear pugnacious, but I don’t feel I have to capitulate on an opinion.”

The first of the two said, “Pugnacious? Pugnacious? I should say you’re being pugnacious.”

The second one chimed in, “Capitulate? Capitulate? You have to capitulate. You have to write a dissertation.”

“But I thought everyone had to write a dissertation,” I said.

They got up to leave and the first one said to me, “I want to see you in my office after this.”

After getting some reading assignments from Doc I went to see the other professor. He said, “What were you doing in there? You almost threw your Ph.D. out the window.”

“Well, it’s not worth that much to me,” I said.

“You have what I call a ‘Sibley complex.’” [Mulford Q. Sibley was a professor of political science, a socialist and Quaker pacifist.]

“Well, actually, I admire Sibley.”

“Besides, it wasn’t just that one question.”

“What other question? What else did I get wrong?”

“No, it wasn’t that. It was your attitude.”

“My attitude?”

“The department thinks you think we’re a bunch of idiots.”

“Well, I can’t be responsible for your mass paranoia.” And I stormed out of the office.

I went to see Doc a few weeks later. We talked about Stanislavsky and the contribution of the method school of acting, and the department agreed to pass me on my written prelims. But they got their revenge. The oral prelims are mostly perfunctory. The department will ask general questions to test your knowledge, but it’s really a test of collegiality—how well do you get along within the academic structure? And I failed that, and I knew it. They said I failed my orals but I could take them again in a year, and in the meantime I could write my dissertation—which seemed enough of an assurance that I would eventually pass that I accepted my chastisement cheerfully.

They passed me on my second oral prelims, and I had one last major hurdle: my final oral exam where I defended my thesis. In the year that I was writing my dissertation three books came out that confirmed the basis of my thesis even if they didn’t quite take my approach: “The Flower and the Castle” by Maurice Valency was a thorough analysis of the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg, and Martin Esslin came out with “The Theater of the Absurd,” and in the same year, a thoroughly scholarly analysis of the plays of Brecht. At first I was devastated. A lot of what I thought was original in my writing was now already in print by these other scholars. But then,

I felt vindicated. I had begun work on my dissertation before these books came out. So, it was clear I wasn't plagiarizing anyone else's ideas. I credited them and noted them in my bibliography. But, more than that, I came to see that ideas cannot be owned by anyone. They are part of the social and cultural context. And in that sense they belong to everyone.

At my final orals, the professor who accused me of having a Sibley complex had, unfortunately, been given a copy of my dissertation that the typist had not corrected, so he gleefully pointed out typos for the better part of a half hour. But I felt he was working up to something. I apologized for the uncorrected proof, and the other readers assured him that their copies were without the offending errors. But, finally, he got to the object of his hunt, "And here you say that Dada was primarily French when everyone knows it was German."

"Well, it probably begins in Switzerland and moves to Berlin, but it becomes a movement in Paris, ultimately influencing notions of surrealism and laying the foundation for the theater of the absurd. Isn't that right, Professor Hurrell?" I said, turning for support to my thesis advisor from the English department. "Mmmm, yes," he muttered.

And there the matter ended. It ended not with a bang but with a mutter. Everyone got up and congratulated me, and I had earned my Ph.D.

VII. Teaching in the Rhetoric Department

After a couple of years in graduate school, and after earning a master's degree, I was looking around for a possible teaching position at the U. I heard they were hiring in the rhetoric department at the Institute of Agriculture on the St. Paul campus. I taught my first college class there in the fall of 1962. It was Beginning Speech, and I was supposed to give an introductory lecture to four assembled sections in front of the head of that department. It was a disaster. I tried to do way too much. In a 50-minute lecture, at eight in the morning, for their first college class in their first quarter of their freshman year, I tried to teach farm kids fresh from the country in one short lecture the scope and breadth of literature from ancient Greece up to the moderns. Looking back, I'm amazed they didn't throw things at me.

But I loved teaching and I soon got the hang of it. I taught a couple of speech classes and some freshman English classes. In my first freshman English class I had a cowboy who wrote about shoeing horses and riding in rodeos. I thought I was in heaven. Helping him with small things but encouraging him to write made me believe I was doing something useful.

A few years later I was grading papers. The assignment was to analyze a poem. An older student had written about an audience "listening to their wireless, sipping their cowslip tea." There were no quotation marks and no context for the paragraph. Obviously the student had plagiarized a critical essay of the poem written fifty years before. I gave the student an F and wrote that he was seriously in jeopardy of being thrown out of college. A younger student that I liked came in to see me. He explained that the older student was a driving instructor at his old high school, and he had been told that he had to take some college classes to keep his job. I talked to the older student, explained what plagiarism was, told him about quotation marks and citing sources, and gave him a C for the course. Inflexible standards of scholarship were not as significant, I found out, as a man keeping his job.

I enjoyed the lunches at the faculty club. I loved the banter, the discussions about the war in Vietnam, but I was naïve about the politics of the department. I believed academic freedom meant you should think and consider all possibilities of everything. I had discovered marijuana,

and like every other idiot who wants to share his joy with the world I told some of my friends in the department. Eventually, the head of the department called me in and told me that this academic year would be my last. It was being done in a nice way, very friendly, but it was clear I was being fired. There was nothing wrong with my teaching. I had completed my Ph.D. by this time, but I just didn't measure up to the Institute of Agriculture Department of Rhetoric's notion of what it meant to be an academic. I didn't fit in. I wasn't collegial.

I had been looking for a full-time position for the past year, and this development added urgency to the search. I went to a speech teacher's convention in Chicago that winter and interviewed for jobs. I make a good first impression. It's only after someone gets to know me for a while that they realize how much trouble I can be. I was offered two jobs—an assistant professorship at Smith College or an assistant professorship at the University of Houston. I did a quick calculation and decided that I'd probably get killed teaching in Texas and it would be safer and more fun to teach the ruling class under glass at Smith.

VIII. March Against the Vietnam War, April 1965

National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), Women Strike for Peace (WSP) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were sponsoring a March on Washington in April of 1965 to protest the war in Vietnam. Four of us piled into a small Volkswagen and drove out early Friday morning. We were able to stay with some local supporters of WSP Friday night in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and we cleaned up and put on suits and ties for the demonstration Saturday morning. While we were marching around the White House a flatbed semi-truck drove by with a series of gravestones on it representing the countries behind the Iron Curtain. The tableau was sponsored by The Captive Nations, a right-wing group of proto-fascists from Eastern Europe that served as the backbone of George H. W. Bush's political campaigns. It was an interesting piece of propaganda meant to counteract our anti-Americanism.

Then we saw another semi pull up and park in front of the White House. The back doors of the trailer opened up, and the scruffiest looking people I had ever seen piled out. Beatniks. Peaceniks. They brought with them 20-foot puppets of LBJ and huge papier mâché bombs and planes. This was Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater from the Lower East Side. It was amazing. They didn't try to look "normal." And I realized the limits of reform. This would be the last demonstration at which I would wear a suit and tie. No more trying to blend in, trying not to offend. From now on it was shock therapy. In your face! We had been afraid that if we were too casual that would detract from our message. What we found was that looking straight simply allowed the media to completely ignore our message and assume it had been properly delivered and handled through official channels. No. They weren't listening to us. We had to do something different to get their attention and to win over young people.

There were only about 25,000 to 30,000 people at the March. I. F. Stone was master of ceremonies. He introduced Ernest Greuning, who with Wayne Morse were the only two senators to vote against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution that was the flimsy and false basis for justification for involvement in Vietnam. There were folk singers. Paul Potter from SDS gave a speech that sent chills up my back. He talked about how he believed in America when he was growing up and how he gradually became disillusioned. How he once believed America was always on the side of righteousness. And when the horror of Vietnam became clear, how all of those illusions began to fade away. I remembered my childhood, a good Catholic boy, an Eagle Scout, and I thought

about my parents who still believed that America was always right, and I knew it would take a lot to convince Americans that their country was wrong.

After the speeches, we all turned around on the Washington Mall and started marching to the Capitol. I don't know what we were going to do when we got there. Go in? Declare ourselves the government? But somehow Joan Baez, who had sung at the demonstration, got in front of the impromptu march and started singing and then telling us that the demonstration was over and we should go home. We stopped and eventually disbanded. My first March on Washington ended with a whimper, but it also ended with a fixed resolve.

IX. Cultural Arts Director at Hallie Q. Brown Community House, 1964 to 1967

Settlement houses are generally dreary places—the poverty, noisy kids, anxious mothers. But they can also be exciting. I had read about the Henry Street Settlement House on the Lower East Side in Manhattan, and how they had theater programs for children and became a cultural center. I thought I'd like to try something like that in the Black community in St. Paul at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center. I went over and talked to the director and offered to work for three-quarter pay and only work three-quarter time. She was thrilled. I started immediately.

My last quarter as a graduate student I was teaching three classes at the U, which was three-quarter time; working three-quarter time at Hallie Q. Brown; taking a full load of four classes in graduate school; rehearsing an anti-war play at night for Women Strike for Peace; beginning to write my dissertation; and for the first ten days of the quarter I memorized enough German to pass the graduate school language exam.

At Hallie I taught creative dramatics to 5th and 6th grade kids. We'd read a story or nursery rhyme and then we'd act it out. The kids loved it and I think it helped them gain confidence and verbal fluency. I recruited a local scholar to teach a Black History class—the first in the Twin Cities. He went on to a nice job at Macalester College. And I offered a class in adult literacy. I had a few students, but they mostly fell away, although one stayed with me for about six weeks. The first night I asked her what was the most important thing that had ever happened to her. She said she'd been in an automobile accident and the car had turned over. I asked her to describe the event. Then we started writing the event. Painfully, for six weeks, she kept coming back and we'd go over what she'd written, talk about the event and maybe write another sentence. When we finally finished, she read the paragraph aloud, jumped up with a great smile on her face and ran out of the room. I never saw her again, but she was probably my greatest triumph as a teacher.

On Saturdays we would have art classes for kids in the morning thanks to a friend of mine, and entertainment at 3 p.m. that could be a magician or singers or jugglers and clowns. Sundays we had performances by local jazz musicians. It was all free and lots of fun. But it was a lot of work.

Some leftie friends approached me and asked me if I wanted to sponsor a Du Bois Club at Hallie. I didn't know much about W. E. B. Du Bois, but I knew he was a Black scholar, started the NAACP and eventually went to Ghana. He was also a Marxist. The young people that wanted me to sponsor the club at Hallie were all Red Diaper Babies, the children and grandchildren of communists. At that point SDS was not allowing Marxists or communists into their organization, so Marxist parents wanted an organization of their own for their kids. We mostly sat around and talked on Saturday mornings. My attempts to get them to actually get out and do some organizing in the neighborhood were met with skepticism, apathy and, finally, abandonment. But it was

fun while it lasted. There were parties, weddings and a convention in Chicago that I found out later was duly recorded by the FBI Red Squad.

We also produced plays. A jazz musician approached me. He'd written a musical about the civil rights movement, "Some of My Best Friends Are." It was fun, a little corny, but it played well. I found a cast and a wonderful woman to direct it, while I tried to get stage lights, props and costumes. It was free, ran one weekend and played to packed houses.

The next year I thought I'd try something more serious. I had always wanted to do a production of Euripides' play "The Bacchae" with a Black Dionysus and a white Pentheus. There is a line in the play that suggests Dionysus comes from a more exotic place than Thebes. There is one dramatic reversal in the play that is spectacular. Dionysus has been upsetting the town, and Pentheus confronts him. In the space of only about a dozen lines Dionysus changes Pentheus from a moral puritan into a voyeuristic transvestite. Pentheus is trying to stop Dionysus from luring all the women out of town into the woods where they dance and act like animals. Dionysus seduces Pentheus by asking, "Don't you want to watch them play in the forest?" Pentheus admits he does. Dionysus then says he will have to dress like them so he won't be noticed. Transfixed with the possibility of seeing erotic fantasies, Dionysus leads Pentheus off the stage in a daze. Of course it ends badly for Pentheus. A messenger tells us that Dionysus convinces Pentheus that he should climb a tree to get a better look at the dancing women. Dionysus then tells the women that Pentheus is a tiger in the tree, and Agave, Pentheus's mother, slays the tiger and brings Pentheus's head in on the top of her spear. Gradually, she is brought to her senses and realizes with horror what she has done, and the play ends with the recognition of the divine power of eros and the need to steer a balanced course between repression and frenzy.

The actor I had cast as Pentheus dropped out after realizing how difficult the role would be, so, in the midst of my other responsibilities, I took that on as well. I thought it went rather well, but the staff at Hallie much preferred the more accessible musical we had produced the previous year.

Almost 20 years later, on leaving a production of a play at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis I ran into a former colleague from the rhetoric department. He had been the only one to come and see my production of "The Bacchae" at Hallie. We had been talking about the Guthrie production (which had nothing to do with "The Bacchae") when, out of nowhere, he said, "When you did that play in St. Paul you looked like you were high on drugs." I realized then that my friend had been part of the group that denounced me. "It's called acting," I said, and walked away.

X. New Left Convention in Chicago, 1967

Before driving out to Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, I stopped at Chicago for the New Left Convention. I went to Old Town, met some lovely people and we decided to bring a little bit of the Summer of Love to Chicago. We talked a liberal church into letting us use their kitchen and we started the Free Bakery. We made chocolate chip cookies and gave them away at North and Wells. We assured anxious parents there wasn't anything in the cookies other than the normal ingredients, but some were still a little nervous when we offered them to their children.

When the convention started I suggested to the Arrangements Committee that we should have a free lunch for everybody. They liked the idea and got me hooked up with some very progressive brothers from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union, and we set up a kitchen a few blocks away from the convention. It was a great success. We stopped allowing take-out orders,

however, when some of the more entrepreneurial conventioners started selling the trays at the convention.

The convention was taken over by the Westside Organization. In an effort to incorporate progressive Black voices, the organizers reached out to groups like the Westside Organization and the Blackstone Rangers. These groups practiced a kind of Gangster Marxism. They understood how to use anti-capitalist rhetoric, and they used it to guilt-trip liberals who would then excuse their thievery, thuggery and bad behavior.

One afternoon I was looking for some people in the hotel, and I got off the elevator (which had “Black Power” etched into the brass doors) and walked into a group of about ten young Black men who gathered around me, and one of them said, “One of the brothers got his money stolen and doesn’t have any way to get home. We’re hoping you can help.” I did not want to open my wallet and risk losing everything I had. At that point a group of older Black men started walking down the hall in our direction. I shouted out, “Hi,” as if I knew them. They looked up. The young guys said, “Oh, is he one of yours?” and grabbed me by the shirt and threw me over to them. I went with the older guys down the hall until we found a back stairwell, and we went down a couple of floors before we dared get back on an elevator.

The organizers of the convention probably wanted to begin the development of a third party, one that was clearly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, but, as the chaos of the convention showed, the objective conditions were not ready for a national third party. The candidates that would have run for president and vice president of this third party in 1968 would have been Martin Luther King and Benjamin Spock.

At another time when I was walking down the halls of a floor in the Hilton Hotel, I turned a corner and there was Martin Luther King sitting by himself behind a table outside a conference room. He had given his famous Riverside Church speech just a few months before in April when he finally spoke out against the war. I couldn’t resist, and since he was right there in front of me, I thanked him for speaking out against the war. Everyone on the left knew the price he had paid for that speech in terms of access to President Johnson. It was heroic and an inspiration. He nodded.

There were supposed to be plenary sessions where the convention discussed some kind of platform and issues, but the Black Caucus decided they wouldn’t participate. They insisted on meeting separately (this was during a big period of Black separatism in the civil rights movement). They said they would decide on what the important issues should be and let us know. We couldn’t very well sit around and twiddle our thumbs, so I proposed a White Revolutionary Caucus. We got a room and we met to discuss political ideas, programs and strategies. The Black Caucus sent people over to see what we were up to, and we assured them that we recognized that Black communities were the most oppressed sector in America, and we knew there could not be any solution to the problems of capitalism without leadership from the Black community, but we wanted to be prepared to help. It was good to talk to like-minded people, and it was the most fun of any part of the convention.

That night there was a special evening of entertainment: music, singing and a speech by Martin Luther King. The Black Caucus insisted that whites sit in the balcony and Blacks only could sit on the main floor. It was interesting and a little unnerving to be a part of a racially segregated event. The white liberals who paid the bills and organized the event excused the segregation as reparations for a history of segregation that had victimized Blacks. The rest of us just put up with it, with one exception.

Eddie Fassbinder was a wondrously crazed character who frequented bars around the University of Minnesota campus on the West Bank. He loved to dance to music on the jukebox. A couple of times I was standing at the bar, and Eddie came up behind me, tapped me on the shoulder, I turned around and Eddie grabbed me and started waltzing with me up and down the bar. He was a good dancer and it was a lot of fun. But I was shocked to see him at the entryway of the main floor of the auditorium that evening in Chicago. My shock turned to horror as I saw him start to dance and waltz his way up and down the center aisle to the cadences in Martin Luther King’s speech. To everyone’s amazement, he made it up and down the aisle twice before two very large guys grabbed him by the arms, lifted him up with his legs still moving to the rhythm of the speech and walked him out the door. He survived the event, got a job with the Minneapolis Fire Department and retired on a psychological disability.

The convention adjourned on Sunday with a plenary session that concluded that the immediate goal was not to form a national party but to work locally. There was a huge banner on the wall of the auditorium, a quote from Joe Hill: “Don’t Mourn, Organize!” It was ironic if the hopes of the organizers of the convention had been to form a third party, but it suited the mood and temperament of most of the people there. For me, the convention was the spark that lit the fuse. I felt I was a time bomb ready to explode my academic career. So, I started off to Smith College confident that I would be fired for agitating against the war, and I wasn’t disappointed.

XI. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-67

While all this was happening in the U. S., the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was going on in China.

Reports were scattered, mixed and fragmentary, but it seemed that at a Chinese Communist Party Congress in Wuhan in July of 1966, Mao was told by the Central Committee that his ideas were outmoded and impractical, and “What difference does the color of the cat matter as long as it catches mice?” They wanted him to retire and continue writing poetry but stay out of the way of the practical matters of running the country—“It was better to be expert than red.”

In April Nieh Yuan-tzu, a graduate student in philosophy at Beijing University, wrote a big character poster and put it up at the University. It criticized the faculty and administration for favoring Party cadre for admission, thereby discriminating against peasants and workers. This favoritism could ultimately create a new hereditary ruling class similar to Russia. She was, of course, severely criticized for her action. The Party bosses controlled the newspapers and the radio stations. Education and social behavior were still strictly regimented by Confucian values. The Mandarin bureaucracy was almost two thousand years old and rigid in its assertion of authority. Nieh Yuan-tzu was not showing proper respect.

About 5000 young people were going to participate in the annual race to swim across the Yangtze at Wuhan. Mao always enjoyed swimming, and he said he’d join them. He left the Party Congress, jumped in the water and swam with the young people across the river. The width of the river at that point is about a mile, but the current had taken him 10 miles downstream. He got to the other side, got out of the water, and said, “Nieh Yuan-tzu is right. Bombard the headquarters.”

That was the moment the Cultural Revolution began. Quotations from Chairman Mao were published in a Little Red Book. People were encouraged to stop production in industry and agriculture and study Mao Zedong Thought. Was their work contributing to the revolution, or was it

continuing feudal and bourgeois values? Just because something had been done in a certain way for thousands of years no longer made it the only way that it could or should be done. Question authority! People were encouraged to do six months work and six months study. People who worked in the city were encouraged to work for six months in the country.

Of course there were excesses. Probably the worst were committed by reactionaries who “waved the Red flag,” denouncing others while protecting their own privileges. All Party cadres were asked to do public self-criticism.

But this was not new. Mao had done this before. In fact, he did it with predictable regularity. In 1935 on the Long March, retreating from the Kuomintang forces, Mao insisted on holding a Party Congress in which the policies of Party and the Soviet advisors were severely criticized. At this Congress the Party elected Mao Chairman.

In 1942, in the middle of the war against the Japanese occupations and the civil war with Chiang Kai-Shek, Mao became alarmed that Party cadres were becoming left dogmatic. Rather than working with peasants to make rural villages more democratic and equalitarian, they were issuing orders. They acted like they were superior to the peasants and were guilty of commandism. In each village when the Red Army came, they held a meeting of all the villagers, and let the villagers decide what to do with the chief landlord. Sometimes they executed him. Sometimes they pinched him and screamed at him. And sometimes they shared the land with him. But cadre often made mistakes because they did not understand the conditions of the village. Sometimes they would kill an ox and divide the meat among the village, when that ox was the only way the village could plow the ground. Mao ordered all Party cadre to construct a gate in each village. Each cadre was to stand in the gate and make a good self-criticism. If the cadre was sincere and the village believed him and accepted his self-criticism, then the cadre could go through the gate and continue doing political work in the village. An amazing account of this process is detailed in the last section of William Hinton’s book, “Fanshen.” Mao’s analysis is in “Rectify the Party’s Style of Work.”

In 1957 Mao published “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People.” This long essay contained the section “Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend.” For six months, Mao said, Party cadre should be still and take criticism. In the larger essay Mao outlined the kind of criticism he thought was effective. It should be based on Unity, Criticism, Unity. It should begin by establishing a basis for unity that both sides agree to. Criticism should then assume those basic shared values, and the conclusion of criticism should lead to a greater unity on a new and better basis.

The Party Congress in the middle of the Long March, the critique of left dogmatism in “Rectify the Party’s Style of Work” and the Hundred Flowers period were the theoretical precedents for the Cultural Revolution. The West was horrified at the chaos and anarchy—“Why, people were taking the government into their own hands.” But it was just that chaos and anarchy that Mao believed would be a tonic to purge the Party of authoritarianism and old-fashioned ideas. And this concept doesn’t originate with Mao. Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to John Adams, had said, “God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion.”

Mao’s difference with Jefferson was that the time for rebellion was closer to ten years.

XII. Smith College, 1967 to 1969

New England is beautiful in the fall. The leaves slowly turning. The summer lingering softly

into crisp mornings. And Smith College was picture perfect. “Why, it’s Paradise,” said Jenny Lind in the middle of the nineteenth century. And, so, Smith College named the pond in the middle of campus, Paradise Pond, a suitably bucolic setting to which the ruling class could send their daughters. It was a “sister” college to Amherst College, just down the road, nine miles away, so the children of the ruling class could continue their incestuous intermarriage. While I was teaching at Smith, Julie Nixon was a student (she never took a class from me—though I did have a man with white socks attend one of my lectures; he stood out since he was the only male in a class of 140 females; I’ve always assumed he was Secret Service meant to protect Julie while her dad was busy thinking about becoming president), and David Eisenhower was a student at Amherst.

Teaching was wonderful. I taught a survey course of Modern European Drama that began with Ibsen and ended with Beckett. I’d spent the last ten years preparing for that course. It was the biggest class on campus and very popular. And I taught seminars in filmmaking and more intensive courses on Brecht and Beckett. What could be better? Classes were Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday morning. At noon on Wednesday I was free to play guitar, drive down to New York City or plot the revolution.

Almost as soon as I got to Northampton, I discovered a Sunday vigil sponsored by the local Quakers to silently protest the war in Vietnam. I joined, of course, but I was uncomfortable with the restraints. When people drove by and shouted obscenities I shouted back, until one of the women pacifists standing next to me jabbed me in the ribs and said, “You’re supposed to remain silent.”

After one Sunday, I asked some of the other people if there wasn’t something else we could do, something a little more dramatic. That’s when I met Jimmy Cooney. I fell in love with him almost immediately. He became my spiritual father. He had published *The Phoenix* during World War II. It had been a political literary quarterly that was the first to publish Henry Miller and Anais Nin, among others. In the 1930s he had been active with the Communist Party, but they threw him out because he was too much of an anarchist. He participated in overturning lockouts—when someone was evicted from their apartment in Harlem, Jimmy and some of his friends would go in, confront the sheriff’s deputies, put the furniture back in the apartment that the deputies had put on the sidewalk and bust off the lock on the electric meter that the deputies had put there to stop electrical service. He had published one proletarian-style novel that went unnoticed.

On Sunday afternoons it became a habit to grab a bottle of wine and head up to Jimmy’s Morning Star Farm on the side of a mountain for chess and political discussions. He thought what we should do is protest at the draft board. They met on Monday nights in downtown Northampton. They had refused to give deferments to men who believed the Vietnam War was immoral. Jimmy’s vision was, of course, cosmic. He wanted to protest war, the draft and violence of all sorts. I told him I agreed with him, but tactically it would probably be better to limit the action to more realistic objectives. We would demand that the draft board recognize that a person who claimed conscientious objection to the war should be sufficient reason for a legitimate deferral.

I had some meetings with friendly professors and started talking with the local SDS and Quakers. We spread the word, and on a warm Monday night in October about seventy of us marched around in front of the door that led upstairs to the draft board meeting. We sent a delegation up to talk to the board. The board refused to meet with our representatives and listen to their request to grant conscientious objector status. The head of the draft board was James Faulkner. He was

also the city clerk. It was a political appointment. The town was run by the Democratic Party machine, and he was the political appointee responsible for keeping the machine well-greased. I told the group, "Fine, he won't meet with us tonight, then we'll go to City Hall tomorrow and meet with him there." There were about 10 counter-demonstrators from Northampton Commercial College.

The next day at noon about 30 of us gathered in front of City Hall in downtown Northampton. We marched around for about an hour, and then I and a couple of other people went in to see Mr. Faulkner. The secretary said he wasn't in. There were about 15 counter-demonstrators. On Wednesday, we were about 20 demonstrators, and there were about 20 counter-demonstrators. On Thursday, we were about 15 demonstrators, and there were about 25 counter-demonstrators.

On Friday there were about nine of us: Jimmy, his son, Gabe, Don Jobes (a wonderfully fanatical vegetarian pacifist), five Smith College undergraduates and me, and there were about 30 counter-demonstrators. We started marching around in front of City Hall, but they kept walking through our lines and bumping into us. There were about six Northampton police there, but, of course, they were very unsympathetic. Finally, the counter-demonstrators started getting dangerously aggressive, so I backed us up against the building. Now we were facing them head on. A cop turned to me and said, "Why don't you go home?" I turned to him and said, "Why don't you protect us?" The situation was tense. Then, from behind me I heard the voices of angels. The Smith women started singing "America the Beautiful." The counter-demonstrators were staggered. They finished singing and I thought we were home free, then Don Jobes started singing "Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside," and then all hell broke loose.

I didn't see it coming, but Kenny Brandt told me about it later. Kenny and Roger were brothers. Roger had been in Vietnam. Kenny was standing directly in front of me and Roger was standing behind him. Kenny looked me in the eyes, then quickly dropped his hands to his side. I watched his hands and didn't notice Roger's right hand with a big ring on it coming from behind Kenny's head like a thunderbolt aimed right at my forehead. He split open my head. Gabe and Don had also been knocked to the ground. I said, "OK, you win. But we'll be back tomorrow."

I went to the local hospital and got the wound dressed. It wasn't serious. It left a nice scar, but I'm hardheaded enough so it didn't break anything. The doctor said something similar to the cop about why I shouldn't be out there, and I said something about how the U.S. shouldn't be in Vietnam, and we decided to leave it at that.

When I said, "We'll be back tomorrow," what I meant was we'd be back on Monday. Nobody was planning on demonstrating on the weekend. Of course, everybody heard about the fight. The Amherst College newspaper put out a special edition: "Felien bleeding from the forehead says, 'We'll be back tomorrow.'" The mayor was quoted as saying the demonstrators made him sick to his stomach. It was on the radio and there was even a small notice on the front page of The New York Times. I went around to meetings all weekend in sunglasses to cover my black eyes, recruiting people to come out on Monday at noon.

We had told people there would be two demonstrations: one to protest the war in Vietnam and the fact that the draft board refused to recognize conscientious objector status, and a second picket line just to support our right to demonstrate. Over a thousand people showed up. They all marched against the war. There was no second picket line. The 30 counter-demonstrators were shocked. They realized that, somehow, they had caused this, and they were hypnotized by their own powers. We marched around for about an hour and then marched over to the Smith College campus and sat down on the grass and listened to Jimmy and some others explain what we

were doing. The counter-demonstrators followed us. They interrupted some of the speakers. The president of the college came out and ordered them off the campus. I stood up and told the counter-demonstrators that we wanted to meet with them. We'd meet them next Saturday. We'd put up notices. And we'd continue these very important discussions, but, for now, let's end it.

We did meet with the group every Saturday for a couple of months. The Northampton Commercial College students liked it because it was a chance to meet women from Smith. Many of the young women active with us went up to New Hampshire that fall and winter to work for Gene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary. When he won and LBJ dropped out of the race, that seemed like another victory for our efforts.

I had to stop going to the meetings because Jimmy started bating me from the back of the room. It wasn't radical enough. We weren't talking about the slaughter of animals, etc. So, instead of arguing with each other in front of a hundred people, we both stopped going and, with a bottle of wine and a chessboard, we sat in his kitchen and discussed the great events of the day.

I never got any direct criticism of my political activities by my peers on the faculty, but one day I heard that a discussion of the demonstrations was happening in the basement of the Faculty Club. I dashed over. They were being very critical of political demonstrations, saying academics should be aloof and uninvolved so they could remain objective, which I thought was ridiculous. Finally, after they all had their say, I said, "OK, the demonstrations to protest the draft board were not perfect. What are you doing?" No one answered. I may have won the point, but I was not acting very collegial.

My response, of course, was an echo of a much more famous New England exchange. When Emerson came to see Thoreau in jail for refusing to pay a tax to support the war against Mexico, Emerson asked, "What are you doing in there?" To which Thoreau replied, "What are you doing out there?"

Months later Kenny Brandt came to see me and explained what had happened on Black Friday. He told me he was now working for the FBI as an undercover agent. He said he had infiltrated the Black Panthers in Springfield. I'm sure he was deluded about his success and his importance to the Bureau, and it was sad to see him still trying to understand his one moment of fame when a thousand people focused on him as the defender of the Vietnam War.

Traveling theater troupes came through Smith College. Staid Smith College was treated to a performance by Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre where, at the end of a dramatic parable of capitalist exploitation, all the members of the audience were invited to take off their clothes and join the actors on stage in a pile of naked bodies. Very interesting. Not much local participation.

Another group from New York City's Lower East Side was the Pageant Players. They produced a fairly interesting dramatic parable about marketing: "Virginia Slims and the Dancing Bears." Another group that was touring with them, Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers, was an SDS offshoot. I made friends with some of them and visited them when I'd go down to the city on weekends. One time they were performing in Central Park, and they got busted on an obscenity charge. While a couple of the actors were being hauled away, I went over to the next area where Paul Krassner from The Realist was talking. I interrupted and took up a collection for bail money. He was not pleased but he was sympathetic.

One of the newer groups I met was The Burning City Theater. Two years later I ran into them in San Francisco, joined them, and we performed at The Day After Demonstrations.

My department chairman at Smith told me I was fired at the end of my first year. I told him

he couldn't do that. He'd committed to a two-year contract. A few weeks later he told me he'd been fired. I don't think it was just me who ended his academic career. He'd had some other bad luck, as well. A guy on the tech staff got killed playing around on the automatic paint frame—an elevator that lifted scaffolding up and down to help paint large sheets of canvas. The guy at the University of Houston called me and offered me the chairmanship of the department for a year while he went on sabbatical. If I wanted a career in academia, that was my chance, but I didn't. I wanted to go back to Minneapolis and do political work there. New England was pretty and intellectually stimulating but it seemed too tradition-bound and restrictive. It allowed social deviance only within certain proscribed boundaries. And Texas seemed scary. I was afraid they'd shoot something or someone they didn't understand. So, I was preparing to go back home.

In my last year at Smith a professor from India came to see me and asked if I would be interested in producing a play by Tagore in honor of Gandhi's centenary. I said I'd look at some of Tagore's plays and let him know. I read a half dozen of his more popular plays. They were all predictable melodramas with some slight taste of social significance, and they were all unremittingly boring. Then I read "Chitra." I fell in love with it. The story is as old as the "Bhagavad Gita" and taken from the same long poem, "The Mahabharata." Chitra is the only child of a man who is responsible for guarding the city. She was raised as a man and is a great warrior, but one day she sees Arjuna, the great warrior and archer, hunting in the woods. She falls in love with him, but because she has been raised as a man she feels she lacks feminine graces. Two goddesses intervene and grant her wish to be beautiful and feminine for one year. Arjuna falls in love with her but at the end of the year, her city is under attack and he hears about a warrior princess who could save the city. Arjuna is now more attracted to the idea of a warrior companion, and Chitra reveals herself and the two are married. I thought it was a perfect play with a great lesson for Smith women: you could have it all, a career and still be sexy. A novel idea for 1968.

It was a lovely production, ran for just one weekend to packed houses. Lisa Baskin, the wife of the famous sculptor Leonard Baskin, did sets and costumes, and Leonard did a limited-edition lithograph poster for the production that became such a collector's item I never got one. We used George Harrison's soundtrack for "Wonderwall"—electric sitar—as the music for the stylized dance and movements. The role of Arjuna was not that difficult, but, as with Pentheus, the actor backed out halfway through rehearsals, and I had to take on the role. We got no support from the department. I was Dead Man Walking at this point.

One of the other traveling theater troupes that came through the area was the Firehouse Theater from Minneapolis. A lot of them stayed with me, and we agreed to find a place together in Minneapolis when I got back that summer.

XIII. The Eater House and the Georgeville Commune, 1969

David Morton was the son of an art professor at the University of Minnesota. He was one of three Minnesotans who went on the Freedom Rides in the South in 1961. Since then he had dropped out—did psychedelics, didn't have a straight job and grew his hair long. He was probably the first well-known hippie in Minnesota. He formed a jug band called The Jook Savages. The name was taken from the Juke family—a family with hereditary low IQ and a tendency to criminality that had made them living arguments for the eugenics movement. Assuming that title, becoming a member of the Jook Savages, meant you were telling the world that you were fucked up and dangerous.

Janice Crabb, an old friend, was the mother of the Eater House. She was getting welfare, had a housing supplement and food stamps and wanted to share her largess with interesting people who might attract young people to help with the cooking and minding the children. We called ourselves the Eater House because that's the only thing we all had in common. There was one couple in the huge mansion we shared in the Black community in St. Paul that hardly ever came out of their room; she seemed to enjoy his attentions and didn't mind cooking and waiting on him. When he finally came out of the room, he said they were going to leave and join the Beatles. They left and we never heard from them again. There were other musicians that came and went, but the core of tenants were members of the Firehouse Theater. Janice didn't mind calling it The Eater House, but she always said she was a member of the Jook Savages. Later, David and Shirley Morton and their daughter Larkspur came to live with us before David took off for the woods in northern Minnesota.

We sat around the large kitchen table every afternoon and evening singing and playing music. We had many guitars, a mandolin, sometimes a pump handle bass, and kids beating out tempo with chopsticks on a Quaker Oats cardboard drum. Our musical career peaked at a performance of The Eater Family Circus at Dania Hall on the West Bank of the University campus.

I had begun to write songs:

*Why won't you leave us alone?
What is it you think we done wrong?
Tell me how old you think I'll have to be,
Before you think I should believe all that I see,
Before you stop draftin' and messin' over me?
Why won't you leave me alone?
What do I have to do to get you off my back?
Why must it always be either the poor or Black?
Why can't you check on your own side of the track?
Why can't you leave us alone?
Someday will come when you'll understand
People who dream belong in this land
Maybe by then, you'll learn to give a damn.
Why won't you leave us alone?*

Some other friends had moved out to Georgeville. They had been loosely connected through Stone Age Industries, probably the first head shop on the West Bank, started by Susie Shroyer. They had been selling crafts they made but decided they wanted to move out of the city and into the country. A real estate entrepreneur, Larry Johnson, came into the shop one day and told them about a building he owned in Georgeville, Minnesota. They could all live there for very cheap rent. It sounded good. There was no plumbing. The well for the building had been contaminated. They would have to dig a new well and put in a hand pump, build an outhouse, find a wood cookstove, use the propane gas heaters until they could heat with wood, but by late winter of 1969 they had things well enough under control that the women decided they could move in. Two of the men were potters, and the first thing they did in the spring was build a kiln. There were seven of them to start with, but the group grew to twenty during the summer of 1969. There was a two-acre organic garden (before organic became fashionable) and a sauna in the basement.

We were almost self-sufficient and quite proud of ourselves.

Keith Ruona and Susie Shroyer were the couple that organized the caper and made it happen. Keith made the deal with Larry. As far as I know we never paid rent, but we did offer Larry and his family a place to stay whenever they wanted, and ultimately we completely changed Larry to the point he grew out his hair and started printing bumper stickers saying, “Build Utopia.” Keith knew all the farmers in the area: where to get fresh ground flour and oats, where to get chicken manure, where to gather firewood. Susie organized the kitchen and the crafts and pottery that we sold in the Georgeville Trading Post downstairs.

Everyone worked—either in the garden, or the pottery, or making craft items, or fixing cars. Occasionally someone would stop by and sit around all day. I was generally delegated to talk to them: “Look, everybody here works a little bit to make it happen.” “Oh, but I’m a poet.” “Yes, I know. We’re all poets here, so help us with the weeding in the garden tomorrow, O.K?”

It wasn’t really a rural commune. We were living in a two-story brick building with three store-fronts downstairs and an apartment and ballroom upstairs. And there was a railroad track with freight trains running on it twice a day right across the street. But still, it was more rural than I had ever been. Georgeville was a ghost town. Only a hundred miles from Minneapolis, but it had been abandoned when the railroad didn’t stop anymore and all the lumber had been cut. There were many abandoned houses, an abandoned schoolhouse and our building. There were a few houses in town and Toots’ Bar, which served 3.2 beer. Population: about 20.

I made a movie about it, “Georgeville Commune, 1969.” It’s interesting as a record of the time, and it was a hit at the University Film Festival a few years later, but it was a music video before the age of slick music videos and a 16-millimeter color film hand-spliced before videos allowed mixing and editing on a computer. I worked on it all fall and most of the winter: editing, splicing, hand-gluing sections together, adding a soundtrack and mixing the sound and visuals. What took me four months, now can be done in a couple of days on a computer. To get psychedelic triple exposures, we had to wind back the camera and try to remember what we were shooting over.

I put in a lot of my songs:

*I don’t go into the city much anymore
What would I go in there for?
You cannot breathe the air
The people just stand and stare
And what are you doing there?
Out here we bake our daily bread
You’ll always find a warm bed
And what have you got instead?
I don’t go into the city much anymore
What would I go in there for?*

And some of the philosophy that I’d picked up: “Before Buddha was enlightened, he chopped wood and carried water. After he was enlightened, he chopped wood and carried water. Chopping wood is good karma.”

And a story I remembered that a priest told at Mass when I was ten years old: “An angel took a child down the halls of eternity and pushed open the first door marked Hell, and it was a long table with food piled up on it and people sitting on chairs behind the table with knives and forks

too long for them to reach the food to their mouths. And the door closed, and the angel opened the next door marked Heaven, and it was a long table, piled high with food, and the people behind the table with knives and forks too long for them to reach the food to their mouths, but they had learned to feed the person sitting across from them.”

*Doin’ what I know to be right
You don’t have to worry about me tonight
There’s a cold wind, backin’ in from the East
But that cold wind, don’t worry me in the least.
Looks like winter is settlin’ in
Glad I landed here in the midst of friends
Sometimes I wander a long way from home
But my love for you, it doesn’t roam
I’m doin’ what I know to be right
You don’t have to worry about me tonight.*

We got visited by evangelists one afternoon. They set up their microphone across the street from us, and we sat down on our side of the street and listened to them. They played music. We liked to play music, so I joined them and tried to play along. Then I sang them my spiritual:

*Well, I guess I don’t want to be Jesus,
Rasputin or even Oscar Wilde
I want to live to be a hundred
I want to see the world and smile
‘Cause there’s too many died before their time
Too many been locked up tight
They don’t need me up on Calvary
If you see those boys, tell ‘em I was all right
‘Cause I’m not going out again
To try and save this old world
I going to gather ‘round my friends
Find us a farm and settle down.*

They packed up and left and we danced in the street.

Of course, the song wasn’t exactly true. I never did really look for a real farm. I was still strongly attracted to the city, and I was still foolish enough to believe I should “try and save this old world.”

One early fall night at Georgeville I was reading the U.S. Constitution, and I came across the part where it said no appropriation for an army should be for more than two years. In other words, there should be no standing army. The founding fathers recognized that a standing army and a permanent military class were a danger and a threat to democratic government. Also, the Constitution said only Congress has the right to declare war. A president cannot engage in war without the consent of Congress.

I was angry about how the whole country had been lied to, and I was determined to do something about it. I wrote a one-page leaflet explaining very simply why the Vietnam War was

unconstitutional, illegal and immoral. I typed it up and went into Minneapolis and had it copied and stood on the corner of 4th Street and 14th Avenue Southeast in Dinkytown, near the University campus, and tried to hand them out. It was an early frosty, almost wintry day. I was standing on the corner in front of Gray's Drug Store, and no one was taking the leaflet I was offering. No one wanted the added burden of something else to think about on what seemed like the first day of winter.

"There has to be a better way to market this idea," I thought.

In some of the head shops I had seen copies of The Oracle and The Seed, underground tabloid newspapers from San Francisco and Chicago. I liked the color burns in The Oracle, the psychedelic drawings and the hippy appeal, and I liked the straight-on local politics of The Seed.

XIV. The March on Washington, Fall 1969

There was a big rally in Minneapolis for people opposed to the war at the Minneapolis Auditorium in October of 1969. I went and got fired up. For the price of the bus ticket, I could buy enough gas to drive a carload of my brothers and sisters from Georgeville out to Washington. I hurried back and quickly sold them on the idea. We left that night: Bob and Lisa Stein, Bob Kauten, Alan Jones, Tony Stone and I. We packed a bag full of miso and raw onion sandwiches and talked the rest of the commune into letting us take the second-best car. Just to make the trip more interesting we all dropped acid.

I drove all night and reached the Chicago Skyway at rush hour. Driving down the Skyway at about 65 mph, coming down from LSD, I felt a thud in my left front wheel, and I noticed my tire coming off and falling behind the car. I steered the car into an abutment, ran back through three lanes of traffic, found the tire at the side of the road, grabbed it and ran back to the car. By that time some brothers driving a tow truck had pulled up in front of us and had lifted up the car. They gave us a couple of lug nuts which we attached to the three posts that hadn't been sheared off, tightened the nuts, and they let the car down. We gave the brothers a couple of joints for their trouble, and we were back on the road again.

After about 12 hours we got into Indiana, driving on the highways to avoid paying on the tollways, and I turned to my passengers and said, "OK, I'm tired. Who wants to relieve me?" It was then I found out that no one else had a driver's license. It was going to be a long trip. It was somewhere in the mountains in Virginia that our brakes went out, and finally, about ten miles outside of Washington, the car blew up. It overheated and something shot out of the engine block. We grabbed our stuff, took off the license plates, threw them in a nearby field and hitchhiked into the demonstration.

We sat around with 100,000 other demonstrators and listened to speeches and music, and then I got up and told the group that I was going to go look for a chartered bus to Minneapolis and see if we could hitch a ride to get back to the commune. I looked up and down the street adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial but couldn't find anything. I noticed a rental truck in back of the stage and went over to it to ask if they'd seen a bus with Minneapolis destination marking. There were some people in the cab, so I stepped up on the running board and asked this very pretty young woman if she'd seen a bus from Minnesota. She looked annoyed. I was not about to be put off, so I looked over and next to the other window was another pretty woman, and I was about to ask her the same thing, when I noticed a short guy sitting between the two women. It was Bobby Dylan. At that moment I heard Jimi Hendrix singing his incomparable version of the national

anthem. I mumbled, "Sorry" and stepped down.

I couldn't find a bus with Minneapolis on it, but I found the next best thing, a bus that said it was going to Chicago. That was a lot better than nothing, so I went back to the group, and, after listening to Sen. George McGovern and some more music, we all went over to the bus. By that time, we had collected a couple of other people, so there were about ten of us. We were not going to sit in any of the seats. We were going to sit in aisles, and we would try not to bother anyone. When the church group that had rented the bus showed up I explained to them our problem and asked for their cooperation. One of the women from the church group said, "OK, you can't sit on the floor in the bus. We'll buy you all bus tickets home." She and I went to the Greyhound office and she bought tickets for everyone.

XV. The Day After Demonstrations in San Francisco, 1970

I finished editing, splicing and gluing my film together. I got a soundtrack recorded at a studio in Minneapolis. And I was ready to marry the two rolls into a complete film. There was a place to do that out in San Francisco. Keith and Susie had taken off for San Francisco, so I thought I'd go out and join them and get my film put together. I hitchhiked out there with a backpack containing the film and my guitar.

The talk in San Francisco was about planning the demonstration after Judge Hoffman's sentencing in the Chicago 7 trial. On February 18, a jury had found Dave Dellinger, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis guilty of crossing state lines with the intent to incite a riot in connection with demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. On February 20, they were sentenced to five years in prison.

People had been preparing for this for months. I ran into old friends from Burning City Theater in New York, and we put together something to be performed at the demonstration in San Francisco downtown in front of the Federal Building. It was a short parable about how a criminal war criminalizes dissent.

A lot of lefties had been taking emergency self-defense classes specifically training people on how to defend against police aggression.

After the San Francisco demonstration, some of us went over to Berkeley to the University campus. We knew there would be a big demonstration there. I got there just as a crowd was surrounding a police car. The cops got out of it and were calling for reinforcements. The crowd started rocking the car, trying to tip it over. I was standing next to a guy with a motorcycle helmet on, holding a 16-foot two-by-four. He said to me, and to anyone else listening, "Let's go take care of business," and he took off and we all followed him down Shattuck Avenue. He used the two-by-four to push in the plate glass windows of all the banks he could find. We ran down Shattuck Avenue for about eight blocks, then we dispersed and disappeared.

I picked up my film and one of the other things I picked up in San Francisco was another idea for a newspaper. I ran across a collection of a defunct underground paper, Dock of the Bay. It had great politics, but it also had centerfolds of revolutionary heroes like Ho Chi Minh, Che, etc. I thought it was wonderful. People could put them up on their walls. A newspaper that could be both political and decorative. I was inspired.

Keith and Susie and I drove back to Minneapolis, and I got there in time to show "Georgeville Commune, 1969" at the University Film Society International Festival where it got an enthusiastic round of applause.

XVI. Hundred Flowers, 1970

When I got back to Minneapolis I heard about some people around the University who were thinking about starting a newspaper. I met with some of them. They were much younger than me. One of them, though, had actual experience working on a newspaper in college. This was invaluable because I had no idea how it worked. Dickie Dworkin became the managing editor, and I was sort of the de facto publisher because I put up the money and sold ads. We needed an art director, so Dickie and I convinced Warren Hanson to drop out of college at Augsburg and join us. Editorial decisions were made by committee. We had a meeting every Monday where we analyzed the last issue and talked about what would be in the next one.

I bought a house in the Powderhorn area of South Minneapolis, and we all moved in and set up a layout table in the basement. We would type copy on an IBM Selectric typewriter (Selectric because we had a choice of three fonts), cut out the copy and wax the back of it and lay it out on sheets. We used press-on lettering for headlines. We would put all the layout sheets in a box and take them to a printer who would shoot a photograph of the pages and shoot a photograph of the photographs we had to fit in the holes we'd left for them. We figured out the sizes of the photographs by using a reduction wheel (what I called "The Magic Wheel"). By today's standards for desktop publishing, we were very crude and amateurish, but considering that photo-offset printing was fairly new—many papers were still using linotype machines and lithography—we were actually cutting edge in 1970. We sold the paper for 25 cents. We let street dealers and head shops keep 10 cents for every paper they sold, and we got 15 cents. It was almost enough to cover costs. And we were able to sell some ads. We printed 5000 copies each week.

Before our first issue, we all went out to Georgeville for a weekend to talk about the paper. We hadn't settled on a title for it. I said I wanted to call it Red Star Express. They all thought that was terrible. Then I suggested Hundred Flowers with the slogan under the masthead: "Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend." They thought that was great. It sounded counter-cultural enough to satisfy flower children, and it was Maoist enough to satisfy me.

We agreed there would always be something counter-cultural in the paper. There would be at least two or three music reviews. We would try to be as local as we could be, and our politics would be heavy. My favorite type font for headlines was Cooper Black Italic, which I called "People's Heavy."

One of our first issues was our North Country issue where we called for secession. In the center we published an update on the Declaration of Independence in which we talked about how the Vietnam War was illegal and unconstitutional and how it was no longer possible to reason with such tyranny. We argued that Minnesota and parts of North Dakota (the watershed areas of the Mississippi, Minnesota and Red River Valleys) should unite with parts of Canada and form a new North Country. The North Country map was our cover illustration.

The lead story on page 3 was an analysis by Keith and me of the Minnesota 8. Up to that point, Minnesota 8 referred to the eight students caught trying to destroy draft records. We wanted to indict the eight interlocking capitalists that ran Minnesota because they were the real criminals. Binger and Keating of Honeywell were connected to the Daytons and the banking corporations and to 3M. All the money that changed hands between these interlocking capitalists was stained with Vietnamese children's blood from Honeywell's anti-personnel bombs.

The cover on our next issue was a cartoon of James Binger wringing dollars out of an anti-personnel bomb with pennies dropping down to a worker in the Honeywell plant. It was a promotion for a demonstration against Honeywell. That was what we did best, led cheers for the revolution. The cartoon was by Chuck Logan, a Vietnam vet who is now a well-known mystery writer. He did another cartoon for us that we made into a poster centerfold: two Vietnamese soldiers poking at a large, inflated tiger saying, "Hey, it's not paper, it's plastic"—a takeoff on Mao's famous dictum: Imperialism is a paper tiger.

Chuck's career as a cartoonist for us came to an end in a kind of scandal on the left. He submitted a cartoon that he thought was the funniest he had done. It was two hippies rolling a joint sitting in the middle of a room as a twelve-foot breast crashes through the wall. The caption: "Cool it. It's a bust." I told him I didn't think it was that funny and we'd probably get in a lot of trouble. He said it was great and I had to print it or he'd never do another one. The woman he was with at the time, a well-known feminist, agreed with Chuck and thought we should print it. We printed it. A women's group descended on the offices. They demanded that we ink out the offending cartoon on all the issues. Brian Coyle, who supported the feminists, agreed and bought inkpads and rollers and set to work inking them out. He got through a couple of hundred before he got tired and quit. The next night I went to a musical event at the Cedar Theater and told the audience about our problem. I said "We've always thought of Hundred Flowers as a community newspaper, so we're asking you to help us. Please take one of the copies of the paper and ink out the offending cartoon when you get home."

There were marches from Loring Park to the state Capitol to protest the war, and one week there was so much happening we had to divide the front cover into sections to promote a student strike at the University, Lazy Bill Lucas playing piano and a sit-in at buildings that were going to be torn down to make way for a Red Barn fast food restaurant. The centerfold the next week was among our most popular—a car crashed through the front of the existing Red Barn on the other side of campus. It was the kind of wild and crazy action that, although we couldn't endorse it, we not-so-secretly admired.

The peace movement in the sixties and early seventies soon got taken over by the Socialist Workers Party, a Trotskyist group. Most people were OK with that. The SWP was doing the organizing and doing the publicity, so they should be able to pick the speakers and use it to try to recruit. We used to call their peace marches "Trot Marches" because they always started at Loring Park and marched in quick-step time to the state Capitol. They were always very well mannered, and they got parade permits from the police. The SWP didn't want to offend ordinary people. Some people in SDS wanted to do something a little more heavy. They were looking to offend.

At about this time, in the middle of summer, two buses pulled up in front of our house. One, a school bus, was filled with old friends from the Eater House who were on their way to a farm commune in Oregon. We had three toilets in the house, so it wasn't much of a problem. They were reconditioning the bus to be a live-in trailer home for about twelve. They tore out the seats to make room for beds. We used the seats for cushions around a tabletop on bricks that we used for our dining room table. The other bus was a retrofitted Greyhound that contained the traveling Hog Farm and Wavy Gravy.

Hugh Romney, or Wavy Gravy, was famous for organizing the free food distribution at Woodstock: "We've got free food. And we're going to get it to you. We're all going to do this together. We're going to feed each other. We must be in heaven." His wife was Bonnie Beecher. I'd know

her when she and I were undergraduates in theater at the University. She was in a sorority, and she lined me up with one of her sorority sisters, Judy Olson, Miss Minnesota 1957—very beautiful, but we didn’t have a lot to talk about. Bonnie was going out with a folk singer who had just changed his name to Bob Dylan. I asked her when I saw her that summer if “Girl from the North Country” was written about her. She said it was. But then, probably at least a dozen girls in Minnesota also thought the song was written about them.

Back to the SDS demonstration: There must have been between 300 and 500 peaceniks, SDSers and assorted anarchists assembled at the Minneapolis Auditorium. I brought Wavy Gravy along for the cultural experience. We didn’t get permits. We were going to march down Nicollet Avenue from the Auditorium at one end to City Hall at the other, disrupting traffic. We took off and people along the way were very sympathetic. By the time we got to City Hall there were still about 200 hard-core crazed fanatics. We surrounded the flagpole, pulled down the American flag and ran up a flag for the Viet Cong. Demonstration done, we started to walk away. I saw an officer I knew (we’d acted in a play together about fifteen years before). I said hi. We talked for a bit. Another officer came by and kicked me. I said, “Pat, did you see that?” He said, “What?” And I could see the divide between us and the police.

Hubert Humphrey was running for senator again after losing the race for president in 1968. He was speaking at a Hamline College graduation. Some of us thought it would be a good idea to remind folks about his defense of the war in Vietnam and his lying to the American people about the carpet bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong. We gathered at the back and formed a wedge around a guy with a bullhorn. We marched in, interrupted his speech by telling the students Humphrey’s real record on the war and then retreated with some angry young people threatening to do us bodily harm. But nobody got hurt, and we made our point.

Besides the sit-in in the buildings in Dinkytown to stop the Red Barn, some young people were sitting in in three houses on Harriet Avenue in South Minneapolis. A developer had bought the three houses, and he was planning on tearing them down and putting up a two-and-a-half story walkup that would quadruple the density and transform a residential neighborhood. We had been cheering them on, so when we heard the bust was coming (the city had cut off all utilities and had cemented shut the basement drains to prevent sewer rats from crawling out) I went down to take a picture with my Kodak Instamatic camera. I went in and talked to the occupiers who were about to be arrested by the Tactical Squad assembled in the street. Then I went outside and across the street to document the arrest.

I was standing in front of a line of spectators when the cops started their move on the house. Some of us were chanting, “Leave them alone!” Then I started to move towards the houses, thinking the crowd behind me was following me. I got as far as the middle of the street when two police officers arrested me and threw me in the back of a police van. Soon, many of the people I’d met earlier were thrown in as well, and when we had a full van we took off for downtown. I was photographed, fingerprinted and booked on a charge of disturbing the peace. I needed \$25 for bail. I called the paper. They said, “Do you want to be bailed out?” I said, “Of course I want to be bailed out.” They said, “Well, we thought maybe you might want to protest by staying in jail.” I said, “Please get down here with \$25 and get me out of here.”

At the trial, the arresting officer didn’t appear, which was kind of a disappointment to me because I was looking forward to cross-examining him. So I moved that the charges against me be dropped since there was no evidence of a crime, and I explained to the judge that I was a reporter for Hundred Flowers going about my duties. The judge called us into his chambers and, after I



Ed Felien and Warren Hanson. two of the co-founders of Hundred Flowers newspaper.

explained what Hundred Flowers was and some part of the theory of an underground press, he agreed to dismiss the charges. The experience left me even more confused than before about the line between advocacy journalism and inciting to riot.

One of the guys who was hanging around the paper was Doc. I don't know if anyone knew his real name. He said he'd been a medic in Vietnam and was medically discharged with an AK-47 slug in his back. He was a little intense. There was a trial of some SDS people who had gotten arrested in a ROTC protest. Doc came to the office dressed in a graduation gown with a plastic machine gun and a bag with fake blood. He was going to go down to the federal courthouse and protest the trial. We tried to talk him out of it. He insisted he was going to do it. I went with him to make sure he didn't get hurt. We got down to the federal building, and Doc didn't know the number of the courtroom. What's worse, we were in the wrong federal building. Some FBI people came up behind us and asked us to come with them. I tried to explain to them Doc's history and current project. They were uninterested. They sat us down on a bench, took our names and told us to wait while they checked us out. About ten minutes later this fat, bald man came out and sat down next to me and said, "Well, Ed Felien, what have you been up to lately?" That was a little creepy. I stood up and asked, "Are we being charged with anything?" They didn't answer. I said, "Then we're leaving." We left, got back to the house, and we never saw Doc again.

We rented The Depot (the Greyhound bus station downtown converted to a rock and roll night club) for a Sunday afternoon for a benefit for the Venceremos Brigade and the North Country Freedom Camp. Spider John Koerner and other West Bank favorites played. The Hundred Flowers Surf Jazz Band Orchestra played a set of my songs and rockabilly favorites like "Down in the Boondocks." Dickie Dworkin played a mean set of drums.

The Venceremos Brigade was a group of lefties who were going down to Cuba to help with the sugar cane harvest.

The North Country Freedom Camp was my idea. We lived in the inner city and there were many kids who couldn't afford to go to summer camp, so when we heard about this deserted logging camp up north owned by a leftist sympathizer, we decided we'd use it for a week and give our kids a nature break. We got about twenty kids in assorted cars and vans and left the city. After a couple days Tony Salvatore, one of the adults, asked if we had insurance. Of course, we didn't. After discussing the problem, Tony talked us into breaking up the camp and returning to the city. A few weeks later someone in the Honeywell Project told us they had gotten their FBI files and found out that they had an informer in their group, and the only person who had been to all the recorded meetings was Tony Salvatore. Tony stopped hanging out around the left after that.

We did special editions on women's liberation, organic food and gurus—with a laughing Jesus on the cover and a photo of Meher Baba ("Don't worry. Be happy.") as the centerfold.

A feminist group took over the paper one week and insisted they get four pages for women's liberation. We were sort of in favor of that, so we were happy to work with them. One of the articles was about tearing down some sexist posters at the Electric Fetus: "Power Failure at the Electric Cock." I said, "Do you think we could tone down the title?" They absolutely insisted on their original. When we took the paper to Shakopee Valley Printers, the head printer took us back into his office, and there was Ancher Nelsen, the congressman from that district. He asked to look at our layout pages. He went through them carefully, one by one, until he got to the Women's Liberation pages and stopped short at "Power Failure at the Electric Cock." He closed all the pages and said, "No, I don't think so." I took the pages and the layout box, marched to the door, turned back, and in my most indignant voice said, "As John F. Kennedy said, 'When you make

peaceful revolution impossible, you make violent revolution inevitable.'"

We had been refused printing at about 20 web-fed photo-offset presses. One cover was a map of Minnesota with 20 pins showing the bourgeois hypocrisy of a "free press." Finally, we were printed in Milwaukee by the same printer who printed the Chicago Seed.

We missed a week because of the printer problem so we had to combine the gay liberation issue (if we let the women's liberation group take us over, then why wouldn't we allow the gay liberation group to do the same?) with the State Fair issue. That was a colossal mistake, as I found out trying to sell the issue at the State Fair.

At the request of Susie Shroyer, we published a half-page ad that looked like embroidery saying, "Wash Your Own Dish" which she tacked up over the sink. Keith and Susie were living with us with their new baby, Leif. They took charge of getting enough food to feed the regulars and visitors. Keith arranged to buy 50-pound bags of flour and brown rice, but it was difficult to store such large quantities in our house, so they convinced Diane Odermann to allow them to store big bags of flour, rice and other foodstuffs on her back porch. We chipped in \$50 out of our meager treasury. Diane's porch became People's Pantry. It was self-serve and on the honor system. You came, measured out your portion and paid a reasonable amount. Eventually the Pantry moved to Riverside Church and then it became North Country Co-op—just at the time we had published our North Country Liberation Front Program.

The North Country Liberation Front Program was the brainchild of Brian Coyle. We printed it and inserted it into one of our editions. We thought it did a good job of summing up the political program of the counterculture. Brian promised to go around and meet with people to discuss it. I don't think that ever happened. There were crossed guns at the sides of the masthead, suggesting we were ready to take up arms. I objected to that, but Brian was always titillated by violence. After I told him about my experience on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley earlier that year, he insisted on writing an article, "Gonna Smash in all Your Plate Glass Windows," about the legitimacy of revolutionary violence. He later became quite respectable and served on the Minneapolis City Council from 1984 until he died of AIDS in 1991 at 47 years of age.

One night while I was working on the paper, a local DJ on a popular rock station said he'd "swear on a stack of Hundred Flowers" that something was true. That was probably the nicest thing anyone ever said about us—that we were the alternative Bible of the local revolutionary culture.

There were tensions in our collective between me and the younger members. When we got news about the details of Che Guevara's death and the role of the CIA in locating him, we all dropped acid, and I remember standing on top of a table, shaking my fist at the ceiling saying, "We'll make them pay for this." One of my younger comrades remembers he was thinking, "We're all going to die."

One morning we woke up to find out that someone had blown the back door and porch off the Old Federal Building downtown. This was the door where draftees assembled to be taken off to Vietnam. It seemed like a clearly political act, but we had no idea who or what group in the Twin Cities would do something like that. Later that morning someone showed up at our front door, said they were from Liberation News Service (our national and international news feed), and could he stay with us for a couple of days. He said he'd slept by the river last night. We said, "Sure." It turned out I recognized him from when I was teaching at Smith. He had been active in SDS at Amherst. We chatted. I asked him about friends of mine from back then. He pointed to the floor. I said, "What?" He said, "They're underground." A large faction of SDS had become



Hundred Flowers vol. 1 no. 5 cover

The Weathermen (from Bobby Dylan’s “You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows”) and then The Weather Underground. They had been blowing things up across the country, but the only fatalities they had were their own. Tragically, Diana Oughton, Ted Gold and Terry Robbins had blown themselves up earlier that year assembling a bomb in a Greenwich Village townhouse. I made a quick calculation and stopped asking questions.

We debated the question in the paper. Were we at the stage of armed struggle? Was the bombing a legitimate tactic? Ultimately, though we sympathized with the intent of the action, we believed there was not sufficient political consciousness to warrant an action like that. Mao had said, “A single spark can start a prairie fire.” But that’s true only if the ground has been prepared and the kindling dry. There were no oppressed masses ready to catch fire, no prairie ready to erupt in mass revolt. There was a long road of political education still ahead.

One night while I was laying out the paper and everyone else had gone to bed, I came across a hole in the paper after a letter from a soldier in Vietnam. The letter expressed a kind of flower child morality about how we should all be friends and love one another. I was horrified. How could someone whose job it was to kill Vietnamese talk about peace and love? I was tired and cranky. I was irritated at my comrades for deserting me when we needed to put out the paper. I was irritated at the soldier for willfully not understanding he was being used as a tool of U.S. imperialism. I abused my power as the only one at the layout table, and I independently set editorial policy that was way out of bounds for most of the people working on the paper. I said, as an editorial answer to the soldier’s letter: “You are a bourgeois, chicken-shit pacifist. As Che said, ‘Let my death be answered by the staccato of machine gun fire.’”

Needless to say, I had a lot of explaining to do. Marv Davidov, the pacifist who was the chief organizer of the demonstrations against Honeywell anti-personnel bombs, asked me what I meant. We had been friends since before he took off with David Morton on the Freedom Rides. I had always supported his political work. I explained the difference between his deeply felt pacifism that actually ran counter to the interests of the bourgeois class, and the pacifism of people who don’t want to resist the power of the bourgeois class and think it’s not nice to fight against their interests. And an occupying and imperialist power would, of course, promote a philosophy of pacifism as opposed to one that tolerated active resistance. Gandhi was successful because he would make his demands, lead marches of thousands of people, and then fast almost to the point of killing himself. I would argue that his was a violent act. He was taking someone (himself) hostage and starving him to death unless the British government relented. Everyone understood that if Gandhi died there would be very bloody riots. It was violence (against himself) and the threat of greater violence that moved the British government.

The self-immolation of Buddhist monks in front of the American Embassy in Saigon in the early days of the Vietnam War shocked the conscience of anyone who cared about human life, but those actions could not be called non-violent. It can hardly be pacifistic to burn yourself to death, morally courageous, yes, but not non-violent pacifism.

I was fried—mentally and psychologically exhausted. I needed to get away, and I wanted to go out and see Jimmy again. So, I told everybody I was taking a week off, and I hitchhiked out to Massachusetts. Jimmy was great. Pontificating like an apostate pope. Talking about Nixon “with the thinly disguised swastika in the middle of his name.” Jimmy had set up a letterpress in his barn. He had racks of California Job Cases, the trays of type that typesetters used to print books, pamphlets and newspapers for 500 years. In Minneapolis, we were publishing an underground newspaper by using a very primitive kind of desktop publishing and photo-offset printing. Jimmy

was going back into a more craftsman-like past where the beauty of type on a page was enhanced when the typeface actually embossed the paper, made an indentation and filled that space with ink. With Jimmy weaving magic spells, it was easy to lose oneself in the majesty of the printed word on good paper. But ultimately it was too escapist, too much “Art for Art’s Sake,” for me. There was no way we could respond to changing political events if we had to hand set all the lines of type and run them off one page at a time on a letter press. And I was anxious to return to the battle.

When I got back, Dickie and Warren and Keith and Susie told me I was no longer a part of the Hundred Flowers collective. They had been meeting all week and decided that I was too arrogant, too independent and too much trouble. I accepted their judgment. We decided to do one more issue together. I got to pick the theme for the cover: The Black Panther Party with a center-fold of Huey Newton. And there was a page devoted to the split in the paper. I had committed the military error. I tried to muscle my way through an argument by name-calling and insults. And, if I could reject a political position without discussing it, then everyone else was permitted to reject my politics without considering them. My actions were self-indulgent and counterproductive.

Hundred Flowers went on for one more issue after I had been booted and then collapsed. No one else wanted to spend the energy trying to keep it together. Also, since I owned the house (and, in the divorce, they got the paper, but I kept the house) it was difficult for them to put out the paper when they all lived in different places.

XVII. The murder of Mark Salzer, Winter 1971

Later that winter we heard about the murder of Mark Salzer by an undercover narcotics officer of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). James Decowski befriended Mark and then busted him. He was in his apartment with his girlfriend. The cop pulled a gun. Mark knocked over a lamp. The cop shot and killed him. Mark had no weapon. He wasn’t a threat to anyone. He was shot and killed for selling a small bag of marijuana.

Dickie Dworkin came to see me and said some people on the West Bank wanted me to help organize some kind of protest. I met with some of them. We decided to have a march from Mark’s apartment down to City Hall and lay flowers at the door of the grand jury room where they were deciding whether to bring criminal charges against Decowski. About 200 of us marched on a cold late winter day. After laying the flowers at the door, I decided to try to push the action just a little further. I said we should go downstairs to the mayor’s office and talk to Mayor Stenvig, a former cop, about curbing police brutality.

About 50 of us sat down in the hallway outside Mayor Stenvig’s office. We wanted him to come out and talk to us. His staff said he would see six of us in his office. I didn’t want to go inside. I wanted to stay outside and keep the demonstration together. Dickie and five others went in to see Stenvig. Those of us in the hall were peaceful and orderly, though we did start singing “We Shall Overcome.” When the group came out, some were completely enchanted by Stenvig’s charisma, but Dickie said we ought to stay in the hallway until Stenvig came out. Lt. Ekblad had been handing people a bullhorn to address the crowd. When Dickie said that, Ekblad pulled back Dickie’s thumb and broke it. I stood up and said, “That’s it. We’re out of here.” Dickie and I went to General Hospital and had his thumb set and put in a cast. Two days later Dickie and I returned to City Hall to file a complaint against Lt. Ekblad for use of excessive force. We were directed to the Internal Affairs Unit—two officers in a basement room. We brought in x-rays of

the broken thumb and said we’d like to file a complaint. They made a call and in a few moments Lt. Ekblad came in, and the three officers looked at the x-rays, laughed and started talking about their pensions. After about a half hour of this, I asked when we could file our complaint. They said there would be no complaint. We picked up our x-rays and left.

I thought, “The use of excessive force is an assault and a crime, so we should go see the City Attorney.” We went upstairs to the City Attorney’s office and asked to talk to a criminal attorney. After we showed him the x-rays we asked him to bring charges of criminal misconduct against Lt. Ekblad.

The attorney said, “You don’t understand. The police bring us criminals and tell us who to prosecute.”

“But what if they’re the criminals?” I asked.

The attorney said, “That doesn’t happen.”

Having reached a second dead end, we asked the attorney, “Who appoints the City Attorney?”

He said, “The City Council.”

We went over to the City Council offices and tried to talk to our representative, but he wasn’t interested in seeing us. Dickie and I decided I should run for City Council. Precinct caucuses were coming up. I would run to get elected a delegate to the ward convention.

The precinct caucus was easy. I just showed up and said I wanted to be a delegate, and that was it. The ward convention to endorse a candidate for City Council was a bit more complicated. I had some support. Judy Healy, a young progressive Catholic and her husband, Mike, supported me. They even threw a fundraiser. My mother, who had been active in South Minneapolis DFL politics for 25 years, decided to take an interest in my campaign. She called Catholic delegates she knew and told them, “Don’t vote for my son. He’s a communist.” When she called Judy Healy, Judy told her, “Well, I’ve already committed to him, but I’ll pray for him as well.”

There were about six candidates. We all made speeches but after four ballots it was clear that none of us would get the required 60% so the convention adjourned without an endorsement. We all ran in the primary. It was an open primary. The incumbent, Jim Butler, won one of two spots and June Hegstrom won the other. She had not run at the endorsing convention, but she was the wife of the former DFL alderman (they were called aldermen in those days), and she had contacts for money and lawn sign lists.

I was naïve going into that experience, but I learned a lot, and when June lost to Jim Butler, I made up my mind to win next time.

XVIII. Mo Burton and the Black Panthers, Spring 1971

There wasn’t much to do after losing the election, so I started hanging out with Mo Burton. He was a 6-foot, 2-inch, 290-pound Black guy who had a great political analysis and wanted to start a local chapter of the Black Panther Party in Minneapolis. We’d drive around, drink cheap wine, smoke some pot, talk politics and then play Go, an ancient Chinese/Japanese game of strategy. He started a study group where about six of us sat around and read the Red Book by Mao and talked about theory and practice.

He thought we had to have a clubhouse, so he rented a little concrete block building behind a store on 38th Street in the heart of the Black community. I think he was starting to smoke a little too much pot because he was starting to get paranoid. He thought the police were going to kill him. Bobby Hutton had been murdered by the Oakland police in 1968, and Fred Hampton had

been murdered while he was sleeping in his bed by the Chicago police and the FBI in 1969. So, it was not too big a stretch to think the Minneapolis police might want to help with the Black Panther extermination campaign. But when he started piling sandbags in front of the building and keeping a shotgun at the clubhouse, I thought he was going overboard. It was the Kathleen Cleaver Information Center. Kathleen was the wife of Eldridge (“Soul on Ice” and the guy who led the shoot-out in Oakland that ended up getting Bobby Hutton killed).

We had a support demonstration in front of the clubhouse on a cold spring day. A young woman marched by in a fur coat. I wrote a song about her: “‘Hands off the Panthers’ her picket sign said. It was freezing cold, but she didn’t mind the bother. It makes me feel real she said.”

The police didn’t come by and murder everyone, but the landlord canceled his lease and the city forced him to tear down the building, and Mo ended up getting sent back to prison on a weapons charge.

XIX. Experimental College, 1971 to 1973

Just when I had given up any hope of ever being hired again as an academic, David Tilsen, a comrade on the left and a former member of the Du Bois Club, told me about Experimental College. It was a college at the University where the students were hiring the faculty. They had only funds to hire a faculty member one-quarter time. It sounded great, I applied, and they hired me.

The college had also hired David’s guerrilla theater group, “Alive and Trucking;” David’s grandmother, Meridel Le Sueur (internationally loved writer); Marv Davidov, organizer of the Honeywell Project; Peggy Shor, local feminist organizer; some philosophy department professors; Andrea Marvy to teach dance, and a few others.

Quarter-time meant that faculty were only supposed to teach one class, but I was so excited by the concept of a student-run college, that I taught classes in Current Political Developments in China—from the end of World War II to the Cultural Revolution; Racist and Sexist stereotypes in Elementary Texts in the Minneapolis Public Schools—where we compiled a 100-page book and presented it to the school board; and documentary filmmaking—where we made a thirty-minute documentary film about the college.

There was a march on Honeywell that fall organized by the Honeywell Project to protest the manufacture of anti-personnel bombs—little bombs the size of a softball that come apart on contact with the earth and send out tiny pieces of shrapnel meant to cut through skin. These are genuinely terrorist bombs. They cannot harm buildings or military installations. They are not effective against armed troops that are generally well protected with heavy uniforms and helmets, but they are deadly cutting through the flesh and vital organs of women and young children. Honeywell had just recently improved their razor coiled shrapnel by changing from metal to plastic. This made it much more difficult for Vietnamese doctors to find and extract the pieces.

XX. The DFL Endorsing Convention

The spring of 1973 was critical. I had been fired from Experimental College. They didn’t actually fire me. Dean Werntz told the three coordinators who ran Experimental College that if they didn’t get rid of me and David Tilsen, the University administration was going to get rid of Experimental College. They came back and told me. I had no choice but to resign. We should have known that getting rid of the radicals was the first step to getting rid of the College. But we

didn’t think five years ahead, we were thinking about a budget for next year. So, I resigned, but not without one last protest. I took the film crew that had been doing the documentary about the college [you can view the 1972 anti-war protest scenes from the documentary here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u2FXF5ez7s&t=77s>] to interview Dean Werntz. He wouldn’t see us. We sat in his office for an hour or so and then left.

[For a detailed summary of the anti-war protests at the U in 1972 check out “TAKE THE STREETS!” by Ed Felien available at Mayday Books.]

By now I had other things on my mind.

The DFL endorsing convention for City Council was happening in the spring of 1973, and this time I had a better idea of possibilities, having learned something from my defeat in 1971.

Two years before when I called delegates, I found out my mother was also calling delegates and warning them that I was a communist and that they shouldn’t vote for me. Judy Healy, a dear friend and Catholic delegate, told her, “Well, Alice, I’m throwing a fundraiser for him but I’ll pray for him as well.” But time healed the breach and by 1973 my mother had come to accept my radical politics, and she nominated me at the endorsing convention.

There were about 170 delegates. There were originally four candidates, but two were dropped after two ballots, and it became a race between Steve Aldrich and me.

Today we would recognize the struggle between Aldrich and me as a struggle between the Clinton liberals and Sanders radicals. Back then it was characterized as a struggle between hacks and flakes. A hack was someone who knew how the system worked and wanted a piece of the action. A flake was someone who was motivated by a burning issue and who assumed a political campaign was a holy crusade.

In between balloting we lobbied undecided delegates. The totals seesawed between Aldrich and me. It looked like neither of us could get the 60% necessary for endorsement. Aldrich’s people were telling delegates, “Steve agrees with Eddie on all the issues but Eddie’s just not electable.” We decided to tell delegates the exact same thing, “Eddie agrees with Steve on all the issues but Steve’s just not electable.” The Aldrich people were furious. They came to us and complained. We told them we were just saying the same thing they were.

Finally, although we were ahead by a little, it looked like the convention would deadlock without an endorsement. Someone from their side moved to adjourn. It was a standing vote. Aldrich was standing with his supporters in the front row in favor of the motion. I ran down to the front of the stage and said loudly to him, “Steve, you’re not voting to adjourn, are you?”

I knew most delegates wanted an endorsement. They had spent four hours discussing and debating, and they didn’t want to see it wasted. The motion to adjourn lost, and I got the 60% necessary for endorsement on the next ballot.

I spent the summer door-knocking every home in the 8th Ward. I found out later that only flakes knock on every door. Hacks printed out labels of all the people who voted in the last municipal election and put them on 3 by 5 cards. When they knocked on the door they knew the person’s name, and they sent them a letter afterwards thanking them for the visit. They could door-knock a ward in a fraction of the time and call every voter by name.

My pitch at the door was quick and simple: “Hi, I’m Ed Felien. I’m running for City Council for Ward 8. I would have voted against the domed stadium.” The City Council and the incumbent had just voted to spend millions of taxpayers’ dollars to build a new domed football stadium downtown. It was wildly unpopular. Sometimes we’d chat for a while and shake hands. Sometimes I’d just hand them a piece of literature with the phone numbers of city departments they

could call in case of a problem, and on the other side was my campaign literature with a smiling photo. Sometimes I'd just wave and try to hand them the literature. If they weren't home, I'd leave a piece at the door with "Sorry I missed you, Ed Felien" handwritten across it.

The incumbent was Jim Butler, a nice enough guy. His kids and my brother's kids went to school together. He was a member of Holy Name Catholic Church. The Holy Name Men's Club was a serious political machine. They sent letters to the parish warning about me. People would tell us when we were door-knocking that I'd been married 12 times and sacrificed goats on the altar. Their major campaign piece directly attacked me by reprinting two articles I'd written for *Hundred Flowers*: The Declaration of Independence—rewritten to allow North Country (Minnesota and parts of North Dakota) to secede from the U.S. because of the Vietnam War—and an article where I said if there was a mass bust of pot smokers (the West Bank was going through one of its seasonal fits of paranoia) then we'd organize a mass protest to free our brothers and sisters. One day I was taking a nap so I could door-knock in the evening when I was awakened by a phone call. It was Paul Helm, a right-wing radio jock. He was calling me on air. He quickly introduced himself and asked, "Hundred Flowers? Let a hundred flowers blossom. Let a hundred schools of thought contend? Isn't that a quote from Mao Zedong?" I was awake enough to answer, "Well, actually, it's a quote from Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher."

What I said was true, of course. Mao took the quote from Lao Tzu and used it as the slogan for the Hundred Flowers period in 1956 when he invited grassroots criticism of the Party and the government. Paul Helm never gave me the opportunity to explain that fascinating history. He hung up on me.

I won the seat on the City Council by a plurality. There were three people in the race. A candidate more conservative than Butler was taking votes away from him by also campaigning against the domed stadium. Butler was caught in the middle, and he leaked votes to the right.

XXI. Taking Power

Before the Open Meeting Law, politicians decided destinies in smoke-filled rooms. Of course, that was also before the laws against smoking indoors.

After the election, I was invited by Louis DeMars to a meeting at the Leamington Hotel to organize city government: free food, free booze, lots of cigar smoke and a chance to meet all the other DFL-elected City Council members. The council was going from a lopsided Republican majority to a 12 to 1 majority of DFLers. I was starry-eyed and filled with hope.

Louis had it all figured. He would be president of the council, and he kept the major committee chairs for his buddies on the Northside: John Derus (4th Ward) got majority leader and chair of Ways and Means; Dick Miller (3rd Ward) got Zoning and Planning; Sam Sivanich (1st Ward) got vice president.

Sam was a wonderful character from Northeast Minneapolis. He had been on the council for a number of years and for many of them he had been outnumbered by Republicans 12 to 1. Representing the 1st Ward, he was the first to vote on a roll call issue, but he was never sure what the issue was because the Republicans wouldn't always tell him, so when it came time for him to vote, he'd say, "Pass," until he could figure out how to vote. The only change Sam wanted for our council was to rotate the call so he wouldn't have to be first all the time. After about six months of this, when the rotation finally came back to him, he said at a council meeting, "Eddie, you should be very happy. Today we have achieved a complete revolution." I was pleased that



Ed Felien, a filmmaker at Experimental College
Photo by Tom Cajacob

Sam thought I was a revolutionary, but I think he knew that wasn't exactly the revolution I was hoping for.

I got chair of Health and Social Services. The county normally handles social services and the city handles roads and utilities and police and fire. So, Health and Social Services was a nice place to put a bleeding-heart radical where he couldn't cause too much trouble. Nevertheless, I was happy for the assignment.

The City Council appointed the city attorney, and this is where I hoped to make a difference. Two years before, I had run for City Council because Mark Salzer had been shot and killed by MPD officer James Decowski, and Lt. Ekblad had broken my friend's thumb at a rally to protest police brutality. The City Attorney's Office refused to help us, so I determined to run for City Council to make changes in the City Attorney's Office.

Louis announced we were going to appoint Walter Duffy as the new city attorney, and he would appoint new heads for the Civil and Criminal Divisions. The head of the Criminal Division had been especially punitive in prosecuting anti-war protesters. He was replaced and assigned to prosecuting slumlords.

After about a year, Walt came into my office one day and said, "We've prosecuted four officers for use of excessive force, and we got two convictions." This was a profound change. This changed the way the police acted—especially toward minorities. The cops knew that if they screwed up there would be consequences.

Another big thing that made a difference was the ordinance our council changed to allow the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission to hear complaints against police officers for use of excessive force. Any citizen could write out a complaint against an officer and it would be read by a city attorney and reviewed by the Civil Rights Commission. The Civil Rights Commission could subpoena officers and compel them to testify, and the commission could award damages if they felt that was justified.

The Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission had tons more power than any subsequent civilian reviews. That's why they killed it. The MPD had powerful friends in the Minnesota Legislature. [Ray Dehn told me recently that the power of the city was pre-empted by the state. The state was saying and still says that we no longer had the right as citizens of Minneapolis to bring complaints about the violation of our civil rights by the police to the attention of our Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission. That doesn't make sense. That has to change.]

I saw Walt one more time after I left City Hall. I had been working with striking cab drivers. We had a party one night. I made up a song for the occasion. Here's a part of it:

*Ellen Hawley was a woman in our union
She was on picket at Blue and White
A scab came out of the driveway
And he got her in his sight
She jumped up on the hood of that cab
He tried but couldn't knock her down
She pulled off his windshield wipers
And got a free ride across town.*

We had another beer and they made me sing the song again. I went home. They went downtown to picket in front of the Nicollet Hotel. Four of them recognized the guy in the Blue and

White cab in front of the hotel as the guy from the song. They pulled him out of the cab and threw him through a plate glass window. They were arrested. I was called. The next morning I went down to talk to Louis. He called Walt into his office. Walt lectured me about the bad behavior of my comrades and then released them in my custody and dropped the charges.

I drove them back to strike headquarters to get their cars, and I got to listen to them argue about what was the shortest route and what was the fastest street and "who I had in my cab lately."

XXII. Downzoning

In 1970 I was publishing Hundred Flowers, a weekly underground newspaper, an anti-war, anti-racist, early feminist, psychedelic fun rag that sold for a quarter.

Some people were having a demonstration somewhere on Harriet Avenue protesting the demolition of houses to make room for a two-and-a-half story walk-up apartment building. I grabbed my two-dollar camera and went over. About six or eight of them had been occupying one of the abandoned houses. I went in and talked to them and then went outside and stood with the group of about 20 supporters. When the police started a rush on the house to arrest the occupiers, I lost my cool. I said to the group, "We've got to support the guys inside," and then two cops grabbed me and took me downtown in a police car after being photographed. [It's the photo that's used on the website for the "Confessions" series.]

I was hauled downtown and booked for disturbing the peace. I had to call back to the Hundred Flowers Commune for someone to come down with \$25 to bail me out. Charges were dropped at the trial, and the \$25 was returned.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was part of a protest against zoning. The city has the power to decide what density of houses and what kind of businesses belong in a neighborhood. On Harriet Avenue and in most of South Minneapolis the R-1 and R-2 zoning that allowed single family homes and duplexes had been changed to R-4 and R-5, which allowed much greater density.

In the early '70s I was part of a community organization called Model Cities. We had monthly meetings and discussed community problems. We decided that the solution to the problem of speculators coming into a neighborhood, buying up three houses in a row, tearing them down and putting up a two-and-a-half story walk-up, was downzoning.

That was part of my campaign during the election—downzone the neighborhoods to existing usage.

So, the first thing I did as a newly elected City Council member was to present a plan to the Zoning and Planning Committee to downzone every neighborhood in our ward to existing usage. It was done and it worked.

For a while.

Zoning is a problem today for people in the Glendale Public Housing Project. Developers want to move out the mostly people of color, tear down the existing homes and triple the density. The residents object. They say, "'unconscionable' clearly characterizes any proposal to demolish our community, and replace it with a privatized, gentrified and densified development against our will for the luxury of wealthier white community and the developers who will make millions out of our displacement."

Council Member Lisa Goodman, when confronted with an attempt to increase density and change the nature of a neighborhood in her Uptown/Kenwood ward, said, "When you buy a house, which is your single biggest investment, one of the things that you take into consideration



is the location and what the neighborhood looks and feels like surrounding you. To upend that and make a dramatic change without the neighborhood and neighbors agreeing to it is, I think, unconscionable.”

The Defend Glendale & Public Housing Coalition says, “Does the standard of concern expressed by this City Council leader not also apply to Minneapolis tenants (who are disproportionately persons of color and those who reside in public housing) or only to homeowners (who are disproportionately white)? This is an important question that Minneapolis will have to face and answer correctly. Under Lisa Goodman’s push and direction, the Minneapolis Public Housing Agency (MPHA) moves toward ‘redevelopment’ of Glendale Townhomes (184 units of family public housing) by privatizing, selling and demolishing Glendale against the will of its residents. MPHA will be replacing Glendale with private developer-owned ‘mixed income’ housing that increases the density of Glendale housing times three and superimposes a large majority of much higher-income residents onto the Glendale site, displacing 600 low-income residents totally and permanently changing the character (‘look and feel’) of the historic Glendale Townhomes and its community that has been home to low-income families (predominantly families of color: African Americans, refugees, immigrants, Somalis, Oromo, Hmong) since 1952.”

Lisa Goodman was right about her neighborhood, but wrong about not granting the same right of self-determination to others. I have confidence the people of Glendale will survive.

I believe strongly in community corrections and in halfway houses to keep offenders out of jail, but South Minneapolis in 1974 was being flooded with halfway houses. Every other neighborhood was NIMBY—Not In My Back Yard. Criminals existed in all areas of the metropolitan area, but the houses of transition were all in the inner city. So, I proposed a change in the zoning code that would not allow a halfway house within 500 feet of another halfway house. That stopped the institutionalization of neighborhoods.

For a while.

A few years after I left the City Council I was talking to Brian Coyle, then City Council member from the 6th Ward, the other inner-city ward, and he told me he was concerned about halfway houses moving into neighborhoods. I told him about my zoning ordinance. He’d never heard of it, but he was happy to learn there was one wheel he didn’t have to re-invent.

Another problem for our neighborhoods were saunas and massage parlors (quaint euphemisms for houses of prostitution) moving into vacant storefronts. Without judging the morality of consensual and commercialized sex, I argued that these businesses were not really neighborhood businesses. Their customers came from outside the immediate neighborhood, so the zoning for saunas and massage parlors should be B-3 rather than B-1. This kept the businesses out of the neighborhoods and on Lake Street or downtown.

The zoning code is the key to understanding and fighting gentrification. Developers can’t come into a neighborhood and change it so the people who live there can no longer afford it, unless the City Council member agrees to it. It’s up to all of us and our neighborhood organizations to watch for changes to the zoning code that could result in our own extinction.

“The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” [Attributed to Thomas Jefferson]

XXIII. Rent control

*“Dear landlord
Please don’t put a price on my soul”*



--Bob Dylan, 1967

In 1974 the vacancy rate for rental housing in Minneapolis was 3%. Rents had gone up 35% on the West Bank in the city-supported Cedar-Riverside Towers and 15% around Loring Park. Poor people were being moved out of their neighborhoods. They were being gentrified.

Working with the West Bank Tenants Union and others, I proposed that the City Council institute rent controls to limit the rent increases that were destroying communities. Rents would be frozen at the level charged on July 1, 1973, but would allow increases in rent from that date to cover landlords' operating costs. There would be a rent control board in each ward to which a landlord or tenant could appeal.

Malcolm Ritter reported on the City Council public hearing in the Minnesota Daily of Nov. 27, 1974. He wrote: "'In the absence of regulation,' Felien said, 'speculation, profiteering and other disruptive practices cannot be forestalled.' Because of the 'emergency' situation, he said, the city is able to use its police powers to control rents.

"Noting that the question of whether or not the city can legally control rents has been raised against his proposal, Felien called the objection 'ultimately a question that can only be decided by the Minnesota Supreme Court.'

"He said that the opinion of the city attorney, which holds such action not allowed unless the legislature passes enabling legislation, is 'subjective' rather than based on legal precedent.

"Felien also explained that his proposal called for rent levels of July 1, 1973, because that is the date federal wage and price controls were lifted. 'Rents at that point began to skyrocket,' he said."

I didn't have the votes to pass rent control. I needed seven, and I could only get up to three or four. Dick Miller, my nemesis, chair of the committee holding the public hearing, moved that the City Council establish a rental housing task force to study the problem.

Malcolm Ritter reported: "Felien opposed the establishment of the committee, commenting 'I don't think that by burying this issue for 90 days that we're going to change anybody's mind on rent control.'

"'It's such a little thing that we're asking—to control one element of the inflationary spiral that's affecting us all,' he said."

The Star Tribune attacked that statement directly in their editorial on Dec. 2, 1974, "Rent controls: nibbling at the corner." They concluded: "The basic cause of rent increases lies in the economy. Rising costs are the enemy. To attack them through rent controls is to nibble at the corners of the problem."

Their editorial misrepresented the vacancy rate, ignored the cartels that controlled housing in Loring Park, set off false alarms about a creeping bureaucracy and concluded by saying we shouldn't do anything because it's a national problem—which was a rationale for indifference.

A quick petition at Mill City Co-op, one of the early small food co-ops on the corner of 26th and Bloomington, got 93 signatures favoring rent control.

Creating a task force was the easiest way to kill the proposal without actually voting against it. It was clear there was no way it would pass the council, but some of us refused to let the issue die. We started gathering petitions to have the question put to the voters in the next election. We would amend the city charter to establish rent control.

We gathered enough signatures to get the question on the ballot. The phrasing for the ballot was simple enough, but our opponents were clever enough to get the complicated legalese

written by a very young attorney that was the actual language to be inserted into the charter. The proposed ordinance was so complicated it was almost incomprehensible. They beat us by printing and circulating the full text and saying Vote No.

Some progressive groups are talking about a new campaign for rent control in Minneapolis. If there's one lesson to be learned from our experiences 40 years ago, it is to keep it simple with specific and concrete examples.

Good luck!

XXIV. Municipalization of the electric company

One of my more ambitious projects was to try to take over the electric company. It had all the romantic allure of Castro and Che sweeping down from the hills to take over a radio station and declare the Revolution.

In Minnesota more than 146 municipalities owned their own electric company. It was really not a wild concept. Minnesota law said a municipality could purchase their electric company for original cost minus depreciation. That was a huge bargain. "Original cost" was a great feature. Imagine buying a 40-year-old car that was running perfectly at 40-year-old prices.

It would be much cheaper for Minneapolis residents. One-third of the electric bill was state and federal taxes. Municipalization would reduce everyone's bill by one-third—after paying off the cost of the purchase.

I was optimistic and fully charged.

The AFL-CIO Minneapolis Central Committee wanted me to come over and talk to them about the idea. They were seated at a long table, about 20 of them, representing most of the trades and locals in the city. I told them, "There's three reasons we should support municipalization: It would be cheaper; it would give us some control over how electricity would be produced and we could get away from fossil fuels; and right now only a small fraction of the workers at the electric company are organized, and if the city took them over, the clerical and billing staff would immediately become members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)." The union rep sitting next to the chair said, "If they ain't organized, piss on 'em."

I was shocked. I said, "Do the rest of you believe that?" I asked the local head of the teacher's union, "Do you believe that?"

I was met with silence.

I learned that trade union politics had more to do with narrow self-interest than with working class solidarity.

It was disillusioning.

The head of the union then sent a memo to everyone on the City Council telling them they opposed municipalization.

I ended up asking the City Council to spend \$25,000 on a feasibility study to see if it would be practical for the city to purchase the electric company.

I got 3 or 4 votes out of 13.

A short time after I left the council, the electric company went to the state legislature and had the law changed so a municipality couldn't purchase an electric company for original cost minus depreciation. They would have to pay replacement value, which put the cost out of the range of possibilities for most cities in Minnesota.

I knew that generating plants lost a lot of electrical power in transmission. The shorter the distance to transmit the electricity, the less electricity was lost. I had visions of small generating plants throughout the city. But I never thought it possible for every house to have its own electrical generating plant, but that's what's happening now with solar panels producing enough electricity to power a house.

That's an improvement over municipalization.

Individual ownership of an electrical generating plant is even more democratic and more decentralized than municipal ownership.

XXV. Gay Pride

It happened in less than a minute.

I got on the elevator at City Hall on the third floor to go down to the parking garage. Jack Baker got on with me. Jack had been president of the University student association, a very out gay. He'd just married his partner by managing to get a marriage license in Mankato.

He told me the City Council should amend the civil rights ordinance to include sexual preference as a protected class—along with race, gender and age.

I said sexual preference should already be protected under the freedom of association clause in the Bill of Rights.

He said that's true, but so should all the other classes (race, gender and age) be protected. And people can't afford to go all the way to the Supreme Court when they've been discriminated against in hiring. Right across the street from City Hall, the phone company has on its job application form, "Are you a homosexual?"

I said, "OK. I'll work on it," and got off the elevator.

I talked it over with other members of the City Council. None of them wanted to touch it. They all agreed discrimination against gays was wrong, but I could introduce it as an amendment to the civil rights ordinance only if it would be referred to my committee, Health and Social Services, for a public hearing. I thought that was an odd committee to hold a hearing on an amendment to the civil rights ordinance, but if that was the only way it would happen, then I'd do it.

The public hearing was a circus. It seemed like every right-wing evangelical minister in the city came to denounce me as the devil incarnate. I alternated testimony: someone talking about how they'd been discriminated against, then someone talking about how God's wrath would strike us dead.

In the end, it passed the council unanimously. No one wanted to talk about it. But no one could vote against it, either.

Ten years later the state legislature amended the state civil rights code to include sexual preference, and it was celebrated as a great victory.

When I ran for re-election that was one of the issues my opponent used to hammer me with in the more conservative areas. He campaigned with the police chief (in uniform) from the 3rd Precinct (our district) and complained that I was more concerned about gay rights than I was about police protection. The fire chief piled on by closing the fire station at 42nd and Cedar for a couple of days—saying it was my fault for not providing enough funding. He concluded his statement to the press by saying City Council members come and go like autumn leaves.

I had underestimated the durability of the deep state in city government.

XXVI. The police

*We'll be fighting in the streets
With our children at our feet
And the morals that they worship will be gone
And the men who spurred us on
Sit in judgment of all the wrong
They decide and the shotgun sings the song*

*I'll tip my hat to the new constitution
Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play
Just like yesterday
Then I'll get down on my knees and pray
We don't get fooled again.
--Peter Townsend*

Bad news.

We got fooled again.

At their meeting March 30 the Minneapolis City Council voted to confirm the reappointment of Susan Segal as city attorney, even though Our Revolution (which had endorsed all Southside DFL incumbents in our area) asked them not to reappoint her because she ignored the violations of civil rights of Black citizens by the Minneapolis police and ignored the city charter that prohibited giving millions of our tax dollars to New Jersey racketeers to build a sports stadium.

It's business as usual.

Peter Townsend's song ends:

*Meet the new boss.
Same as the old boss.*

These problems are not new. Earlier in my "Confessions" I wrote about how 45 years ago a new City Council and the new council president, Louis DeMars, hired a new city attorney and how he began initiating criminal complaints against police officers for misconduct.

We have argued in Southside Pride that the conduct of the officers arresting Terrance Franklin and Jamar Clark violated their civil rights. The reappointment of the present city attorney puts an official stamp of approval on that police misconduct and should be seen as a threat to all of our civil liberties.

On June 23, 1975, a Minneapolis police officer shot a young Black kid in the back as he was fleeing the scene of a suspected burglary. Previously, in February of 1974, we had established a policy with the police chief that officers would NOT shoot at so-called "fleeing felons." The city was outraged. The Urban League complained of insensitivity and inhuman treatment of the Black community. Mayor Hofstede told the Minneapolis Star, if the youth was unarmed, "I will be inflamed and will do something about it." Hofstede and DeMars asked the University of Minnesota Criminal Justice Department for help in understanding tenure in top management of the



Police Department, disciplinary procedures and tort liability of officers.

Hofstede established two avenues of redress for citizens with complaints against the police. They could go to the Police Internal Affairs Unit or to the city attorney’s office and “Copies of citizen complaints initiated in either office are forwarded to the other to insure proper disposition of the matter, whether it is criminal in nature, a matter of misconduct or eventually determined unfounded.”

Walter Duffy, the city attorney, issued this statement: “On October 1, 1974, the Internal Affairs Unit began referring all complaints to our office for review. This refinement strengthened the two-avenue complaint procedure and resulted in increased efficiency in handling these matters by both offices. This process has improved communications, reduced duplication of efforts, improved enhanced openness on the part of police officers and has resulted in professionally sound and thorough reports being received by this office.”

We further strengthened citizens’ rights by allowing the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission to hear complaints about police misconduct.

That was more than 40 years ago.

Today the smothering bureaucracy of City Hall and the timid, self-serving politicians who run our city government have given our police a “Get Out of Jail Free” card. Why haven’t the officers who violated the civil rights of Terrance Franklin and Jamar Clark been disciplined? Why hasn’t the city attorney reviewed these police reports and recommended action to the chief of police, the mayor and the City Council?

We have a right to a better city government than this. We need a city government that serves all of us.

Addendum: In an earlier column on Gay Pride I neglected to mention that my colleagues on the City Council, Earl Netwal, Lee Munnich and Tom Johnson, had introduced an Intention to Introduce an Ordinance to change the Civil Rights Ordinance to include sexual preference as a protected class, months before my efforts. The first Gay Rights Ordinance in a major city in the U.S. (only Ann Arbor, Mich., preceded us) was a collaborative effort, and it passed the council unanimously and was signed by the mayor, and Mayor Hofstede, Dan Quillin and I paid for it in our failed bids for re-election the following year.

XXVII. Small victories, big defeats

Someone came to me while I was on the council and told me they were being evicted from their apartment because the landlord hadn’t paid the utilities. They thought they should be able to pay delinquent utilities and have that amount deducted from their rent. I thought, what a great idea, so I authored an ordinance at the next council meeting to allow tenants to pay utility bills to avoid shut-offs and deduct that from their rent.

Louis DeMars, the president of the council, said I should chair a task force to study the problem made up of representatives of the gas, electric and water utilities. Louis was always doing that. Whenever I came up with some bright new idea, he’d make me chair of a task force to study it. It was time-consuming, but it helped insure the proposal was well thought out and it gave me time to build political support for it.

The meeting went fine. The utilities didn’t want to have to notify tenants; it was an extra step,



but they went along with it. The Water Department was especially resistant, which I found curious because they don't have to show a profit or please their stockholders. The stockholders for the Water Department are the customers they're serving, but public service for the Water Department seemed to mean doing the same things in the same way.

The ordinance passed unanimously, but it was soon forgotten. I'm sure, today, no one is aware of that protection for tenants, and if no one is aware that the law exists, then for all practical purposes the law doesn't exist.

A few years after I left the council, Brian Coyle told me he was concerned about halfway houses concentrating in his ward. I told him I had authored and passed a zoning ordinance that said no halfway house or group home could be within 500 feet of another halfway house or group home. There were so many of them, one on top of another, they were changing the character of the neighborhoods. It wasn't so much a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) move as a gesture to Share the Wealth. Group homes and halfway houses should be spread more evenly across the city.

One modest change that had a big effect was changing the zoning ordinance for saunas from a neighborhood business to a community business. Before he left office, my predecessor allowed a sauna to go in at 43rd and Chicago. It opened the month I took office, so, naturally, the neighbors blamed me for destroying the neighborhood by letting a house of prostitution in the neighborhood. Without discussing morality, I argued that most of the customers came from outside the neighborhood, so because it put a strain on parking, a sauna should be located in a more heavily commercialized location.

Two other proposals were less successful.

Park and Portland Avenues ran from 25th Street to 46th Street, two miles, in my ward, and they were dangerous for bicycle riders. I got the Traffic Department to designate the right side of Park and Portland a bike lane and to eliminate parking, but then I was told I had eliminated six handicapped parking places. I immediately canceled the bike lanes until we could figure out how to have bike lanes and handicapped parking. Clearly the best bike lanes are those you don't have to share with cars and, therefore, rather than have bikers run down Park and Portland, it might be better to give them Oakland Avenue. Cars might still drive on Oakland but only for one block and then they would be diverted to Park or Portland, but bikes would be allowed to drive through the intersections without stopping except for traffic lights at Franklin and Lake Street.

Another project that died before it was fully grown was my attempt at recycling. I tried to convince my colleagues on the council. They were unimpressed. I tried an experiment in my ward. I wrote to the residents on one garbage route that they could recycle their newspapers by bundling them and leaving them separate from their garbage. Most residents cooperated, but Clayton Sorenson, the city engineer, couldn't see the point. "And glass! Why would you want to recycle glass? We're not going to run out of sand!"

Bicycle lanes and recycling would have to wait for another generation.

XXVIII. Losing it

Halfway through my two-year term as City Council member I had to start running for re-election, and I was so obtuse I didn't realize I'd made just about everybody mad at me.

Good friends of mine who had started the co-ops were now Maoists and members of the CO (the Co-op Organization). They were intent on taking over co-ops by brute force and imposing canned goods and ketchup on people who wanted organic vegetables and brown rice. They took

over the People's Warehouse on 26th Street and drove out the PW people who worked there. I was torn. I wanted to support their objectives—to mainstream food to working people—but I hated their tactics. But when the PW called the police to get the CO out, I called the police and told them it was a family matter and the police shouldn't get involved. When they called the electric company to turn off the electricity, I called the electric company and told them to turn it back on. My friends had fallen under the spell of a charismatic Black gangster Marxist who later on shot and killed someone in a dispute over rent.

What had happened in Minneapolis in 1975 was much the same thing that happened in Massachusetts in 1981 when some members of the Weather Underground came under the spell of Black gangster Marxists who said you weren't really revolutionary unless you robbed banks. They robbed a Brinks truck and killed two police officers and a guard. Probably the most famous Black gangster Marxist was Donald DeFreeze, aka General Field Marshal Cinque, who was responsible for killing Marcus Foster, the Oakland, Calif., school superintendent, and kidnapping Patty Hearst.

I wrote a four-page pamphlet and placed copies in the co-ops: "What's happening in the Co-op Movement?" [https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.47/439.739.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Scan_0004.pdf] I argued the CO was being left-dogmatic. They were bullying people and turning people off on co-ops, cooperation and socialism. The CO collapsed shortly after.

But the damage had been done. Friends for years were too busy being real revolutionaries, driving hippies and natural foods out of the co-ops, to help with my campaign, and people who loved their co-op were upset that I was friends with their mortal enemies.

My support of municipal ownership of the electric company had alienated the labor bosses who supported the sweetheart contract between linemen and the company. The head of the local AFL-CIO claimed some credit for my defeat saying I had lost because of "a little push from behind by labor."

I proposed a half of one percent tax on the transfer of stocks and bonds. Why should stockbrokers be exempt from a sales tax? The hearing for my proposal was standing room only. Stockbrokers came out of the woodwork to speak against it, and they were happy to contribute to anyone who would run against me.

My rent control proposal alienated everyone who owned rental property.

My criticism of police abuse and demand for an investigation when a cop shot and killed a young Black kid in my ward motivated the captain of the local precinct to campaign with my opponent and talk about respect for law and order.

But the issue that he used most effectively against me was my authorship of the gay rights ordinance and my support for Gay Pride Day. The good church-going people of South Minneapolis thought Gay Pride was a bit too extreme in 1975.

I lost to Tommy Ogdahl—2,565 to 2,842.

Friends told me after my loss, "This is great. Now, you're back with us. Protesting the government."

I tried to tell them we need to move beyond protest. We need to take power and use it to make things better.

Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party, murdered by Chicago police in 1969: "If you dare to struggle, you dare to win. If you dare not to struggle then god damn it, you don't deserve to win. Let me say peace to you, if you're willing to fight for it."

Bobby Seale: “By any means necessary.”

Ed Felien: “By every means available.”

XXIX. The new Farmer-Labor Association

After losing my bid for re-election, and after a respectful period of mourning and self-pity, I decided it would be a waste to lose contact with all the politically active progressives I’d met. I wanted to start a radical Farmer-Labor Caucus, within the DFL. We’d be based on the history of the Farmer-Labor Party of the ’30s.

At the 1934 Farmer-Labor Party Convention in Minneapolis, Governor Floyd B. Olson said, “I am what I want to be. I’m a radical. I’m not a liberal. We need a definite change in the system.” The convention went wild and wrote a socialist platform with a preamble that said, “Capitalism has failed and should be abolished. We mean to establish a Cooperative Commonwealth.” The FLP went on to win a majority of seats in the House of Representatives in the ’34 election with that platform.

In the winter of ’76 I called a meeting of friends, supporters and comrades to talk about forming a Farmer Labor Caucus in the DFL. About 40 people showed up. We agreed with the overall analysis of capitalism versus socialism and the Cooperative Commonwealth. We agreed the best strategy for educating voters and linking up with other progressives would be to work inside the DFL as the Farmer-Labor Caucus. And we agreed to go to the upcoming precinct caucuses.

We supported Fred Harris, a former senator from Oklahoma. He was promoting Economic Democracy and Native American issues.

We had begun a monthly community newspaper, Southside Patriot, and a newsletter for supporters. We held a Farmer-Labor Convention in the fall and elected Tom O’Connell chair.

Carter was elected President in 1976 with Minnesota Senator Walter Mondale as Vice President. Mondale’s empty Senate seat allowed Gov. Wendy Anderson to appoint someone. Anderson resigned and Lt. Governor Rudy Perpich became governor and appointed Anderson senator. That set off the Minnesota Massacre of the statewide DFL ticket in 1978.

But giddy with expectation that everyone in the DFL was now going to move up, Don Fraser decided not to run for re-election to the House and decided to run for the Senate. He lost to Bob Short who ran against gun control and abortion.

I took a job as assistant professor at Wayne State University in the fall of ’76, teaching humanities to auto workers. I kept in touch, kept my house on Powderhorn Park and commuted regularly.

When it became clear Fraser was not going to run for re-election, that set off a mild earthquake in Minneapolis. Lots of people wanted the job. Marty Sabo was speaker of the Minnesota House and clearly first in line. But we were not happy with his centrist and liberal politics, so we encouraged Tom O’Connell to run for DFL endorsement for Congress. We got more than 40% of the delegates to vote for Tom at the convention. We held up the endorsement until we got Sabo to commit to come back and talk to us every three months so we could review his performance.

Sabo actually amazed us. He became chief deputy whip for Speaker Jim Wright. They got some progressive legislation through Congress even with Reagan in the White House, but their most important and significant act was to threaten impeachment proceedings against Reagan for supplying the Contras with weapons and money in violation of an Act of Congress. It was a scheme dreamed up by George H. W. Bush (Vice President and former head of the CIA) and

Col. Ollie North (who had taken over the French opium trade in Vietnam and handed it off to the CIA) in the basement of the White House. The Contras in Nicaragua collected opium and heroin from dealers in Columbia. The CIA flew the stash to a CIA base in Southern Florida. The Mafia paid cash for the stash, and the money was used to buy weapons from Iran, and then the weapons were flown to the Contras in Nicaragua: The Iran-Contra Affair. And Sabo helped blow the whistle on it.

I asked Tom O’Connell to describe what we were thinking back then:

“Our goals at the time were to create awareness of FL history and principles within the DFL, organize around such issues as rent control, municipal and other measures that directly challenged corporate power, and elect FL candidates within the DFL, including Karen Clark (our first big victory), Nat Forbes for state auditor (close but Dave Roe blocked him), and Alice Tripp for governor, who ran an inspiring primary campaign, among others. We also endorsed and were a catalyst for Paul Wellstone’s campaign as auditor and then U.S. senator (although by then he was much bigger than the FLA).

“We had about 500 members, chapters in North Minneapolis, South Minneapolis, Mankato, Duluth, St. Paul and West Central Minnesota. Alice Tripp was co-chair for much of this time.

“I currently chair the Farmer-Labor Education Committee, a small nonprofit that Paul Wellstone started, to do education about Farmer-Labor History. Among other projects, we are working on a documentary film that will answer the question: Why is Minnesota’s Democratic Party called the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party?

“For the Cooperative Commonwealth!”

XXX. Back to college

In late winter of 1976, I got a call from Fran Shor, a friend who was teaching at Wayne State University. He said they were hiring faculty for a new program, The Weekend College for Working Adults. It was an adult education program teaching college classes to workers in the Ford plants around Detroit. Students could work full time, meet once a week with a small class, watch hour-long television programs four times a week and have two weekend large conferences twice a semester. They could work full time and be full-time college students, and (since most of them were Vietnam vets) they could get their tuition paid and a stipend through their G.I. Bill.

I thought it was a dream come true: teaching workers at the point of production. Instructors designed their own courses.

I sent my resume, got an interview and got the job.

I rented rooms in my house on Powderhorn Park, packed up my two kids and two cats and moved to Detroit.

The theme for the fall semester was Faust. I was responsible for a lecture at the weekend conference and for developing a curriculum for students in my section.

The Faust legend never appealed to me. I thought it was corny. But then something clicked. I had been reading Friedrich Engels’ “Peasant Wars in Germany,” how Thomas Müntzer had led a peasant revolution that almost succeeded in overthrowing the feudal system in Germany and establishing a utopia described in Acts of the Apostles where all shared equally—from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. The nobility finally crushed his revolt through trickery and false promises, and it became a capital crime in Germany to even mention his name. Soon after his execution in 1525, puppet shows on market days in small town squares



Ed Felien and Tom O'Connell

began to tell the story of Faust, a very smart person, who makes a pact with the devil to rule the world. He is damned to hell for his sin of pride. German peasants in the middle of the 16th century knew what happened to Thomas Müntzer and they could see him in the outlines of the Faust story, and they couldn't help but sympathize with the hapless and doomed idealist, especially when he was accompanied by his comic sidekick, Pickled Herring. Müntzer's close comrade Pfeiffer was captured by the nobles after hiding under a sink.

Müntzer's appeal for help: "Help us in any way you can, with men and with cannon, so that we can carry out the commands of God himself in Ezekiel 14, where he says, 'I will rescue you from those who lord it over you in a tyrannous way... Come, you birds of heaven and devour the flesh of the princes; and you wild beasts drink up the blood of all the bigwigs.' Daniel says the same thing in chapter 7, that power should be given to the common man."

It was a thrill to talk with auto workers about Thomas Müntzer and his revolutionary daring.

I helped arrange a community meeting for faculty and students about the worker's struggles with capital in this culture and invited a friend and fellow Farmer-Laborite from Minneapolis who was also an organizer in the steelworkers' union and a member of the Communist Labor Party.

I had a strong sympathy for the Communist Labor Party. They were one of a hundred political sects and clubs in Detroit. But they were Maoist and they ran people for political office. General Baker was a frequent candidate for the legislature. He was an imposing Black auto worker at the Rouge Plant in Dearborn—where it came in scrap iron and came out a Mustang. The CLP was started by Nelson Peery, who was also Black, as a breakaway from the Communist Party. Peery spent time in South Minneapolis growing up, and he writes about how some white teenagers fought with him and some of his friends over turf in Phelps Park on 39th and Chicago. Was it a race war? Kinda. It was at least one of the many unreported racial incidents that formed the consciousness of a future revolutionary.

I ran afoul of my good relations with the Communist Labor Party when the Supreme Court handed down the Bakke Decision in 1978 that held affirmative action meant the University of California could use race as a factor in college admissions. I was afraid this would be an effective way to split the working class by convincing whites that Blacks were being given special treatment. By 1989 Donald Trump, fanning the flames of racial hatred, could tell Bryant Gumbel, "I would love to be a well-educated Black, because I really do believe they have the actual advantage today."

I liked teaching, and I really liked teaching auto workers about literature and politics, but after two years I was anxious to get home to South Minneapolis. A Black woman professor was up for tenure in the spring. She was a bit abrasive but doing important political work teaching Black prisoners at Jackson State Prison, creating television courses and publishing local Black poets. I organized a support group for her and harassed the tenure committee by calling them up while they were discussing her tenure and telling them they could be in violation of Michigan's open meeting law. I was told shortly after that by my department chair that I would not be reappointed. That made four. I had been terminated from the department of rhetoric at the University of Minnesota, Smith College, the University of Minnesota Experimental College, and now, Wayne State University for non-collegiality—I didn't go along with the administration. But the Black professor got tenure.

XXXI. Modern Cleaners becomes Modern Times

I loved the façade on the Modern Cleaners building ever since I first saw it as a small child looking out the window of a Chicago Avenue bus. It seemed so sleek, so smooth, so modern.

The architectural style is Streamline Moderne, a final flourish of Art Deco, popular in Europe in the 1930s and '40s. The most widely known example of the style in America is the Nash Rambler from the 1940s and '50s.

The building started out in 1905 as a butcher shop run by the Skoglund brothers, and the apartment upstairs was where they lived. Someone bought it in the 1930s, made it into a dry-cleaning factory and added a first-floor addition on the side and back. Soon after, around 1940, they built the Art Deco, Streamline Moderne façade. It remained Modern Cleaners from the '40s until I bought it in 1978. Also, around this period, in 1936, Charlie Chaplin released "Modern Times," the last screen appearance of his character The Little Tramp, trying to fit into contemporary industrial society. The very huge Modern sign seemed to insist that we use Modern in the name of the new building, so it became Modern Times.

I wanted Modern Times to be a neighborhood hangout, someplace where people from the neighborhood could meet their friends. Powderhorn and Central were going through hard times. Gangs like the Vice Lords and the Latin Kings were trying to establish beachheads. I thought a restaurant would be a good place for people to get together and discuss neighborhood problems. I especially wanted to be open evenings because I believed traffic in the evenings would make the streets safer.

One office upstairs was home to the Farmer Labor Association. Mark Dayton had given the FLA \$3,000, and we used that money to hire an organizer. We were able to compile mailing lists and keep members informed.

The other three offices on the second floor and the common area were used by The Loft. The Loft began out of Marly Rusoff's bookstore in Dinkytown. She and Phebe Hanson, Jim Moore and Trish Hampl began a journal writing workshop that developed into readings and special events and eventually into a full curriculum for aspiring writers and a permanent location at 1011 Washington Ave.

I thought the building was beautiful. The banks thought it should be torn down, and they refused to lend me money on it. I thought it would take a few weeks of cleaning and painting and we'd be ready to open. It took 13 months, every penny I had, and I had to borrow thousands from friends and family.

Chris McGiffert (an old friend and former housemate) and I would start every morning to tackle the building. It was literally falling apart. We had to build columns and beams in the basement to hold up the first floor, then put in a new column and bearing beam on the first floor to hold up the second floor.

We had to pour almost a truckload of cement to fill a sub-basement.

We spent most of the summer re-bricking the north wall. Because it had been a dry-cleaning plant and used steam cleaning machinery, it didn't need a furnace to heat the building, but then, every night, when the temperature dropped below freezing, the steam in the walls would freeze and push out the bricks. We couldn't just tuckpoint the bricks. We had to take out each brick and rebuild the entire second floor north exterior wall.

We had to build bathrooms, a code-approved kitchen with mop sinks, hand sinks, dishwashing sinks, sinks for washing vegetables, new floors, new walls, new ceilings, new doors.

We tried to do most of the electrical work until we got busted by a city inspector and had to hire a professional electrician.

Bowler Plumbing let us do most of the plumbing and heating while they advised and took out the permits. A friend lent us his credit card to buy a furnace. I bought radiators at a salvage warehouse, but (because I knew nothing about radiators and heating) half the radiators I bought were steam and not hot water, so we couldn't use them.

I installed the handicap handrail upside down and had to redo it.

We had to jack up the building because without the columns and bearing beams it had started to sag. Chris and I would go down to the basement first thing in the morning; smoke a little Attitude Adjustment; get ourselves very paranoid, and then jack up the building. We'd go about an inch and a half, consider ourselves Courageous Heroes, and then reset all the support columns. A friend who knew more about buildings than we did came by one morning and followed the smell of something familiar down to the basement and asked what we were doing.

We said proudly, "We're jacking up the building."

"How high do you want to go?"

We said about another foot. He took the jack and started pumping the handle. We heard creaking sounds. We were sure the building would now crash around us. He jacked the building up about a foot.

What are you doing, I asked? How could you be sure the building wouldn't collapse?

"I had faith in all those nails," he said.

Finally, on July 28, 1979, in spite of everything, Modern Times Café opened for business.

