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## **P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement**

Interview P-0007

Margaret Brown and Catherine Smith

21 January 2015

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## ABSTRACT – MARGARET BROWN AND CATHERINE SMITH

Interviewee: Margaret Brown and Catherine Smith  
Interviewer: Seth Kotch  
Interview date: January 21, 2015  
Location: Home of Margaret Brown, Chapel Hill, North Carolina  
Length: approximately 106 minutes

Margaret Brown was the wife of Robert Brown (deceased), cofounder of the *North Carolina Anvil*, a progressive newspaper in Chapel Hill, North Carolina from 1967 to 1983; Catherine Smith is a friend and investor in Southern Associates Press, former publisher of the *Anvil*. Brown grew up in Beverly Hills, California and attended the University of California-Berkeley before meeting Robert in 1970 at an activist retreat in Patzcuaro, Mexico and relocating to Chapel Hill. Both Catherine Smith and her husband Bob are from South Carolina, originally meeting Robert through activist circles when the couple lived in Wise, Virginia. In the interview Brown and Smith cover the following topics: Robert's move to Chapel Hill in 1958 to study southern history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; his service in the Air Force, surviving a plane crash that killed everyone else on board, and the G.I. Bill which allowed him to attend Columbia University despite never having finished high school; Richard Hofstadler and other Marxist historians' influence on Robert; Robert's alcoholism and subsequent recovery; Robert's involvement in the Frank Porter Graham for Governor write-in campaign, the Kevin For for Mayor campaign, and the Margaret Brown for Orange County Commissioner campaign; William Friday and the Speaker Ban; Margaret's involvement in the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley; Steve Schewel, who Robert wanted to pass the *Anvil* onto but refused, founding his own newspaper, the *Independent (Indy)* in 1983 after the *Anvil* ended; Robert's rocky relationship with Leon Rooke, cofounder of the *Anvil*; Marcia Williams, founder of music venue the Cat's Cradle; back-to-the-land movements; *Southern Exposure* newspaper; *Carologue*; the role of the arts in progressive politics and culture; "Joe Staley's Chronology of Resistance to Segregation in Chapel Hill"; the role of the printing, letterpress, and typesetting in progressive politics.

## **TRANSCRIPT: Margaret Brown and Catherine Smith**

Interviewees: Margaret Brown and Catherine Smith  
Interviewer: Seth Kotch  
Interview Date: January 21, 2015  
Location: Home of Margaret Brown, Chapel Hill, North Carolina  
Length: One audio file, 1:45:52

### **START OF INTERVIEW**

Seth Kotch: This is Seth Kotch with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Southern Oral History Program and Department of American Studies. It is Wednesday, January twenty-second, I think we settled on.

Catherine Smith: First.

Seth Kotch: [Laughs] Twenty-third?

Catherine Smith: Twenty-first.

Seth Kotch: [Laughs] Twenty-first? It's Wednesday, January twenty-first. I don't know that I've ever done an interview where I've gotten the date correct. And I'm in the home of Margaret Brown to conduct an interview about the *North Carolina Anvil* and related activities and entities. And I'll just ask the two interview participants to introduce themselves.

Margaret Brown: I'm Margaret Brown, and I was the wife of Robert Brown, who was the editor of the *Anvil* and—but passed away eight years ago.

Catherine Smith: Eight years ago?

MB: Yeah. Yeah, it's hard to believe.

CS: And I'm Catherine Smith, longtime friend of Robert, Bob Brown and Margaret Brown and early investor in, I think, the Southern Associates Press, which published the *Anvil*, with John Smith, who can't be here today but would be willing to contribute additional on another occasion.

SK: Great! Well, thank you very much on the record for sitting down with me. And I'll tell you, because I don't think I mentioned it before, that I'll take some notes while we talk and write down some names, and then, every now and then, I'll check over here and make sure it's still recording. So, hopefully that won't be too distracting.

Before we turned the tape on, we were sort of digging a little way back to predate the *Anvil* and we were talking about a couple of things. One was the creation of the printing press, but before then—.

CS: Let me have back the obituary.

SK: Oh, yeah, of course. Before then, there is the question of, I guess, the origin of the Press itself, in light of the fact that the *Chapel Hill News* had a fairly recalcitrant position on black political candidates.

MB: [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Can we sort of rehash that a little bit to get it on the record?

MB: I'm not sure I'm the one to—you know, I wasn't here then.

CS: Well, that's—yeah. We all—all of us came later—.

SK: Right.

CS: Than some of the things we want you to know about and to look into. But in that regard, I was just—we went out to Bob's office out in Chatham County shortly after

his death and went through to make sure that things were kept, not knowing what was going to happen. Subsequently, the North Carolina Collection went out and gathered more, and that's the papers of R.V.N. Brown that are at the library. But we had been before, and things that were on Bob's desk or in his desk drawers and that sort of thing, I cleaned out, and most of them are right here. And the book, Ehle's book, *The Free Men*, which Bob found pretty full of error—.

SK and MB: [Laugh]

CS: But I was flipping through that just before you came, and I found this, which would be of interest to you: Joe Straley, and Margaret just tells me that Joe Straley was one of the seven or eight physics professors who were politically active in Chapel Hill long, but Bob saved his "Joe Straley's Chronology of Resistance to Segregation in Chapel Hill".

SK: Oh, wow.

CS: And it begins in the spring of 1947, and it has names and people and takes you up through February third, 1964—no, June fifth, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy's assassination.

SK: Wow, um-hmm.

CS: So, this sort of thing will give you the context in which Bob, coming down in 1958 to go to graduate school to study southern history and then experiencing the early events of the [19]60s. When was the sit-in in Greensboro, not that that's the only one, but that's the monumental date? What was that date? 1961?

SK: 1960, yeah.

MB: Yeah.

CS: Alright, that, and then the local, which interests you and which Bob and others did so much to try to publicize, that's the context in which the Press started—.

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: And in some way related to wanting to publish, print—publish about but print—I don't know why I've got this stuck in my head, but these campaign flyers and materials that others couldn't print, and Margaret has filled me in why: there were no printers, publishers that would print. How did Bob know how to print? That's interesting. It was just a job I think he had in the evenings while going to graduate school, right?

MB: Well, there was the printing shop in Carrboro.

CS: And that's where he learned to print.

MB: And I can't remember the man who owned it, but he was the only other printing place in Chapel Hill-Carrboro at the time. And he—.

CS: Taught Bob to print.

MB: He taught Robert, you know, odds and ends of things, you know, all of his offset machines. And Robert would, through labor, actually, get stuff printed for the Movement, you know, flyers and "Tomorrow we're all marching" and all this stuff, which was very hard to get to use one of those printing presses. [Laughs]

SK: I imagine. [0:05:00] It points to one of the interesting stories, too, about movements generally and about the Civil Rights Movement here, specifically: You need to get those little jobs done in order to get the big job done, you know.

MB: Yeah.

SK: You have to pack sandwiches for the marchers. You have to print flyers or no one will know where to go.

MB: Absolutely. I ran into the same thing at Berkeley, you know, all during the Free Speech Movement, which was when I was there. And everybody was trying to go to a church to find a, you know, an unencumbered—.

CS: Copy machine, mimeo machine.

MB: Machine to run off things that we could pass out. So, the technology has so changed it's hard to, I think, kind of understand what the importances and the urgency of all that printing material was all about.

SK: Right.

MB: And not easy to do.

SK: Right. So, we know that Bob—he came here in 1958?

MB: Um-hmm.

SK: And that's to get his graduate degree at UNC-Chapel Hill in history.

MB: Yeah. He came down from—he was born and raised in New York and so, he was going to Columbia.

SK: Right.

MB: On the G.I. Bill, because he was in Korea during the war.

SK: And Catherine was telling me that he couldn't join—was it the Navy or the Air Force—because he had survived a plane crash?

MB: He was in the Air Force.

SK: Oh, okay.

MB: In Korea.

CS: And couldn't go to the—take up an appointment. Here's what the obituary says. Did I get this from you or from Bob?

MB: [Laughs] Probably from Robert.

CS: Yeah, I had long talks with him, but you—.

MB: He was going to go to the Air Force Academy.

CS: But you filled in.

MB: Oh, okay.

CS: Yeah, he was going to the Air Force Academy, the way I say it in my not-so-specific way of writing—darn it, wish I had said that—“Prevented from injuries from taking up appointment in the Air Force Academy, he went to Columbia.”

MB: Yeah, so he went to Columbia. He went home.

SK: Um-hmm, right.

MB: And started to recuperate. And he had never even graduated from high school.

SK: Wow.

MB: So, he—there was a program over at Columbia for returning vets to get in. And he went over and talked to one of the deans for like two full days. And Robert, all the time when he was in the military, just read everything, you know, just read, read, read, read anything he could get in touch with, and so, this conversation with the dean was very important. And so, the dean let him in, [laughs] because he got to tell him all the books he'd read and—.

SK: Right.

MB: You know.



SK: Yeah. So, meanwhile, and I suppose we're talking about things that are happening in Chapel Hill that you learned subsequently to your arrival, Catherine, in 1966?

CS: Yeah, I came in [19]66.

SK: And your arrival, Margaret, in [19]6—.

MB: No, I was—.

SK: [19]70?

MB: [19]70.

SK: In [19]70.

MB: Yeah.

SK: [Laughs] Which doesn't make it less historical or accurate.

MB: [Laughs] Yeah.

SK: But we're all going to sort of weave our way towards [laughs] the great meeting.

CS: Yes. Well, okay—go ahead. Go ahead.

SK: So, you're in—are you in Berkeley at this time?

MB: Yeah, yeah.

SK: Doing undergraduate work?

MB: Uh-huh, at Berkeley.

SK: And participating in the Free Speech Movement?

MB: Oh, yes. Yeah, because I got to Berkeley in [19]64.

SK: And where were you—where did you grow up? What was your—?

MB: Los Angeles.

SK: Okay. Where in Los Angeles?

MB: Beverly Hills. Yeah, West Los Angeles, Beverly Hills.

SK: Um-hmm.

MB: Yeah, so that was pretty exciting. [Laughs]

SK: Yeah, I bet! And what led you to—I mean, did you—when you were a young person, what made you decide that you wanted to get involved in movements eventually? Was this something that you knew you were sort of leaning towards, or did it just kind of hit you over the head when you got to Berkeley?

MB: No. (Certainly) my parents were both political in their own ways, but when I got to Berkeley, everything was just happening. You know, that was the year, the summer of [19]64, lots of students went to Mississippi, and when they came back to Berkeley for that fall semester, it was just all this information. I just got caught up in it, what was going on.

SK: And were those some of your first sort of glimpses of what was happening in the South, or what life was like there?

MB: Oh, yeah, I'd never heard of it. And I even drove through the South with my husband, who was a southerner, in the previous summer. And I remember we stopped in Louisiana, where he had a bunch of relatives. And we'd walk through a park, and I'd say, "Why does that say 'colored'? What does that mean?" [Laughs] And he was trying to explain to me, and I thought, "Nah! That can't be true!" [Laughs] But—and it just, you know, went right past me until *this*, you know, until actually understanding what was going on in the South. But certainly, as somebody from Los Angeles, I never even knew there was such a thing as segregation.

SK: Wow.

MB: Never heard of it.

SK: And after you graduated, you ended up at some point in Mexico?

MB: Yeah.

SK: I don't know if there was a period between graduation—.

MB: Well, that was actually very politically motivated, too, because it was the—I'm trying to think of what—well, it was Kent State. I don't know if you know about Kent State. It was the killings at Kent State. And all the universities in California just shut down. It was in April, I think, the killings happened. Everything shut down, and there was lots of—Ronald Reagan was bombing Berkeley with tear gas, every day, all day.

SK: As governor of California?

MB: Yeah, as governor. [Clears throat] So, a lot of people left. And I had a little group, and we all decided [0:10:00] we'd go to Mexico. So, we went to a town called Patzcuaro. And that's where John and Catherine and Robert and Leon Rooke and Connie all were—.

CS: That was [19]70. That was [19]70.

MB: [Laughs] The summer of [19]70, yeah. So that was the spring of [19]70 was Kent State.

SK: Um-hmm. And so, Catherine, you were there as well?

CS: That's where I met Margaret. We came with Connie and Leon to Patzcuaro. And Margaret was already there, and Bob came down while we were there.

MB: Um-hmm. He rode a motorcycle there. [Laughs]

CS: But we had met Bob before that. We came from—we were in Chapel Hill. I'll tell my story a little bit.

MB: Yeah!

CS: Just because I was—I'm really interested to hear. John Smith and I both grew up in the segregated South, and so we were both southerners.

SK: I'm sorry, where?

CS: South Carolina, different parts of South Carolina.

SK: And where are you from in South Carolina?

CS: Anderson, and he's from Columbia.

SK: Okay.

CS: And we had met in undergraduate—well, his graduate and my undergraduate school, University of South Carolina. And left there in [19]60—what?—[19]60, I think—no, it must have been [19]64—and went to his first teaching job in Wise, Virginia.

SK: And he—I'm sorry to interrupt, but he was—he got a graduate degree?

CS: Yeah, we—I finished as an undergraduate, and he finished a master's in English.

SK: Okay.

CS: And so, we went to Wise, Virginia, in the far west Appalachian corner of Virginia, which is how we happened to be there when Lyndon Johnson's Great Society was focused on Appalachia. So, in [19]65 and [19]66, I'm teaching in the first Head Start kindergarten and loving every minute of it, though not knowing at all what I was doing. John was off doing his first job teaching. But we came from Wise, Virginia, in [19]66, a very different context to Chapel Hill-Durham-Duke-UNC.

But we met Bob the summer before we came down, because he was on one of his motorcycle trips west and stopped off to visit John Heider, the Duke psychology student who was the child psychologist—[laughs] talking about an inappropriate appointment for him—child psychologist in the Head Start Program I was teaching in, and he happened to be living in an apartment next to us. So, when his friend Bob Brown—they had already started the *Anvil* at this point, apparently, or the Press at this point, because this was [19]65.

MB: Um-hmm.

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: This was in [19]65 when Bob came through Wise, Virginia, stopped off to see his friend John, and so we met them. And I'm emphasizing this, because Margaret talked about having grown up not knowing this thing was around, what was happening. It was a whole other world. Well, in the same sense, although we knew exactly what, you know, integration and desegregation were about, in fact, had sort of begun to see it happening, because the schools desegregated in the South in the late [19]50s, and it sort of—all hell broke loose, really.

MB: What are you saying? You've got to speak up for me. [Laughs]

CS: The schools desegregated right after the Supreme Court decision. They started desegregation. All kinds of impacts you might want to go back to there. I can go on and on about that. But in North Carolina, for example, out in the East, especially, the thought was that all the good black schools got closed and went to the inferior white schools. [Laughs] It was a mess!

SK: Um-hmm, sure.

CS: My parents and relatives were teachers. And so, what happened in classrooms and in schools was just chaos, social trauma, really. It's amazing. Anyway, we knew about all that before we came. That was sort of background. But coming from Wise, Virginia, where strip-mining and Lyndon Johnson and Great Society and Head Start kindergarten was the context we'd been in, we hit this area wide-eyed and naive.

And I'd like to tell a little embarrassing story, actually, about our first [laughs] arrival. John Heider and his wife then, Anne Heider, said, "Oh, you're coming down to look for a place to live? You should go—just stop in our house in Durham, stay there while you're looking for a place to live." We had a little six-year-old son at this point. So, we did exactly that. And they only gave us the address. So, we pulled into Durham one night and we happened to hit there on sauna night [phone rings] and walked in the house and nobody had on a stitch of clothes! [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] Oh, good ole Chapel Hill!

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right. [Phone rings]

CS: I thought, "Wow! This is a different kind of place." [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right.

CS: From Wise, Virginia. [Phone rings] So, anyway, that's how—we kind of dropped in out of nowhere, too, [19]66, to start in graduate school. [Phone rings] John wasn't even around; he was out of town. But immediately, [phone rings and MB answers] because according to the dates in the obituary, the Press was up and running, but the *Anvil* was getting started [0:15:00] about that time—.

SK: Okay.

CS: We got pulled into, and very willingly pulled into, you know, what they were doing.

SK: I've seen a couple of sort of start dates for the *Anvil*, and one is [19]65 and the other is [19]67. It makes me wonder if the [19]65 date is the Press running and [19]67 is the *Anvil* printing.

CS: Okay. Let me see what—I got here in [19]65. They started the publishing business, the Press, in—let me see, [19]67, [19]65?—that's the Press?

MB: Yeah.

SK: And before then, he was publishing—.

CS: The *Anvil* is [19]66.

SK: Okay.

CS: And before that, he was publishing, evidently, at the printing house or printing company, because this says, "In [19]61, he and others began writing and printing *Reflections from Chapel Hill*, and in [19]63—."

MB: Have you ever seen a copy of *Reflections*?

SK: I haven't.

MB: Oh!

CS: Oh!

MB: [Laughs] I just happen to have one!

SK: [Laughs] And then, he printed the *Chapel Hill Conscience* after that?

MB: No, I think before it.

SK: Before it?

CS: Oh, here's a picture of the people who were doing *Reflections*. Is that, right, Margaret? Is that who that is?

MB: Oh, yeah. ( ) Leon's in here and Robert.

SK: Okay.

MB: But that's *Reflections*.

SK: Oh, thank you.

CS: Speaking of—.

MB: Yeah, just put them anywhere. [Laughs]

SK: Yeah, sure. So, Catherine, you're in Durham before you go west?

CS: Yeah, see, four years later, on a summer trip to Mexico, [laughs]—.

SK: Um-hmm, there we go, [laughs], yeah.

CS: [Laughs] Alright. But they'd been up and running for four years. We'd been in Chapel Hill for four years. See, we were leaving Chapel Hill, in fact. That was the year we left Chapel Hill to go to—where—Pennsylvania.

MB: Yeah.

CS: Because we left straight after Mexico.

MB: That was your first jobs.

CS: We had finished graduate school and so we were leaving. That Mexico trip was—.

SK: And so, both you and your husband were in graduate school at UNC-Chapel Hill?

CS: Yeah, we both got doctorates in English Lit.

SK: Okay.



CS: And proceeded on. And that's—in talking to John about this, he said, "You know, that's—we were early." For us, we were early and involved in the Press. The *Anvil*—right at the start of the *Anvil*, you know, we were here then, but then we got caught up in graduate school. In graduate school, we had a little child. Really weren't all that involved, unless Bob would call and say we need help collating. Once or twice that happened.

MB: Yeah.

CS: Sometimes the money was not sufficient to do a press run. Bob would call around, and people would send money. That happened a couple of times. But that was about all of our involvement with the *Anvil*, other than reading it and subscribing to it. Margaret was the one you ought to talk to about, you know, keeping the *Anvil* on the streets, going, because we had a pretty distant relationship with the *Anvil*.

And the idea of the Press, really, going back to what caught us, my attention, especially—I really liked the idea of the Press. I mean, the *Anvil* is fine, but the idea of—my father was a newspaperman, the standard South Carolina Dixiecrat-machine newspaper. And he worked there for forty years and knew all about—he was a—Strom Thurmond (was a) major supporter of this newspaper, etcetera.

SK: Um-hmm. What was the name of the paper? Do you remember?

CS: *Anderson Independent*. And he had the best knowledge of that newspaper and he would never agree to be interviewed. [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs]

CS: This man kept himself under the radar his whole life, and I got so frustrated with him, you know, at the end of his life. He lived to be ninety-four. Lots of people wanted to interview him about—.

SK: Sure.

CS: (The role of the) newspaper (in the) Dixiecrat (movement). Wouldn't say a word. [Laughs] But anyway, that's the background I came out of, and I really liked the idea of a newspaper, I mean, a press and a newspaper formed for the reasons that the Southern Associates Press and the *Anvil* were formed for, because they're the antithesis of everything else.

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: Not only locally, but all over the South.

SK: So, does that mean, Catherine, that you and John were not in North Carolina after 1966?

CS: No, not in North Carolina after 1970.

SK: After 1970, okay.

CS: Yeah, we were here [19]66 to [19]70.

SK: [19]66 to [19]70. Got it.

CS: And the Civil Right Movement was pretty much over. On campus, there was—on two campuses, Duke and UNC, civil rights—I mean, the food service workers strike and the beginnings of Vietnam antiwar, and that's pretty much—. But during the food service workers strike—I think that was a kind of carryover from civil rights—there were some closed classes and activism and some reserves on campus sometimes, but that

was right at the start. But it was not the same time at all. So, it was—and we just continued on our graduate studies way.

SK: Right. Do you remember—other than your impression, [laughs] your very first impression of arriving, the unclothed—?

CS: [Laughs] That wonderful shock!

SK: Yes! Were there other—I'm curious—.

CS: I remember what I was trying to explain [0:20:00] to my son, “Why don't these people have any clothes on?” [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right. He was probably the only person there who didn't require some kind of explanation. To a six-year-old, it's just a state of nature.

CS: [Laughs] No, he was curious. But, hey, we just joined right in, you know. And I remember talking to somebody there. “Now,” I said, “you know, this—is this the kind of place this is?”

MB: Well, that was, you know, John—.

CS: And some young person said, “Oh, no, no. This—it's a boring place.” And I said, “Have you ever lived in Wise, Virginia? [Laughs] It's pretty exciting to us.”

MB: Well, John Heider's father was a very famous psychologist. He was way up there.

CS: And John himself had his own reputation later.

MB: Yeah.

CS: He became a—.

MB: And then he went out to California and lived at Esalen. You know Esalen?

SK: I've heard of it, but I don't know it.

MB: Esalen Institute. It was at Big Sur.

SK: Okay.

MB: And that's where—everybody flocked there to get naked basically.

SK: Yeah. [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] Do drugs, talk about stuff.

CS: Yes.

MB: Yeah, so I don't know—.

CS: But he's—you know, he retired, I think, himself a pretty well-known psychologist.

MB: John?

CS: John Heider.

MB: Well, we saw him when Robert and I went to Kansas.

CS: Yeah.

MB: What's the town where the university is?

SK: Lawrence?

MB: Yeah, Lawrence. That was in 2002.

CS: Okay. That was—.

MB: He was living there and had married a woman who was a—taught in the architecture school.

CS: Yeah. His—I've given Seth—.

MB: I don't know if he's still alive. I bet he is, though.

CS: When Bob died, he knew about Bob's death, and I have his email address constantly. And so, I don't know if he's still alive, but eight years ago he was.

SK: Sure.

CS: And articulate and willing to talk.

SK: Okay. So, Margaret, when you met—you call him Robert. I've seen him as both Robert and Bob.

MB: Well, everybody called him Robert, but, see, my boyfriend right previous to Robert was Robert—I mean Bob. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] So, I didn't want to call him that.

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, right.

CS: She always calls him Robert. We always call him Bob.

SK: Okay.

MB: Yeah.

SK: So, you meet him when he comes through Mexico. You're there feeling kind of driven out of California?

MB: Oh, absolutely!

SK: Or just wanting to leave?

MB: No, we were there recuperating. We all got very sick from tear gas and, you know, it was awful. So, yeah, so we went. And actually, there was a connection. There's an art school in Berkeley, Oakland, and they had a facility in this village, which they sent some of their good art students to to spend the summer or some time. But it had actually been closed down by the [19]68 riots in Mexico City, which were terrible.

CS: Margaret, did you go back to Berkeley and then come—?

MB: What? I never went back to Berkeley. [Clears throat]

CS: But you didn't come to North Carolina immediately?

MB: Yeah, I just came to North Carolina.

CS: Immediately?

MB: Yeah.

CS: From Patzcuaro?

MB: Yeah, Patzcuaro, yeah.

SK: Did you get a degree at Berkeley?

MB: Yeah.

SK: In what?

MB: Cultural geography.

SK: Cool.

CS: I had forgotten that.

MB: I think it was social science field major, but it was cultural geography.

SK: That's neat.

MB: Yeah.

SK: I think it's very much back in vogue today.

CS: Yeah. it is.

MB: Well, yeah, oddly enough, I know.

SK: [Laughs] Seize your moment!

MB: [Laughs] Yeah.

SK: So, I'm curious to know, coming from a Los Angeles where you didn't see much physical segregation, into Berkeley where there was a very strong leftist

movement, and then back to Chapel Hill, what was your impression around in the Chapel Hill-Durham area? And this would have been in 1970, right?

MB: Yeah, in [19]70. Well, it seemed sort of like a ten-year out-of-date place. I was so happy to come here. It was such a relief from the tensions that were going on in Berkeley and California. And this seemed—you know, segregation had—it was desegregated, but it was still very segregated. [Laughs] So, I was trying to find something to do when I got here, get involved in something. And so, I looked around. Girl Scouts was segregated still. Boy Scouts, you know, there was still a lot of stuff that was totally that way.

And I finally found that 4-H and Extension was not segregated, because it couldn't be. It was federal. And that had just happened the year before. And so, I got really involved with it, because we had the farm then. Robert—we had horses and all sorts of stuff going on here.

SK: Cool.

MB: And Robert had moved out here because of—he always lived in a house right on Franklin Street. He had like three of them over the years. Do you remember one of them? It was where the Hardee's is now. It was one of them, a big old place.

CS: Yeah. I think I remember it when it was there.

MB: Yeah. So, he was always on Franklin Street on campus. You know, that was his world.

SK: It's right in the middle of town. I mean, it's right there.

MB: Exactly. [0:25:00] And then, there was a bomb—somebody had sent—he had a lot of death threats, [laughs] so they said there was a bomb planted underneath the house. And they sent a bomb squad up from Fort Bragg.

SK: Wow.

MB: And I think found a bomb, as I recall. [Laughs] And so, he decided—everybody said, “You need to get out of here.” So, he moved out here, which was so far out of town, you know, it was really considered it was very far out to get here. [Laughs] I tell you, you have to take a sandwich.

CS: There was a farmhouse he rented.

MB: And the farmhouse was here, which burnt down, but that’s a whole other story. Yeah, so he lived out here, and it was perfect. It was exactly what I wanted.

SK: Yeah. Well, it’s a beautiful space, the outside and inside, yeah.

MB: Yeah, it was wonderful. So, yeah, so I started getting involved in the community, and he was, you know, publishing the newspaper every week.

CS: (I can give this back). I just needed some dates to remember.

MB: Which, you know, he was a very methodical, determined person and very organized and meticulous, and there was no way that he would not publish a newspaper every week.

SK: So, this was a weekly newspaper. I read that it was published—I suppose by the time you would have gotten here in 1970, it was being delivered on, published on Fridays.

MB: Yeah, was it Thursday? Yeah, we were up all night Thursdays or Wednesday nights.



CS: It says something about that in the obituary.

SK: Yeah, I have a note, and the note may have been taken—you know, there's a good chance I read your obituary [laughs] and took notes from it—but it said until 1969 it was published on Thursdays, and then it started publication on Fridays.

MB: Oh, did it?

SK: It's not—it's immaterial. It's just one of those little things.

CS: I don't know where I got that from, but it was either Bob or Margaret.

[Laughs]

SK: Well, now it's been written down, so it's true, and we've said it.

MB: Yeah, right.

CS: I feel—if Bob said it, I feel better about it. I don't know, but you were there. Maybe you can—.

MB: Somehow there's a vague memory.

CS: Margaret filled in on things, but Bob—I made a point, you know, while he was still—.

MB: Yeah, he drug me over there immediately to at least collate. You don't know about collating. [Laughs] That was before there were machines that did that. So, you had to put everything together by hand, which was a social experience.

CS: It was.

MB: It's what everybody did, was collate stuff together and talk.

CS: Yeah, that's how most people found out about the *Anvil*. They had a call to come help collate.

MB: Yeah. But he had already moved over into his big office there right across from Durham High School from another office that was up in Lakewood, which was the first one, where he had the printing presses and stuff. And that was because, as I said before, there was no location that anybody would rent him in Chapel Hill or Carrboro for an office, or would the paper companies deliver paper to him, because of Orville Campbell telling them that they would be in big time trouble if they delivered any paper to Robert.

SK: And was Orville Campbell the publisher or the editor or the owner of the Chapel Hill—?

CS: *Chapel Hill Weekly*.

MB: All those things, I think. [Laughs]

CS: Yeah, I know he was editor and publisher. I don't know about owner, but presumably.

MB: Yeah. Orville was a very fierce presence in this town, and nothing escaped him.

CS: You grew up in Chapel Hill? When were you born?

SK: 1979.

CS: Okay.

MB: Yeah. Well, Orville was just dying out when I got here, but all through the [19]50s and [19]60s, Orville was quite a character.

SK: And I think people who believe or assume that Chapel Hill is kind of a liberal town would be surprised to learn that it was being kind of controlled, [laughs] it sounds like, by a segregationist for quite some time.

MB: Well, the university had—.

CS: [Speaking simultaneously] Yeah, I'm going to read this release myself. I've never seen this before.

MB: You didn't find—you know, it kind of reminded me, Robert's stories, of what happened in Berkeley during the Free Speech Movement. You would have thought the faculty and so on would have supported all those—*untrue!* You know, there were very few faculty people that would speak out and support protestors or arrested people. And that was the big thing, you know, that Robert always talked about: everybody getting arrested, and having to go to Hillsborough, and who was going to bail them out, and, you know, all the charges. I think it's addressed a little bit in John Ehle's book.

SK: Um-hmm. And so, can you talk a little bit about that—just the process? You've mentioned collating as this social experience, which is really interesting.

MB: [Laughs] Yeah.

SK: But, so I take it you had some late nights to get the issue out the following morning? Can you talk a little bit about sort of what it was like to be—what the different tasks were that you needed to complete in order to produce the paper, and then maybe what it was like to distribute it?

MB: Um-hmm, right. Well, okay, so the news pieces would come in. Robert had lots of people who would write for the *Anvil*. He had a doctor at Duke who went to all of the musical events and did little short reviews. And he loved the arts, and so that's what it was called: It was arts and politics. And those newspapers, it was the first time that a—I don't know what you call them—the events page [0:30:00] of accessing everything from movies, concerts, everything. That didn't exist in publications before then. It was very

closed down. That originated, I think, at the *Berkeley Barb* or, you know, it was one of those things that came out of the progressive press, that people got together and said what was going on so people could learn. And it wasn't segregated, right? That was a big piece. Now we just take it for granted, you know, that you go some place and see all the listings of things. But before, that did not exist.

SK: And what's the connection between that kind of events page and the political movement?

MB: Openness, community, drawing people out to experience each other, not being afraid that you'd end up with, "What do you do with black people, white people?" It was everybody. You know, everybody is welcome, participating. Yeah, I think Robert always saw it as a very big accomplishment by the underground press syndicate and stuff.

And, okay, so what would we do? So, you know, Robert would write an editorial. Oh, gosh! We'd all wait all night for Robert's editorials to emerge. And then, there was an artist because the *Anvil* had advertising. Do you have a copy of the *Anvil*? No?

CS: In the bottom down here are some copies, I think.

MB: So, he usually had one or two artists. And then, he had a typesetting machine which would justify type. And Penny, who lives in Rocky Mount, did that for years, plus she was an artist. And so, she put all the ads together. They were all handmade ads.

Oh, yeah, that's the farm issue. I even wrote in that one.

CS: (1976).

MB: Hmm?

CS: I'm listening. I'm really learning a lot.

MB: Yeah.

CS: But it's on big paper because it's the only size that that damn press would print. And it was an old press, and Bob had learned how to repair it, keep it moving.

SK: Right.

CS: But it demanded a certain kind of paper, too, I remember that.

MB: Yes, yeah.

CS: You couldn't use newsprint.

MB: You couldn't use newsprint in it.

CS: It had to be heavier stock.

MB: And there was no one—.

CS: So, anyway, it's this antiquated looking shape, but that's why.

SK: [Laughs]

MB: Right. And no one would print the *Anvil* on newsprint. Well, the only place was the Chapel Hill paper, which could have printed it, but he wouldn't. So, Robert had to use this paper. So, it was the artist making up the ads, and then Robert getting the typeset pieces. And then, you had to do the layout, which now you can do it on computers.

SK: Right.

MB: It figures it all, but you had to measure *everything*. Oh, my God! Everything had to be set in place.

CS: [Speaking simultaneously] My father's job at that newspaper for forty years was classified ads, and I must have spent I don't know how many Sundays after—.

MB: What?

CS: I was reminiscing my experience, which gives me part of my respect for what Bob taught himself to do, not only how to run a huge old-fashioned press, keep it going, printing press, but now you're talking about page layout. He's a historian! [Laughs] Page layout, etcetera. We used to sit out in the car after church waiting for my father to go make sure that all the ads were laid out and all the clippings were in where they needed to be.

MB: Now, you can see all the artwork. It's all original.

SK: Yeah, and we're looking at an issue from 1976 right now that's called the Farm Edition.

MB: Yeah.

SK: And what's striking me right away is how all this sort of—modern farmers nowadays would be reading the exact same thing.

MB: Oh, absolutely! It's exactly the same thing that's happening down in Chatham County. You know, I go down there. I go, "God! I feel like it's forty years ago!" [Laughs] The same interests, the same things.

CS: "Theory, planning"—theory? [Laughs]

MB: What?

CS: "Theory, planning, tools, soil, fertilizer, seeds, herbs"—.

MB: Oh, yeah.

CS: Theory? [laughs]

SK: Yeah.

MB: Yeah, it was a whole back-to-the-land. That's kind of what came out of California. So, anyway, and then Robert would—he had this methodical mind that somehow could see a whole page and put all that type together.

CS: [Reading to self] “1969, twenty cents”.

MB: Amongst, I must say, lots of screaming and yelling. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Is that right? Coming from Bob or at Bob or both?

MB: Every which way! [Laughs] Because it'd be three o'clock in the morning, and everybody would be sitting there, waiting for *somebody* to get one little piece that would fit in a paper. You know, the whole room—it was a big room, and it had all of these tables set out with each page on, and putting them together, you know. Then, he would have to go to the darkroom. He had a big darkroom and he'd take photographs and make the photographs, put them on the press. [Laughs] Then you'd have to burn the plates. (You know, we used) plates. Have you ever seen those? I've got some out on the porch.

SK: I've seen them. Okay.

CS: This is letterpress, yeah.

MB: What?

CS: Letterpress. I used to wander around in the print room in the back of the newspaper that my father—.

MB: Yeah. Yeah, and then he would—.

CS: Hot type, set type.

MB: This wasn't hot type.

SK: I feel like there must have been a very strong smell.

MB: Ink! Yeah, ink.

CS: Yeah, [0:35:00] and just hot metal and various smells. [Laughs]

SK: Yeah, yeah.

MB: Well, we didn't do hot type.

SK: Right.

MB: She's talking about her father's—.

CS: You didn't? You didn't do hot type?

MB: No, no. It was offset.

CS: It was offset by then, okay.

MB: Yeah. Yeah, so.

SK: Did the *Anvil* have employees, or was it all friends and collaborators?

MB: Oh, no, these were all—well—.

SK: I assume people were paid. Well, I mean, it's foolish to assume, right? But I—were people paid for articles?

MB: Yes, five dollars. And then, Penny, I think, got twenty-five dollars a week. She wasn't there eight hours a day, kind of she just—.

SK: She would have done all the illustrations?

MB: Yeah, she'd come in and do those. She was on her—we used to call it “Robert's time” and “Penny's time”. Oh, God! And the rest of us, who were sort of ordinary human beings, suffered enormously, [laughs] standing around waiting for these two.

CS: Just going through the ads, it's like going through an old *Life* magazine.



SK: Right. Well, I'm wondering, especially in the context of the fact that they couldn't get anyone to print the *Anvil*, who were your advertisers?

MB: Oh, you can—well, I bet every one of them is gone now, but—.

CS: The Ivy Room in Durham was a constant.

MB: The Ivy Room in Durham. The Coffee Shop, (he was always)—.

SK: The Carolina Coffee Shop?

MB: That was Byron Freeman.

SK: Which is still there on Franklin Street.

MB: Yeah, Byron.

CS: North Carolina—no, that's ( ) Eurythmics, music education.

MB: Chapel Hill Tires, I'd say they were.

CS: WSRC.

MB: The Villa Teo—you don't remember them. That's where the—.

SK: The Clean Machine is still in operation.

MB: Is it?

CS: WSRC.

SK: WSRC!

CS: And Pizza Inn.

MB: The Cave, that was a good one.

CS: Glen Lennox Pharmacy.

MB: The Cave and—the other music place, Marcia's, the Cat's Cradle.

SK: The Cat's Cradle, yeah.

CS: A restaurant at Hilton and Heartwood Realty.

SK: So, would these have been places that would be unafraid of retaliation, or—?

MB: Exactly. This was the whole other group of people in town. In fact, Robert started this organization to get all these people to start their own Chamber of Commerce, because the Chamber of Commerce was so reactionary and racist and stuff, and to include black businesses and all these emerging businesses. And it lasted a couple of years.

SK: Is that right?

MB: Yeah!

CS: I think we should take as definitive: He says, “Established 1967”.

SK: 1967. So, we have it in print from the *Anvil* itself.

CS: Yeah, from the masthead.

SK: From the masthead, yes.

MB: Yeah. I’m trying to think what else. There were places over in Durham.

CS: Barnes Supply.

MB: Barnes Supply over in Durham. They still exist, I think.

CS: Potpourri.

SK: And what’s your sense for the readership of the *Anvil*. I guess I’m seeing a lot of—and Margaret, are you still looking at the food issue?

MB: [Laughs] Yeah!

SK: Or the farm issue? [Laughs] I see a lot of agricultural kind of material.

MB: Yeah, it’s fascinating! I’d forgotten what was in this story.

SK: But there's, you know, food issues. There's issues about consumption and production of food. There's local politics. As you mentioned, there's arts, there's labor questions.

MB: Anything he could get people to write on. You know Larry Naumoff, Lawrence Naumoff?

SK: Um-um.

MB: He's a pretty famous North Carolina writer.

CS: Yeah, Lawrence Naumoff.

MB: I see he wrote one here on tractors. You can find all those old North Carolina writers who wrote either under their own names or made-up names.

SK: And so, Catherine, were you receiving the *Anvil* as a subscriber throughout this period?

CS: Yeah.

SK: And you were up in Pennsylvania?

CS: We were living in Virginia for two years and then in Pennsylvania and subscribed. And, you know, as I said, we were on the call list when they needed to round up some money or make a press run. But otherwise, just friends.

SK: Right.

CS: You know, keeping up in a kind of social way as friends, but not involved.

SK: And as a reader, and this is asking you to think way back, of course, so—.

MB: You know, I think that question is so interesting, because it was the question that I could hear Robert and Joel, all of us, talk about: Who in the hell reads this paper? We had no idea.

SK: This is Joel Bulkley?

MB: Yeah. You know, trying to figure out who would read it. But then I met this woman maybe—it was before Robert died, because she was sitting here. A friend of ours brought her here. And she had moved to Durham in 1967 with her husband, who was a physician, and he was offered a job at Duke. And they were from New York, I think, and they were terrified to come to the South, I mean, just—they thought it was dangerous to go to Durham. And they came, and during that week that he was here to see if he was going to take this job at Duke, they ran into the *Anvil*. And she said, “We found the *Anvil*. We went, ‘Oh, my God! There *are* people like us here.’” [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

MB: And he took that job because of that. So.

CS: That’s an interesting story.

MB: I know. I thought that was really fascinating. [0:40:00]

SK: Yeah.

MB: And then, they ran into other people that read the *Anvil*, and that was kind of their linkage. You know, to have the *Anvil* sitting on the kitchen table, you knew who your friends were if they said, “Oh, yeah, I read the *Anvil*!”

SK: Right. You know, I heard a similar, a quite touching story that Arnie Katz, who was one of the—he put together a publication called the *Carologue*, which addressed a lot of the issues that I’m seeing here. And John Ehle actually contributed a piece in that on—I believe it was on artisanal cheesemaking.

MB: Um-hmm.

SK: Which was in connection with a book that he wrote on the subject. Anyway, all that is to say—.

MB: Oh, yeah, I've got that book.

SK: Okay, great.

MB: Yeah, I remember talking to him about that book.

SK: And I talked to him. I've tried to get an interview, but I haven't been successful so far.

MB: Is he ill?

SK: No. He just couldn't get the scheduling together.

MB: Ornery?

SK: Maybe. You know, you said it, not me. He was generally receptive but traveling and things of that nature. Anyway, all that is to say, Arnie Katz was telling me about a young gay person growing up in rural North Carolina who read the *Carologue* and for the first time knew that there were other people like him.

MB: Yeah, exactly.

SK: Right? And so, I guess the analogue is that there were liberals who knew that there were other people like them, or people with at least a certain set of political beliefs. Did you have a sense—did you ever get an answer to that question, [laughs] as you were asking each other, "Who's our readership? You know, who's doing it?"

MB: Oh, no! We always wondered. And Robert was always dying to have people's letter to the editor, [laughs] just dying to find out what people were responding to. You know, so it was always a joyful occasion when a letter came in.

SK: Unless it was a death threat.

MB: Yeah. Well, yeah, that. Yeah, over at the office over there, he had the Klan come. He had all sorts of people.

CS: Well, let's talk about the distribution. We can get at that question a couple of ways and evoke some more of Margaret's memories. You went around trying to sell ads, right?

MB: Say what?

CS: You went around to sell ads? That was one of the things you did.

MB: Oh, yeah, I was the ad salesman, too. I forgot about that.

SK: Okay. [Laughs]

CS: So, first let's talk about the response you got when you would go asking for ads, and then I want to get to the distribution. They used to put the *Anvil* out in boxes, or they tried to, and the boxes would be emptied but not paid for, the contents not paid for. The boxes would be trashed. What do you think was happening to those newspapers? That's the second question. That's the distribution. But go back to the ads. When you'd go in to sell an ad, what happened?

MB: I only went in, I think, to friendly places that he'd already, you know, approached or whatever.

SK: Did they include some of the businesses that were advertising, record stores and clubs and stuff like that?

MB: Right, yeah.

CS: Okay, so that's not really an avenue to find out who read because people—

MB: I know, but this was always, again, every week I could hear Joel and Robert—Robert would say, "I don't care if they steal the paper!" And Joel would say,

“They should pay twenty-five cents!” [Laughs] And Robert would say, “Let them steal it!”

CS: Those papers were disappearing, you know.

SK: Right.

MB: Yeah, all of them would disappear.

SK: And did you get the sense that they were by people who wanted to read them, or that they were by people who *didn't* want people to read them?

MB: We had no idea.

CS: Oh, you couldn't answer that question.

SK: Right.

CS: But a lot of people knew about the *Anvil*, I can say that, both while we were here in school—I mean, that would have been easy from the English department to the *Anvil*, and Bob used to come in and talk sometimes to classes. But we lived in town and then moved out in the country, too, out—well, not far out in the country, about like this, in a different direction—Jones Ferry Road. But people knew about the *Anvil*. It was a known phenomenon. They might disagree. In—well, you grew up in Chapel Hill, which is not quite the South, [laughs] to have grown up here.

SK: [Laughs]

CS: You know what Jesse Helms said about Chapel Hill?

SK: I do, indeed.

CS: You've heard that: “You don't need a zoo. Just put a fence around it.” But, in fact, what I'm reminiscing right now, it's very much like this still up in central Pennsylvania, where we live most of the year, rural, central Pennsylvania. I mean, you

know these people are there that are doing these things. You're aware of them. You don't like them. You resist them, but you're very aware of them. You know what they're doing. So, you know, did they read the paper to find out what these people were about, or did they just hear it?

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: Where did you run—did you ever run into it lying around? You say you'd go into a home, and it was on the coffee table or the dinner table, and you'd know you were among friends? But did you ever find it out in public places along with the *News and Observer* and the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, lying on the table?

MB: Well, after the—to continue the day, the press day, whether it be Wednesday or Thursday, [laughs] so probably about dawn, Robert would finish printing, and he had all these young kids come in that would collate it. All of us would collate it, and they'd become big stacks, and then the kids would take it to Chapel Hill and put it in the racks around Chapel Hill and Durham and Raleigh. I think somebody took some down to Fayetteville or Greensboro and a few places around. [0:45:00] And then we had lots—we probably mailed out at least a hundred of them to libraries, other underground newspapers, because that was a very big deal, the underground press nationwide.

CS: That's what this—you know about the project to digitize the *Anvil* and—?

SK: I've heard of it, yeah.

CS: Well, here's the guy's contact.

SK: Okay.

CS: And he was in agreement that we—he answered all our questions (in the affirmative).



MB: Yeah, he's collecting all of them

CS: They're putting together a publication. His associate, the digitizer, is digitizing the *Chapel Hill Conscience*, the UNC library's collection of the *Chapel Hill Conscience*, which is one issue, and *Reflections*, which is pretty full, I think—I don't know about completeness on that—and the *Anvil*, maybe the *Anvil*. They may get their *Anvil* from UNC, but UNC will only give them the microfilm. They won't let them have the originals. So, they'll try for originals from someplace else if they can get it. If they can't, they'll come back and use the microfilm. But the whole spiel is being digitized. This guy has a really good fix on what Margaret is talking about right now—.

MB: Yeah, the underground presses.

CS: Which is how the newspapers all kept in touch, or at least read each other, you know.

SK: Right, right. And I know that was an important—.

CS: He was part of something in Ann Arbor. He was a participant.

MB: Yeah, he was very important. We had a big table when he came in the office in Durham, and then all these bookcases all around, and there'd be piles and piles of all the underground newspapers from all over the country. And we just couldn't wait every week for him to come, or month, whenever they'd come in, and find out what was going down down in Mississippi or—you know, people would try to do a publication. Maybe it'd only last for a year or two, but it was great. [Laughs]

SK: Right.

MB: They were from all over.

CS: So, that means people coming into town could have known—.

MB: What?

CS: People coming from elsewhere into town could have known—.

MB: Yeah, they'd hear about the *Anvil*. We had people who would just come in the office because they had been working on some publication in Alabama and saw the *Anvil* and knew that, you know, you could come to the office. Robert had a couple of mattresses that you could sleep on up above the thing.

CS: Yes. He'd have somebody who lived up there for a while.

MB: Yeah. It was safe to come there.

CS: A person who didn't want to go to Canada and didn't want to [laughs] (be drafted) upstairs. I'm going to say locally—this is a theory.

MB: Say what?

CS: Locally, I'm going to say the people who read the *Anvil* were probably academics and black political and church people.

SK: African American church people?

CS: Yes.

SK: Part of the reason I ask is because I'm wondering—a lot of these—.

CS: Would you—Margaret might want to comment on that. But the black community, sort of the elites in the black community, I'm going to say, the ministers and the teachers, I bet they read the *Anvil*, and academics. That's who it was, I would guess, and the Quakers.

MB: See, I think the *Anvil* appeared or felt to a lot of people sort of subversive.

CS: Oh, God, yeah! [Laughs] That's what I was talking about earlier.

MB: Yeah, you know, to me, it was—coming from Berkeley, it was like, “God, it’s so backward,” and to have somebody think it was subversive was like, “What?!”

[Laughs] But I think that’s what generally in Chapel Hill people thought.

CS: Unless they were in the arts, or it was academics.

MB: “They must be communists. They’re subversive. They’re talking about things and telling people go do stuff and encouraging people to get together.” You know, it was very subversive. It was—[laughs] I think.

CS: But people who had, you know, political experience with the *Anvil*, participating and helping, or the Press, I think they probably—.

MB: Yeah.

CS: But let me turn the question back. Does anybody read the *Anvil* now? Who’s been going into the archives and reading it? You?

SK: People—.

CS: When we were getting it digitized, I was talking a lot with the UNC collections curator, and he said student interest is active and ongoing, and people come in and read stuff, but I don’t know who these people are. Journalists?

SK: My guess would be students and other academic researchers. But I don’t know how the library measures what we would call, you know, on a website “page views”.

CS: Yeah. Well, indicators of the same old indifference or ignorance of its existence also goes on. Margaret and I have seen the same exhibit now.

MB: What?

CS: In the Chapel Hill Public Library, there’s a big glass-topped—.

MB: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

CS: Case exhibit of local publications about Howard Lee. No *Anvils*! [Laughs]

MB: And there's no *Anvil*.

CS: And then, there's no *Anvil*, and there was a lot about Howard Lee [laughs] in the *Anvil* before and after he was elected.

MB: Well, the Student Union, the guy who ran the Student Union, would not allow the *Anvil* in the Student Union ever.

SK: At Carolina?

MB: Yeah. Ever. [Laughs] Who happened to be what's-her-name—[0:50:00] she was on the Carrboro Board—Frances Shetley's husband, and he ran the Student Union and he wouldn't allow the *Anvil* or *Reflections*, any of those. [Clears throat] Yeah.

SK: Umm.

CS: Are we getting off your tracks?

MB: Yeah.

SK: I'm poor at laying them. No, I appreciate everything you've been saying. Getting back to distribution, after the printing, you have students—are these high school students who are sort of bringing them around to various places?

MB: Yeah, um-hmm, yeah.

CS: That's what you meant by young kids?

MB: Yeah. I was—oh, God, I'm trying to think of their names. They all still live in Chapel Hill.

SK: Sure. And you said that you were printing them across from you said Durham High School?

MB: Um-hmm.

SK: Does that have a new name now?

MB: The building?

SK: Okay, it was a building. I just don't know exactly where—.

MB: Yeah, yeah. No, there was a big building, and Robert rented two big spaces. One was the printing part, and the other was the newspaper part.

CS: Lakewood Shopping Center?

MB: What?

CS: Lakewood Shopping Center?

MB: Well, he moved out of Lakewood over to that space.

CS: Okay. Now, I ( ).

MB: And that was a huge space.

SK: That's interesting, because *Southern Exposure* published out a place right off, across the street from Lakewood.

MB: Well, I'll tell you all about *Southern Exposure*. [Laughs]

SK: Well, do tell. [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] Yeah, because *Southern Exposure* came in, and Bob Hall—do you know Bob?

SK: My colleague interviewed him, but I don't know him.

MB: Oh, okay. Well, Bob came up from Atlanta, and they were like three blocks away. And Robert and Bob never had the time to even associate with each other. It was really hilarious. But then, Jenny, Bob's second wife—not his first wife, who did the Carolina—.

SK: His first wife was Jacquelyn Hall—.

MB: Yeah, right.

SK: The founding director of the Southern Oral History Program, which I represent or was a staff person at until a year ago, yeah.

MB: Yeah. Well, they split up, and Jenny, who was my best friend, and that's how Robert and Bob finally met each other—not finally. It was early, you know, by [19]63 or [196]4.

SK: So, this was that they quite literally didn't have time. This wasn't an animus thing.

MB: No, no! No, they just—you know, Bob Hall and Robert Brown are very similar, you know, these extremely dedicated—.

CS: Very focused. The work is everything.

MB: Very focused, work, work, work, work. There's no such thing as a weekend.

SK: And were you reading *Southern Exposure*?

MB: Oh, yeah! Well, I didn't know about it before they moved to Durham, you know, and he only came up because she got a job here.

SK: Jacquelyn Hall got a job at UNC, right.

MB: Yeah, and Bob brought the magazine up here. Yeah. So, yeah, they were—Bob and Jenny and Robert and I were—you know, it's been a lot of years.

SK: Um-hmm. I'm curious about this sort of sense of community among local activists and journalists and activist-journalists, and then this broader sense of community among underground publications generally. Can you sort of talk a little bit about, you know, that community of people, and how they interacted with one another, and if there

was—if they were writing on similar stories or trading information or just, you know, friendship and help with collation and things of that nature?

MB: Jeez. You know, a lot of it had to do, I think, with age, and Robert was of another generation than, well, like Arnie. Arnie's more my generation, and Robert came out of a whole—the 1950s.

CS: Yeah, yeah.

MB: You know, he had experienced a war. You know, his whole set of understandings and values were very different than [19]60s people like me. [Laughs]

SK: Um-hmm. [Laughs]

MB: He was not a hippie; he was a beatnik [laughs] from the [19]50s. And so, that, I think there was a little bit of—you know, I think people in the [19]70s who were trying to do publications and stuff, you know, they'd all talk to Robert, but they saw him as an old person, you know, and they wanted to be much more radical. But they had never experienced segregation, civil rights, and were barely involved in antiwar stuff.

CS: And Bob had done things like run a write-in campaign and gotten a governor elected.

MB: Yeah. So, it was a different experience. The [19]70s young people that were starting, they didn't know civil rights and they didn't know antiwar stuff. So, they were kind of—[0:55:00] wanted to continue, you know, the tradition, but, uh, they didn't have much to talk about. They had their own momentum and their own stuff. And I think they saw the *Anvil* as kind of backward, which was really odd, because other people saw it as totally renegade, you know. [Laughs]

CS: [Laughs] I know.

SK: Right. So, what was it? Can you think of anything sort of specific or even something general about the *Anvil* that made it appear backward to sort of later activists?

MB: There was kind of this [19]70s—oh, I don't know how I can exactly describe it. It sort of surprised me when people would come in the office and talk about revolution and, you know, and all this stuff. I'd go, "God, you guys are like ten years out of date! You know, this is [19]60s stuff, early [19]60s," because there weren't marches going on, you know. They were sort of wishing they were from ten years previous to that and part of that, and they weren't. So, they constantly thought of themselves as revolutionaries without a cause, sort of. [Laughs] I don't know, that's how I saw them. [Clears throat]

SK: And so, was Bob—can you sort of characterize his attitude in contrast to their attitude? Was he more kind of practical, pragmatic?

MB: Well, Robert would sit down and talk to anybody endlessly on any subject. And I think, you know, he wanted to try to, when young—you know, and who came into his office was Schewel from the *Independent*.

SK: Oh, um-hmm.

MB: And there's a whole year there where Schewel would come by. And if you ever read Schewel's—in fact, you should get this—his statement of what the *Independent* was like, it sounds like a *Communist Manifesto*. I mean, it is so far out there you wouldn't believe it. I remember reading it and thinking, "Jesus! This is really wacky." But they had this revolutionary sort of attitude. And Robert was not a communist. He was not even a leftist. He was a heartfelt person. He was not interested in ideological stuff.

CS: Well, but—yes, and—not an "or", but an "and"—.

MB: He was interested in reality.



CS: He knew history. You know, he sort of knew about some earlier eras of political upheaval and revolution.

MB: Yeah.

CS: And thought those were issues that still mattered, but they were the issues that you took down a government around, you know.

MB: Yeah.

CS: You don't just aimlessly [laughs] talk about revolution.

MB: Yeah.

CS: And he had a kind of, you know, interest and empathy and sympathy with what they were doing, but thought, "What is it you're actually trying to accomplish?" And never could quite get answers to it would be my (impression).

MB: Yeah. You know, he'd say, "Read Marx. Read Lenin. But, you know, that isn't where the world is at. The world is real. And there's reality and, you know, there's—here's American history." I mean, he was an historian. [Laughs]

CS: Yeah, he knew his background for where things had come from.

MB: Yeah. And Schewel—I'll just say this once. I was never there during these, but Robert would come home and tell me, talking to Schewel. And it was right at the time when technology was coming in, and Robert could see that his technology was going to be out-of-date very quickly. And frankly, he didn't want to get into the next—he didn't want to get into computers, and that was the next thing.

SK: Um-hmm. And this would have been—I mean, Steve Schewel starts the *Indy* in the early 1980s.

MB: Yes.

SK: And this is also when we're seeing cable television start to get into the—.

MB: Exactly. It was a big change. And he knew that that's how it was going to go. Well, there was now the Copy Quick, where you take stuff in and get it copied. You could print the *Anvil* on it if you wanted! So, Schewel had come in with his little delegation of radicals, and Robert wanted to give the paper to them.

CS: Yes.

MB: And he said, "Continue it. Here, take the *Anvil*. Take it." And, "I'm tired." He was exhausted.

SK: Yeah.

MB: And continue the history, the *Anvil* being the place where things are hammered out, where history is—you know, you have all this discussion and intellectual sort of thing. And Schewel wanted nothing to do with that. But the difference being, too, that Schewel had lots of money, tons of money, and Robert had *no* money, really, none. So, Schewel was a very wealthy person.

SK: So, the *Anvil*, it has a—I'm still terrible with numbers, you know, as you saw. I mangled the date as soon as I walked in here. I can't even get that one right. [1:00:00] But, you know, the *Anvil* has a run from 1967 to 1983. [19]83 would have been right when Steve Schewel's *Independent* starts up.

MB: It's the same year.

SK: So, they don't pass the *Anvil* off.

MB: No.

SK: But they do—one set of lights shuts off as the other turns on.

MB: Yeah, that's right.

SK: But that's a pretty long run for a small independently-run—.

MB: Oh, it's incredible! He never missed an issue.

CS: It is. It's one of the longest running, if not the longest running of the alternatives.

MB: He never missed a week. We took two weeks off at Christmas.

CS: So, over twenty years.

SK: And so, the financial model is a combination of ads and—.

MB: [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Is that too grand a word for it?

MB: [Laughs] Agh!

SK: It's a combination of ads and personal gifts.

CS: Ads, investors, and donations (on call when needed).

MB: Yeah, and anything that Robert could print, job printing.

SK: Um-hmm, of course.

CS: Yeah, job printing. Buffalo Press, as Joel Bulkley reminds me, publishing the bus schedules for the city, for the town of Chapel Hill, or anything that you'd get paid for. And he liked the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, actually, because they paid him [laughs] for when you're printing for them, like the bus schedules and stuff.

MB: Yeah, so that's the model, kind of the old-fashioned newspaper model: job printing publishes the news, which was the *Chapel Hill News* paper model.

SK: Um-hmm. And so, Catherine, can you recall or describe sort of what one of those or a sort of standard call from Bob would be like when he called you to ask for investment?

CS: It didn't happen all that often. I don't want to give that impression.

SK: Sure.

CS: But it was classic Robert, you know, polite, just really hate to have to do it, you know, but I can't, you know, get the run through unless we pitch in some money here and there. And he couldn't buy ink, whatever, I remember that one. This was when we were in Wise, so it was right after we left here. So, it was just, you know, apologetic, gracious, determined, certainly would understand if we couldn't do it, you know.

SK: Um-hmm. And so, what were some of the costs? Ink is one of them.

MB: Paper.

CS: Ink and paper. Ink and paper were what I recall.

MB: The rent. I remember the rent was always a struggle to make, and utilities, [laughs] trying to pay the utility bill every month. Yeah, and those are very basic stuff. (Can't make) the payroll.

CS: Yeah, it's all making me feel like I wish I had done more. [Laughs] Damn! I wish I had really been an investor.

MB: Well, you know, to be totally honest about this, that was the great problem of the paper, was that Joel Bulkley got involved in it, because he was supposed to be a big time investor, and Joel never provided money. I think one time he came up with a few thousand dollars at the very beginning. And he had promised Robert that he would inject, you know, several thousand dollars every year, and that was his promise and how he got involved in it and why he got an office. [Laughs] And he never delivered, and that was a very big fight with him all the time. I don't know if Joel would say that, but I saw that all the time and—he and Robert.

CS: Well, in looking at that, I'd say it was classic Bob. It was a friendship call. There was—I'm sure he didn't anticipate, and so there was not built into, because he had the business model of a newspaper in mind, this notion of giving, you know, ongoing giving. Like right now, all nonprofits anyway expect you to continually give, not just, you know, when there's an emergency.

MB: Yeah.

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: That was not part of the model, but I bet it could have been, looking back.

MB: Well, yeah. Joel was a huge disappointment.

CS: Yeah.

MB: And then, Leon, who was—Robert and Leon were like—they had this desk. There was one big desk, and they were one on each side, and they just loved throwing stuff back and forth, and typing away whatever—well, there's his typewriter right there, [laughs] ancient typewriter. And, you know, they just had a ball for a couple of years. And then, when Leon got married and decided to leave, his wife got a job in Canada. And wasn't the wedding here?

CS: Um-hmm.

MB: The wedding was here, and everybody promised to meet in Mexico the following year.

CS: And we did.

MB: And, yeah, I picked up—I walked in, Leon was not there anymore, and it was—I don't think—Robert never recovered from that, really. He missed Leon forever.

SK: When was that? When did Leon leave?

CS: [19]70, the same year we left.

MB: [19]69.

SK: Oh, wow.

CS: Yeah, [19]69, because we met in Mexico and we left after that.

MB: Yeah, the summer of [19]70.

SK: And did he maintain a relationship with Leon Rooke?

MB: No.

CS: Ambivalent.

MB: Very ambivalent. They talked a little bit. They wrote letters. I've got all of Leon's books. You know, he sent them to Robert. He wanted to—Robert was very angry. [1:05:00] He couldn't believe that Leon had left him. [Laughs] He really couldn't.

CS: You know, I bet Leon did not continue a connection. Leon—I have read—that's—sorry I'm on tape here, because I still like Leon and Connie, but I thought Leon's interview was embarrassing.

MB: You thought Leon what?

CS: It was embarrassingly biased toward Leon! [Laughs]

MB: Who?

CS: Leon's—have you read the transcript of the interview with Leon?

MB: Oh, no. I'd love to.

CS: Well, now I've prejudiced you. But I thought, "Come on, Leon!" Several times I thought, "Come on, Leon!" Because what you're describing was a reality. You know, they were very much involved together, jointly, in getting things written for the

paper. That's one point. As a writer, I noticed that. And the other I noticed that Leon gives the impression that he had to write almost everything.

MB: [Laughs]

CS: And he said Bob didn't write much. Wait a minute! There are the editorials. There's the "On the Land" column, which was a continual column. "No, Leon, I don't know about this," [laughs] a lot of things. I thought that several times.

MB: Yeah.

CS: "Leon, shame on you!" But, you know, that's how he remembers it now.

SK: Well, it sounds like, despite the sort of breakup of this intellectual marriage, I mean, you know, Bob, he kept working for another thirteen years on the paper.

MB: Um-hmm, yeah, he did. Yeah, definitely. But, you know, at the beginning, to have that kind of, oh, excitement—.

CS: He never asked for enough. I'm just thinking.

MB: What?

CS: This feeling is welling up in me: He never asked for enough from any of the people that were part of it.

MB: Yeah, it's true. Robert would not ask.

CS: He'd always, you know, "Whatever you can."

SK: So, because he was willing to take it on himself?

CS: Yes, yes.

SK: And so, you're suggesting or saying outright that this was—he took all this work upon himself not because he needed the credit or was sort of obsessed with it but because he didn't want to push himself onto others too much?

MB: He didn't. Robert was a very—he never went anywhere in Chapel Hill. You know, he was not a—we had our big social circle. A lot of people came here every week.

CS: Huge, huge, yeah.

MB: But we never went out into academia, you know, into whatever was going on in the social world.

SK: Um-hmm.

MB: Actually, we did for a while with the Cat's Cradle, because our dear friend Marcia started the Cat's Cradle. So, we were up in town doing Cat's Cradle, and that's how we met lots of people, too, kept in touch with lots of people.

SK: This is Marcia—?

MB: Wilson.

SK: Okay.

MB: Yeah, she came down and opened the Cat's Cradle. And she and Robert were very, very close, and then she got killed in an automobile accident.

CS: I didn't know that story.

MB: So, there was a big crowd of people around the original Cat's Cradle that we'd always see, going into town.

CS: You know, at Bob's memorial—I'm trying to think about Bob's personality and how it influenced what we've been—this history. At Bob's memorial service, one of his good friends who had been his student originally, but lived in the house on Franklin Street and became his longtime friend and now Margaret's longtime friend, a man named Frank Blackford. He's a sociologist. But at Bob's memorial, Frank, I think, really put his finger right on something. He said, "Bob cared." You know, we had been talking about



different events and movements and things that Bob had been part of, and Frank said, “But Bob cared.” You know, he was in it for its principle or its meaning for him and for other people, the issue itself, and that just really distinguished him. And I think it carried with it a capacity to be easily injured, but not to put that on, you know, the injuring party. You know, there was a kind of willingness to let them be who they are and not press the point. Would you agree with that?

MB: Yeah.

CS: Am I characterizing accurately?

MB: Yeah. He had a lot of people that, you know, really followed him. But after Leon left, it was never the same for him. It was like that era had gone by. Because everybody left: John, Mike Smith, Blackford, you know, all the people that he had worked on all these publications with were gone. And so, the *Anvil*, after the first five years, was just struggle.

SK: Wow.

CS: Yeah, it was not something you can just walk away from, either. I mean, it started a lot.

MB: Yeah.

CS: So, a lot of personalities.

MB: [Laughs] Yeah.

CS: And character drives history, right? [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Well said! So, you were just saying that, you know, Bob cared. Were there—I mean, in any of these issues you can see any variety of public matters that are being written about and discussed, but were there particular issues that were

important to him or to you, working on the *Anvil*, that you really felt were issues [1:10:00] that you wanted to—the mind goes immediately to the cliché “hammer on”—you know, things that he was really passionate about, or that you or others on the staff were passionate about, that you felt the *Anvil* really sort of did a good job on, or at least a prolific job of addressing?

MB: You know, I can’t even remember what we put in the *Anvil*, frankly.

SK: [Laughs]

CS: Well, look at the one that’s not the farm issue. I was struck by the—he didn’t drop things, either, after they had stopped being national issues. This says, “Tension in the Hillsborough Schools”, school tension in Hillsborough, has to do with race.

MB: Anything like that.

CS: You know, he knew race was ongoing. Race is eternal, you know.

SK: So, this goes back perhaps to his education at Columbia and his interest in southern history.

CS: Yep.

MB: Southern history! He thought—he had this strange idea that everything that happened in America was fomented in the South. [Laughs] Maybe that’s ( ) historian. So, yeah, so he was very interested in—.

CS: Yeah, it was an intellectual and emotional approach to issues, and the issues didn’t go away when the Movement moved on or when the acts got passed.

MB: Yeah.

SK: What was his relationship to the South?

CS: Well, I think she just nailed it. I don't why—you assume it started at Columbia.

MB: Yeah.

CS: With Richard Hofstadter and Marxist—sort of Marxist historians and their view of—but why the South? As the place where is race the issue, as opposed to economics, or whatever, how did Hofstadter—?

MB: That literature—.

CS: People put it to him that for—.

MB: The best literature in America was southern literature. [Laughs]

SK: Hmm.

CS: That's a good question, and we don't have a real answer for that.

MB: Yeah.

SK: Yeah.

CS: But he absolutely was passionate along the lines that Margaret was talking about.

MB: I think he wanted to come down and find out.

SK: Hmm.

CS: Yeah, that, true, but why? I didn't want to go to Queens and find out what Queens was like.

MB: Well, did you know he had this job?

CS: I managed to, you know, [laughs] not be interested. Huh?

MB: You knew he had this job at the University of Texas?

CS: Teaching?

MB: Yeah!

CS: With his masters?

MB: What?

CS: When did he do that? I'd forgotten all about it.

MB: It was—I can't remember which year, but he left. He was giving up on Chapel Hill.

CS: Um-hmm, that's right, okay.

MB: And he took this job.

SK: Would this have been after the *Anvil* in the [19]80s?

MB: No, no.

SK: Or this is before?

MB: No, no, this is [19]60s.

CS: No, no, way before.

MB: Just before the *Anvil*.

CS: Probably before the Press.

MB: And I think he got a telephone call or something from Leon.

CS: Yeah, got a job.

MB: And Leon said, "I'm in with you. I'm in. Let's do this paper." And Robert came back to Chapel Hill because of Leon.

SK: So, he had actually left? He was in Texas and then came back?

MB: Yeah, he was—.

CS: I'd forgotten that little bit.

MB: He was going to be an academic. [Laughs]

SK: Hmm. Perish the thought.

MB: Yeah, and teach. And he would have made a crackerjack teacher, because that's basically kind of what he was in a lot of ways.

SK: And you said he would visit classes at least at Carolina, right, or elsewhere?

CS: He did come, yeah, to—I got him to come, and some other people got him to come. We all taught, you know, composition, freshman composition.

SK: Um-hmm, sure.

CS: We were English lit graduate students. That's what we did, and he would come and talk to us.

MB: And the famous journalist from the *Chapel Hill News* who taught up there after he left the Chapel Hill paper—I can't think of his name, extremely well-known—and Robert would go up and—but here's a whole element that none of us have brought up, and that's liquor. Robert was an alcoholic.

CS: Well, I wanted to—.

MB: For big pieces of this.

CS: The obituary talks about after the *Anvil* closed, one of the things he did was to recover.

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: And Margaret talks about his going down to ( ).

MB: Yeah, which I don't mind talking about, because I think it's—.

CS: Let's do talk about that, because—.

MB: A really important piece to this.

CS: And no money, not enough money, alcoholism, friends and people who've helped, you know, participants, going away. I mean, he was really left holding a lot of bags.

SK: Hmm. So, alcoholism—.

CS: Margaret was the stalwart.

MB: [Laughs]

SK: And alcoholism has a lot of expressions and habits from one person to another? Can you talk a little bit about what Bob's drinking was like and how it sort of related to his work?

MB: [Sighs] Well, it differed at different times. But, you know, in the [19]50s, all, I think, the world of newspaper people and writers was very much wrapped up in alcohol.

CS: Was Bob—were his injuries painful?

MB: Oh, God, yeah! He was always in pain.

CS: And was drinking partly a reaction to pain?

MB: Well, yeah, plus it was a great excuse. I was just—this is something—I remember Robert typing these things up and putting them in the paper, and you'll get the feel of—.

SK: So, this is—you're holding a—I'm now holding [laughs] a piece of paper with an *Anvil* letterhead, which is addressed to "Dear Friend". And it says, "I know that you are aware of the *Anvil* but you aren't a subscriber. I wish you would become one." And the following is a note briefly explaining what the *Anvil* does and asking for support, and it's signed by R. Brown, Editor. [1:15:00]

MB: Yeah. Read what he says, though.

CS: He said, “You have our support; now we need yours.” [Laughs]

SK: He says, “For ten years, the *Anvil* has been a constant supporter and initiator of progressive politics in Chapel Hill and the state. When it was dangerous to write nonsense, hard-hitting stories and express a consistent progressive point of view, the *Anvil* did. Today the paper is no different. Like yourself, the *Anvil* believes in the politics of principle and is committed to people of good hope who struggle to bring it about. I think this recent issue of the paper makes clear what the *Anvil* is. It stands for the same things you do. You have our support. The *Anvil* needs yours. Sincerely, R. Brown, Editor.”

MB: [Laughs]

SK: And this is hand-signed, I imagine.

MB: Oh, yeah! [Laughs]

SK: Yeah. [Laughs] And we have stapled to the back of it a subscriber card.

MB: Yeah.

CS: I must have had—.

MB: What?

CS: These are issues I picked up in the office, and a lot of them were that agriculture issue. [Laughs]

MB: Oh, yeah, because we printed a lot of those. I remember we printed an extra five hundred or something.

CS: Here’s just one example. I mean, Bob is the reason—we went around—we were going door-to-door for Howard Lee, and we wouldn’t have been if Bob hadn’t been on our case to do it.

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: But here's some Howard Lee—after the election and he was successful.

MB: Yeah, and they wouldn't—they didn't have that in the *Chapel Hill library*.

CS: I know.

MB: As a piece of—.

CS: ( )

MB: I know. It's weird how things are.

CS: "Racism Used in Durham Campaign".

SK: So, Margaret, did you want to talk about liquor and his drinking?

MB: Oh, yeah. Well, yeah. So, he had that history and he certainly when he was in the service and the Air Force was drinking. And I remember the first night I was here in the old house, and he bought a bottle of brandy. And he poured me a drink, and I wasn't much of a drinker. [Laughs] Robert was really fun when he drank. I mean, you know, he was—.

CS: Until he got mad. [Laughs]

MB: Until he—yeah, at some point—.

CS: Explosive!

MB: I know. He'd get pissed off about something, and usually it was Joel Bulkley, actually. [Laughs]

CS: [Laughs] It was just, you know—think about it, just like a child's rage, "*rrrh-rrrh*", just total.

MB: Yeah.



CS: If you were leaving before he wanted you to leave, he would follow you out to the car the whole time, hold the car door open and tell you why you shouldn't leave.

[Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] He had not finished.

CS: [Laughs] Right.

MB: Yeah, so there were times—I'm trying to think of how to even explain some of this. [Sighs] The first couple of years that I was here, it didn't matter. You know, he'd just kind of drink on the weekends or when we had free time. And then, I remember something happened, and he almost didn't print the paper or something—I don't know—but he stopped drinking. And then, he would only drink beer for a year or two.

But, you know, he had been badly injured in Korea. This plane crash was here in this country. It was the end of his four years in Korea, and he got accepted to the Air Force Academy. It had just opened, the Air Force Academy. And the plane crashed up in Oregon, and everyone was killed except him. And they thought he was dead. And he has this great story of his afterlife experience. [Speaking to CS] Did he ever go through that one with you?

CS: No. I don't think I know that.

MB: Oh, that was one of his favorites.

CS: I've heard what the VA doctors all said to him a couple of times, but, no.

MB: [Laughs] The VA doctors. So, he spent the next nine months in the VA hospital in a brace, because his neck got broken. That's why they thought he was dead. So—.

CS: Nine months?

MB: What?

CS: Nine? I didn't know it was that—.

MB: Yeah. And anyway, he survived and walked and so on. But he would always use alcohol, like everybody does, you know, if they're in pain.

CS: And the other—.

MB: He didn't use drugs. He used alcohol when he was in pain.

CS: Yeah, no drugs.

MB: What?

CS: Yeah, no drugs.

MB: Yeah. No, he was never a druggie at all.

CS: Unlike John Heider. [Laughs] And there was lots of it around, but Bob was not a drug user.

MB: Yeah. That wasn't his trip at all. The VA would try to give him drugs, and he wouldn't do them.

CS: That's the other thing I thought either you told me or he told me. It sounds more like you might have told me this, that when he was printing the paper and he was over there, you know, after—maybe it was after—it had not been the kind of social gathering to get the paper out. Maybe it was just Bob trying to get the press (run)—that's when a lot of the drinking happened, too, when he was over there by himself long hours.

MB: Yeah. So, he had gotten a couple of drunk driving tickets in the late [19]80s, I mean the late [19]70s. And I think to a point where he would go over to the *Anvil* and just stay, with a couple of cases of beer, for two or three days at a time. [1:20:00]

Because he was afraid if he left there, he'd never get back or something, [laughs] some crazy drunk thing. So, he'd just go over and stay.

And then, he had a very serious traffic accident one snowy night coming back from Durham, one of those blizzards that we get here. It was like three o'clock in the morning, and he ran into a—skidded and ran into a telephone pole and broke his wrist and really got banged up. But there were no cops around, and so he walked in the snowstorm back to Chapel Hill, all the way down 15-501. I remember I was sitting at the kitchen table and I saw him come up. He was holding his arm and [laughs] he walked in the house and he was just shaking. It was freezing cold, you know. And he said, "I've got to do something." I said, "I know. Do you want to go over to the VA?" And he said, "Yeah."

So, I drove him, I think it was the next day—I drove him to the VA, and he went up to their detox unit for six weeks. And he never drank again after that.

SK: When was that?

MB: When?

SK: Yeah. When was that?

MB: Oh, gosh. It was just as the *Anvil* was closing down.

SK: Um-hmm.

MB: Yeah. You know, like I said, he was so willing to give it away, you know, to Schewel, "Take it," because he couldn't do it anymore. You know, physically, all of those injuries were coming back on him, and he just couldn't do it. Yeah.

SK: When you would think back on the *Anvil* or you would talk with him about the *Anvil* after he stopped publication, did he reflect on what it meant to him, on what he

felt it accomplished, on—you know, I don't want to use—the word “legacy” is kind of a big word, but, you know, on what it might have meant to have done this thing that he did and that so many other people did?

MB: I don't think he thought that he accomplished much of anything. *I* always thought he did. *You* always thought he did. I thought it was an *amazing* creation.

CS: Yeah, I—that's one reason I'm so pleased about your project.

MB: Yeah.

CS: I mean, there needs to be much more recognition for what it was achieved there. I mean, I know you're doing an academic project and you have other criteria that are probably mostly on your mind, but if you get this study done, then there's some accumulation and interpretation, and it's really important.

SK: And that's one thing I'm curious about, generally, speaking to people who are activists, journalists, activist-journalists, and their co-conspirators and collaborators. You know, one thing I'm really curious about is how they, how you sort of measure impact of this kind of thing. Because a lot of activism after the really big, kind of tumultuous 1960s is about personal transformation, it's about small scale community stuff, which when I say small scale, I don't mean to diminish its importance, but it's quite simply happening on a much more local level and affecting fewer people, if you're counting numbers. And so, I am curious how people like Bob and how people like you sort of measure and think about the impact of this what was clearly for Bob a consuming time, a time that he just poured his energy into. And after you've done that work, how do you look back on it and say, “Well, here's the thing that I did?”

CS: Well, yeah, that's getting to be a harder and harder question to answer, and the older I get—.

MB: I know. Me, too.

CS: And driving out here today—no, actually on the way to Raleigh this morning, I was just thinking about this era and the one that immediately preceded it. I mentioned Bob's write-in campaign to elect Frank Porter Graham governor.

MB: Yeah. You have no idea all the stuff he did before the newspaper. [Laughs]

SK: Yeah, right! [Laughs]

MB: Frank Porter Graham, oh, my God!

CS: And Terry Sanford. And Leon reminded me of how much Terry Sanford and John Ehle got started. It is now not only wiped away but actively attacked by the current political establishment in North Carolina, and nationally the same. How do you measure impact? Is the half-life of impact maybe ten years?

SK: Yeah, it's a good question.

CS: It certainly is not a generation. And yet, at the same time, North Carolina is a different place than it would have been and than it was, even now.

MB: Wow, it sure is.

CS: And so, it's pretty ambiguous what the direct impact—it's like teaching. I don't know if you're planning to go into teaching, but we used to have to deal with these—you know, especially teaching writing, especially teaching freshman writing, you were always having these, you know, outcomes to show. And students did change as writers. [1:25:00] Did it have anything to do with what they did in the classroom? Nyeh? It was one of maybe ten influences. But they also aged a whole year; from sixteen to

eighteen, that makes a big difference. [Laughs] They had other influences. So, how do you measure, you know, what causes something to happen?

SK: Yeah. That's a ( ).

CS: And then the separate question of how long does that thing last, or does it? But I still, I mean, even though I read the newspaper and listen and every day hear what's happening currently in the North Carolina legislature, I still know that it's a different place than it was headed toward being prior to all this.

SK: Um-hmm.

MB: Yeah, I don't think Robert personally felt that he had accomplished anything.

CS: And then, back to the personal—.

MB: Someone like Leon Rooke, though, could. He's been acknowledged by everybody.

CS: Yeah.

MB: I mean, that's all they've done is pat Leon on the back and give him awards [laughs] for the last ( ) years.

SK: And that's for his poetry, as opposed to his—?

CS: [For] his novels.

SK: His novels.

MB: His novels, yeah.

CS: He's a novelist.

MB: Leon lives in a totally different world than Robert. He lives in a world of success and, you know, all this bullshit that goes on in the world of—I don't know what that world is, really. But Robert *never* lived in that world.

SK: Did he feel that he wasn't successful, or was he just simply not the kind of person to sort of rest on his laurels?

MB: [Laughs] Rest on his laurels. No. Robert was a very unhappy person in many, many ways. And yet, he could be the happiest person in the world, too, and just spread joy everywhere. But, no. He was—.

SK: After the *Anvil*, did he—I mean, I know that he—from the obituary, I know that he was politically active in at least—I don't know if they were formal ways or informal ways.

CS: Well, formal and informal. As I mentioned, you know, he encouraged Kevin to run for mayor.

SK: Kevin Foy.

MB: Yeah.

CS: And he ran one or two of Margaret's campaigns.

SK: Um-hmm, for Orange County Commissioner.

MB: Yeah.

CS: Margaret was the—one of the things—where did I read this? Maybe it was in Leon's—?

MB: [Laughs] I think you wrote it.

CS: Was it Joel? No. Which of the transcripts? Joel might have mentioned it. There had never been a woman county commissioner. And I thought, "Ah! [Laughs] I

know where that came from. Bob got the idea. Aha!” [Laughs] But anyway, Bob ran Margaret’s campaign, formally in that sense, but also informally.

SK: Um-hmm. And so, Margaret—

CS: Those events on Friday night—the Friday nights where you talked about local politics with a whole range of people. And who knows what they went off and did?

SK: Right. Well, it makes me think of—I mean, that alone is a pretty—that’s a political act and that’s a community-building act. It makes me think of the sort of consciousness-raising groups that people who participated in the Woman’s Movement talk about, that just getting together and talking to each other meant that they gained a better understanding of their own life and how they fit in and they knew that other people thought the same way about the world as they did. And then, they went back home and started making changes that sort of trickled out and down and around.

CS: Bob didn’t demand of anybody that they acknowledge what they were doing. It was about doing it, and he didn’t ask for acknowledgement. As Margaret says, it’s a very different world, the publication world of the literary artist—

MB: Yeah.

CS: Where there’s a whole network of awards and ready, you know, opportunities to publish. And Bob was doing that for other writers here and, you know.

MB: Robert thought life should be suffering, actually.

SK: Hmm.

CS: I think we’re on to something kind of interesting here.

MB: You should suffer to your damndest to do what you needed to do.

SK: Hmm.



CS: He did come out of a Jesuit training.

MB: Yes, that's true. [Laughs]

SK: Um-hmm.

CS: Jesuit education. [Laughs]

MB: Yeah.

SK: Did he have a Queens accent? A Bronx accent? What borough was he from?

CS: Queens. Grew up in Queens.

MB: Yeah.

SK: Queens? Did he have an accent?

MB: Oh, yeah!

CS: Hard to say. He had a gravelly voice, but that was from the accident. It hurt his throat a lot, and his voice was very distinctive.

MB: If you want to see him, you've got that video.

CS: Yes!

MB: It was a video that was taken—.

CS: Is that the only—?

MB: What?

CS: Is that your only copy?

MB: What?

CS: Have I got your only copy?

MB: I think you do.

CS: Oyee, I hope it's down here and not in Pennsylvania.

MB: It was a video taken when it was the thirtieth anniversary of—what was the name of the place?

CS: Harry's.

MB: Harry's! I don't know—do you know anything about Harry's?

CS: The bar that's right next—I mean the restaurant that's right at the corner where the post office is.

MB: Next to the library, and it was Harry's.

CS: Library? Post office.

MB: Library—*post office*. Sorry.

SK: Right on Franklin and Henderson?

MB: Franklin Street, yeah.

CS: Yeah. What's it called, the Waffle Shoppe, now, or something?

SK: There is a Waffle Shoppe there.

MB: No, it's that other—it's a sports bar. It's been there a long time.

SK: There's Linda's. Linda's has been there a long time.

MB: It's on the other side.

SK: The other side? The Four Corners!

MB: Four Corners! That's it.

SK: Okay.

CS: It was Harry's for a long time.

MB: Well, Harry's was this place, and it was going when I came, and it was where—it was never segregated and it was where everybody hung out, and you could go there. And so, all of the people [1:30:00] that were involved who were either outsiders or

civil rights people or whatever, all of the [19]50s and [19]60s—Harry and his wife were refugees from Europe and came to Chapel Hill and opened that, along with the Danzigers, who I don't even—probably everything was closed, the Danzigers' places were closed when you grew up. But they had four restaurants: the Villa Teo—.

CS: The Rathskeller.

MB: The Rathskeller—.

CS: The steak house, Danziger's steak house.

MB: The steak house out on Airport Road. What was the name of it? The Ranch House.

CS: Ranch House. No, different, different. The Danziger's steak house was called Danziger's. It was not the Ranch House. [Note: Ranch House is correct]

MB: Yeah. They had four or five. [Note: Also the Zoom-Zoom] So, there was this community of people who, you know—.

CS: [Sneezes] Excuse me.

SK: Bless you.

MB: So, there was a Harry's reunion. It was 1985? Yeah.

CS: [Sneezes]

MB: And lots of people came here. A lot of people went to Byron's, because Byron was sort of the center place where people could meet and find out what was going on. But, God, there must have been a hundred people here.

CS: Yeah.

MB: A lot of photographs of that. A lot of people wrote for the paper. Leon didn't come, though.

CS: Nor did he come to the memorial service.

MB: What was I going to say about that?

CS: You were talking about the videotape where it's possible to hear Bob. Did Bob have an accent?

MB: Oh, yeah! So, there was a woman—.

CS: No, not really. He didn't have a regional accent. But his voice, as I say, was distinctive.

MB: Yeah. There was a woman from the Department of T—of Television, Radio—what did they call it back then?

SK: Oh, yeah, sure.

CS: Radio, Television, Motion Pictures, RTVMP.

MB: Yeah, RTVMP. And she just retired two years ago. And she called me and she said, you know, "I'm going through my files and I found this—," you know, she was a videographer, although that name was not known at the time, and she came out and interviewed Robert about civil rights—.

CS: Okay, I will—.

MB: And there's a famous picture of him holding up that—.

CS: But I'm going to bet you it's at Pennsylvania.

MB: What?

CS: I'm betting it's at Pennsylvania, but if your project is not ending tomorrow, I'll be able to get it. [Laughs]

SK: It's not.

MB: Yeah, and you can hear him.

SK: Yeah, that'd be—.

MB: And he's talking to Norwood Pratt, who—.

SK: Yeah.

MB: Do you know Norwood Pratt?

SK: How do I know that name? I don't—.

MB: Norwood is—

CS: He's a familiar Chapel Hillian. Excuse me, I'll be right back.

MB: Norwood is a—.

CS: Are you still okay on that?

SK: Um-hmm, okay.

MB: Norwood worked on the paper with him, or worked on the magazine with him. And Norwood has written several books on tea and wines, and he's really quite well-known. And so, he actually is interviewing Robert, and this woman—it's right out here in the yard. And they talk about what it's like to do a publication. [Laughs] And what they're talking about—you know, you'd have to see it.

SK: Sure. I'd be curious. It sounds like it would be interesting, yeah.

MB: Yeah. There's another kind of interesting thing, and I swear to God, every two or three years I see it. It comes on UNC-TV, and it's about Sam Ervin. And they filmed it—this film crew did a whole thing on Sam Ervin. And Robert had written a bunch of stuff on Sam Ervin and this duplicity of Sam Ervin being a segregationist but also being this amazing southerner. And so, they came here and they photographed—they did like a ten-minute thing, and when I see it on TV, I can hear Robert's voice and look over, [laughs] and there's this interview of him talking about Sam Ervin.

SK: Um-hmm.

MB: Because he was very involved with all those people, you know, way before—when he was a student.

SK: At Carolina?

MB: Yeah, yeah, when he was doing his master's here, and Frank Porter Graham—you know, he started this statewide write-in thing for Frank Porter Graham.

SK: Can you talk a little bit about that?

MB: Well, yeah, I'm trying to think of where I would even start to get into it. I mean, everybody loved Frank Porter Graham, but Robert, you know, knew him and—how did that go? I'll have to rethink his stories. I don't remember it really well.

SK: Sure, sure.

MB: But, you know, Robert would—he was kind of a one-man—he would hear about a strike. He was very much into the strikes that were taking place around North Carolina at the mills. You know, and he'd go, and see what was going on, and then come back, and write about them and let people know. [Laughs] My friend Livy Ludington, who lives down the road, they read about some strike that Robert told them about, and they drove all the way down to Greensboro—no, Greenville.

CS: Greenville.

MB: Did Olivia tell you about that?

CS: Go ahead.

MB: And they almost got arrested down there.

CS: They did get arrested.

MB: They did?! [Laughs] [1:35:00]

CS: I heard—this is way off target but—[laughs] never mind, I'll tell you that story later.

MB: Yeah, I know.

CS: I found out how they got out of jail.

MB: Oh, how they got out of jail, yeah.

CS: Very recently I taught at East Carolina University and I began hearing about that event from the other side.

MB: I know. So, he always had a lot of information. You know, he wandered around on his motorcycle, his pickup truck, or whatever, and then came back and told people about it, [laughs] drummed up business. I think his—I've heard people talk about this, when he went down on the corner of Franklin and—right there in the middle, and sat down in the middle of it.

CS: Yeah, there's a good picture of that.

MB: Is there?

CS: Somewhere in some materials when—before Bill Friday died, there was a reminiscence of the [19]60s—.

MB: Say that again?

CS: Before Bill Friday died, UNC, the North Carolina Collection had a remembrances of the [19]60s, and especially things that Friday had been involved in, the Speaker Ban and—but anyway, there were pictures from Chapel Hill during the sit-ins, civil rights part, and a picture of Bob sitting in the middle of the street.

MB: [Laughs] Sitting in the middle of the street, yeah. He was never a great fan of Bill Friday.

SK: Is that right?

MB: No. In fact, he always—he said, yeah, he went up to see Friday, because it was *way* after seg—it must have been [19]68 or [19]69, and he saw that they still, right in front of the Administration Office, had a “colored” thing on the water fountain. So, he walked into Friday’s office [laughs] and said, “Ah, excuse me. You know you still have this ‘colored’ sign down on your faucet.” And Friday said something like, “Oh, we do?! Oh!” [Laughs] Which was, I think, kind of his personality to ignore a lot of stuff, slide right over it. I mean, Robert never saw him as engaged in civil rights at all.

CS: Well, he—Speaker Ban, probably. He’d probably grant that.

MB: Yeah. He never saw him as any force. He didn’t have any regard for him.

CS: Bob—[laughs]. Well, now, I’m still troubled by that question of impact and what did Bob think. But holding off on that for a moment, what Bob would think he achieved, and going back to—for a man who had such definite opinions, we’ve traced two sides of him. He was very definite, affirmative, assertive, and also the reticent—not diffident, that wouldn’t be the right word—but withholding, not imposing.

But [laughs] glancing over the things that people said at the memorial—I made some notes on it. And I, busybody that I was, was calling people to let them know that Bob had died, and I called John Ehle, [laughs] who I thought should know. And John Ehle called back and said he was—actually appreciated the information. And I ended up saying at the memorial what John Ehle then went on to say.

I said, “You know, Bob said that he didn’t like your *Free Men*, I guess, very much.” “No, it was a more recent book that Bob had said there was one—it was all wrong, but there was one good sentence in it.” And so, I asked, [laughs] I said, “Well, did



you ask which one?" He said, "No, because I knew Bob and I would disagree on which one was the good sentence!" [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs]

CS: So, this is how people—for somebody that strong-minded and that assertive, why is it neither of us can come up with his own assessment of what it is that the *Anvil* and everything achieved?

MB: Yeah.

CS: It goes to that other Bob, the thoughtful one who doesn't impose.

MB: Yeah, John Ehle. John Ehle was always a thorn in his side, because that's basically what we all said after the *Anvil* was finished: "*You* need to write the history of Chapel Hill and the Civil Rights Movement." [Laughs] And Kevin would say, "Robert! (When are you going to) do it? Do it!"

CS: Yeah, then there was—now we're talking about that.

MB: I know.

CS: That's another withholding in Bob, is that—.

MB: Yeah.

CS: He would write "On the Land" and he would write editorials, but he wouldn't really sit down and do it.

MB: Yeah.

CS: It was a more "I'd rather go work on, repair something, or fix something."

MB: Yeah.

CS: I know there was a lot of that in the community we live in in Penns Valley—.

MB: Well, I finally found a couple of his—.

CS: Really talented people who would rather go fix the tractor than work on the thing they were writing or painting.

MB: Yeah. I found some of his—two of his short stories.

CS: There is a folder of things, his submissions and the letters he got back from editors.

MB: Yeah. He always saw himself as a writer.

CS: Yes.

MB: And then, I think, after the *Anvil*, he couldn't [1:40:00] get to that place again.

CS: Yeah, I asked him one time, I said, "Bob," you know—.

MB: He wrote some poetry, also.

CS: "Why didn't you write?" And he said, "I didn't have the discipline ( )."

MB: Yeah.

CS: For somebody as disciplined as he was, that was his (view). Here's a folder on Margaret and Robert.

MB: What?

CS: Here's a folder on Margaret and Robert.

MB: Oh?

CS: [Laughs] (You might want to look at that).

SK: So, Margaret, when you were on the Orange County Commission, what were some of the issues that were of particular importance to you?

MB: Well, see, I came always from, well, from the environment. And what I saw when I moved here immediately was that this place was just going to become another Los

Angeles, which would be a nightmare, unless you started recognizing the environmental issues and plan, do planning and, you know, define what was valuable in the community. And so, I always start with water. Nobody can survive—well, that’s what—you know, in the next twenty years we could see the collapse of Los Angeles and all the Southwest because there’s no water.

SK: Um-hmm.

MB: So, I got into that and understanding how the headwaters are all in Orange County for all the big river systems, the Neuse and—and therefore, Orange County had to really start planning its growth. And it was basically a public health issue for me. You know, you cannot have a sustaining, growing environment unless you define what’s important environmentally and protect it, and so on.

So, the whole time as a commissioner, we were always trying to think up ways of protecting Orange County and the headwaters, and a lot of it was purchasing lands. So, the bond issues that I was really supporting was to buy up property for—the development rights of these properties in Orange County that, you know, where the—the tree corridors and the wildlife corridors and all of this just fundamental infrastructure that you need to protect, and then figure out where you can have growth after that. So, that was something I was really into.

SK: I saw the anti-fracking sign next to your ( ).

MB: [Laughs] ( )

SK: It was easy to imagine the *Anvil* having a piece or two on that.

MB: Yeah, right. And then, selling the land Down East. Yeah, I mean, I’m still interested in it, of course, but, you know, that was—I was involved for about twenty

years before I became a commissioner in all of this. That's why I mentioned Smith Level hasn't changed, because we started a little group called the Smith Level Alliance and started going—because DOT wanted to four-lane it and do all this stuff. It was on their master plan. There was a huge ring road around Chapel Hill that was—and we just started going to public meetings and we stopped it all.

And the idea of watersheds was just becoming an issue statewide, and so I got very involved in that. And we determined the watersheds in Orange County, and that's how we actually started protecting them was by watershed and drinking water supplies and that sort of thing. So, yeah, that was my passion. And social issues, but there's—and towards the end, I got very involved in mental health issues, which has been totally destroyed in the state.

So, all the things—you know, John Ehle and his vision, you know, was fabulous. I mean, those people did an amazing amount of stuff. And then, you know, to look back thirty years and what's happening now, well, [sighs] I don't know, I feel sort of beat up by it. I was just talking to Catherine, because I had my seventieth birthday three days ago. [Laughs]

SK: Happy birthday!

MB: God! What have *I* spent my life doing?

CS: Yeah, that's an interesting question, isn't it?

MB: [Laughs] Yeah.

CS: Because you've lived so many lives. Well, let's see which one.

MB: Yeah, I know. So, I'm glad that you can come out Smith Level Road, and it looks just the same.

SK: It does, it does.

MB: We did protect it.

SK: Yeah, it looks just like it did when I was driving probably too fast down it in high school.

MB: Yeah. Yeah, and I had my dog at the vet about two months ago and I was talking to the lady at Vine's, right on Franklin Street, and I've known her for forty years, just because she's worked at Vine's. She lives out in Chatham County, and she said, "You know, Margaret, every time I drive home, ugh, I drive through Franklin Street, and I get on Smith Level and I feel like, ah, it's so wonderful, Smith Level is!" And I go, "Okay, maybe I did do something." [Laughs] "That's worth it!" Yeah, so a lot of hundreds and hundreds of meetings later.

SK: Right, right. [1:45:00]

MB: I don't do meetings anymore. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs]

CS: That's really true. I tried to get her to go with me to one meeting of the North Carolina Mining and Energy Commission.

MB: I know. Oh, God!

CS: I thought she would be a nice informed listener to sit and watch that with me. And she said, "I don't do meetings anymore." That's it! [Laughs]

MB: Yeah. I'm beat up. [Laughs]

SK: Well, that feels like kind of a good note to end on. But is there anything else that you'd like to share to sort of get on the record as part of this story, or something that

I should have asked you that I didn't? I'm sure there are lots of somethings, but maybe the most prominent.

MB: Yeah.

CS: How do you want to handle that if thoughts come later?

SK: Well, there's a few ways, and if you want—if we want to stop the interview, I can turn the tape off.

CS: This is going to be a long one to transcribe.

SK: [Laughs] Yeah, that's why they pay me the big bucks.

CS: You do the transcribing?

[Recording ends at 1:45:52]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council