

Dennis P. Bidwell '71  
Dartmouth College Oral History program  
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project  
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Transcribed by Patrick Howard '23

- HOWARD: This is Patrick [T.] Howard ['23]. Today is May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, and I am conducting an oral history interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam project. I'm conducting this interview with Mr. Dennis [P.] Bidwell ['71]. The interview is taking place in-person in Carson Hall on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. So, Mr. Bidwell — Dennis — thank you very much for speaking with me today.
- BIDWELL: Happy to be here.
- HOWARD: So, let's begin at the very, very beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born?
- BIDWELL: Oh, you want to go in the Wayback Machine!
- HOWARD: Oh yeah!
- BIDWELL: Denver Colorado, 1949. That's where I grew up.
- HOWARD: Can you tell me a little bit about your family? Who did you live with?
- BIDWELL: My parents and one sister three years younger. My dad [Elbert E. Bidwell, Jr.] was a CPA [certified public accountant]. He grew up with nothing during the Depression; first in his family to go through college. Met, at Denver University, Beverly [J.] Adams, who became my mother. So, they married. He pursued a career in public accounting. My mom was involved in bookkeeping and administrative work and then became, as many women did back then primarily, the head of the household, though she was very politically involved in education issues. She was head of the PTA [parent-teacher association] at all the schools that I went along. In any event, I grew up in a comfortably middle-class family right in the heart of Denver, and went through public schools, all the way. Excellent public schools in Denver. I was very, very pleased with that part of my experience there.
- HOWARD: Great! What was your experience like in school? Were you more of an athlete? Student?

BIDWELL:

I was a pretty strong student all the way through. But particularly, when I got to high school, Denver East High School was a very good high school back then. It still is. What then was the Atlantic Monthly did some crazy survey back then, and Denver East was one of the 10 high schools in the country they highlighted. It was strong academically; it was quite racially diverse. Comfortably integrated in times where many schools were not—or at least that was my white guy's perception of things. But I was involved in a lot of other stuff, too. I was very much all about math, chemistry, physics. And I even, in terms of the history of computer programming, which I know is something you know quite a bit about probably, I even took a course in ALGOL [Algorithmic Language] programming at Denver University in probably 1965 or 1966. You know, it was just all about punch cards and very, very simple programming, but it was incredibly cutting edge at the time. But in any event, I did get involved athletically once I was in high school. I was on the tennis team, was on the varsity tennis team. Was a reasonably good runner, though I didn't run track.

But I was very much involved in music too. I was in the chorus, the high school chorus. I was in a madrigal group. There were about 15 of us with an excellent instructor. And we were pretty good for a high school group back then. It would have been called an a cappella group. But back then we sang madrigals and a little bit of everything else. So, it was a very full and I think relatively well-rounded experience in my high school days, but I was very focused on the sciences and on math and figured when it came time to try to think about college, I was focused on Engineering and Chemical Engineering, and the hard sciences, and math, and emerging Computer Sciences. That was my focus then. It changed dramatically, but that was the path I was on.

HOWARD:

What do you think drew you to those harder sciences early on? Do you remember what you felt connected with in them?

BIDWELL:

Hm. Well, that's interesting. I was always drawn to math, and was very strong in math, so the quantitative components of chemistry and physics certainly attracted me. Oh, but I think just something about the orderliness, and the ability to explain things through chemistry and physics, I guess that's what attracted me. I should say, though, that in my senior year, I had never taken beyond the necessary prerequisites in history, for example. But, I took a class my senior year from a really, really gifted teacher who had a huge impact on me on American history. It wasn't an AP class, per

se, but it was sort of an advanced American History class. And it, it just kind of blew me away. It just opened my eyes to a very different approach to history. And in fact, "oh, there were several different perspectives on what was going on there. And, neither one of them is technically right. There were just different views of the Westward Expansion." So that planted a seed of interest in history, though, not something I expected at the time to be pursuing.

HOWARD: So you took this class your senior year? Do you remember what year that was?

BIDWELL: I graduated 1967. So, this history class would have been '66 or '67.

HOWARD: Interesting. This teacher that had a strong impact on your life, did you forge a personal friendship with this teacher? Was it more distant?

BIDWELL: I think I was in touch with him for a couple of years after, but no, it wasn't an ongoing relationship. I had more of an ongoing relationship with a couple of my chemistry teachers. I was a lab assistant in the chem lab for a couple of years. You know, pick up a few bucks, and you get to play around in the chemistry lab. I maintain some of those relationships more than my history teacher. But, in terms of a lasting impact, in retrospect, he planted more of an intellectual and curiosity seed than anybody else.

HOWARD: Combined with that class, and the fact that your mother was very politically active, did you begin to feel any sort of connection with politics and social issues by that point?

BIDWELL: Social issues? Yes, as in racial issues in Denver, the desegregation of the schools. Denver was involved in a big court battle around what was described as "forced busing." That was that was the language given to the efforts to desegregate the Denver schools. So I was involved... I'd say I was more involved in civil rights and educational issues. The Vietnam War that was churning along in '65, '66, '67 was barely on my radar screen. In many ways, compared to other friends of mine who became very politically active in their college years, I was oblivious to so much stuff. I wasn't particularly tuned into the counterculture, the so-called "counterculture," and I wasn't really tuned in too much to folk music, which was so much tied into the world of protest and an alternative cultural view of the country and in opposition to the war, of course. In my high school years, I wasn't

much tuned into that. I was aware and aware of others who were a little more involved.

But I was really busy in high school. I was taking AP classes and had all these extracurricular activities, and was doing athletics, and was a serious pianist, though, that dropped off about the time I hit high school. It just didn't all fit. But there was very little of my time devoted to political activity beyond local, as I said, desegregation of schools, I guess that was kind of my thing.

HOWARD: Well, it sounds like that was a big component of the culture in Denver at the time. Do you feel like there was a lot of local focus on that, as opposed to more focus on Vietnam or national political movements?

BIDWELL: Yes, although there were certainly others that were... I had peers who were very much more attuned to national politics and US foreign policy. Much, much more so than I. My parents were classic old school Republicans, and that was the environment in which I grew up. They were quite socially progressive, but in terms of voting patterns, they were Dwight Eisenhower people, and then they were Richard Nixon people. My dad in particular, totally turned around in his later years. That was the political environment in which I grew up and which I didn't really challenge that much.

HOWARD: What were your friends like? Who were your close friends growing up?

BIDWELL: My close friends in high school were, some of them, kind of nerdy guys like me. As a matter of fact, I was also president of the bridge club. Kind of by default. I had friends who were also very strong academically, including in the sciences. And I made some very good friends through the tennis team; that tended to be an academically strong crowd also. And, I had a group of guys that—I never played on the high school basketball team, I wasn't that caliber, but I was a reasonably good backyard pickup basketball player. And there was a group of guys that I played a lot of basketball with back in those days. So, it was a variety of those kinds of kinds of guys. And I had some very close women friends, in addition to those I was dating. So, it was a pretty well-rounded social life, I guess, all in all, with definite skewing to the nerdy end of the spectrum.

HOWARD: Who would you say you were closest with growing up?

BIDWELL: It varied. The friends I was closest with in elementary school, those kind of faded. And I had another circle to a certain extent in junior high, but there was one guy in particular. who I've stayed close friends with. I've stayed close friends with a couple of them, but one in particular who had a real impact on me in a variety of ways. He was off-the-charts brilliant, was also the head of student government, was also on the tennis team, we played a little [indistinct]. Our interests overlapped in a variety of ways. He wound up heading to Princeton, I wound up coming here. But he was on a political science and history track right from the start. He went on to get his PhD in history with an emphasis in post-World War Two French History from Berkeley and just retired from the faculty at NYU, but also taught a lot at Harvard. A very distinguished academic career.

But he was he was way more politically engaged from the get-go in his days at Princeton than I was here at my days at Dartmouth. He emerged from East High more attuned to bigger political currents than I was. But, he was a good friend then, and we've maintained a nice friendship through the years. And I've become, in my own amateur way, a student of French history and French culture. And I'm spending three weeks there this summer, as a matter of fact. But yeah, he kind of stands out as a continuing friendship where he kind of kind of challenged me to think bigger and more expansively.

HOWARD: When did you meet him?

BIDWELL: I would have met him seventh grade, I guess. Junior high. We had classes together in junior high and so we were in classes together for the next six years.

HOWARD: What was his name?

BIDWELL: Herrick Chapman, C-H-A-P-M-A-N.

HOWARD: Very interesting. Okay, let's start back at high school. What was your college process like? When did you start? What were your post-high school plans?

BIDWELL: I think I was, relatively early on, hearing suggestions from my parents and my grandparents that I could really go someplace. So, many of my friends

went to Colorado University, and other local schools, but especially CU in Boulder [CO]. That was the cool school. It was, you know, reasonably strong academically, but it was the party school, and the ski school and the beautiful women school. But I found myself... and then when I started these conversations with my guidance counselor, who was also my tennis coach, and also my driver ed instructor. [chuckles] You know, I wasn't necessarily thinking about a big highfalutin Eastern school, but some of my friends started to think in those terms. And my guidance counselor said, "Look, if you've got an opportunity to go to a fine Ivy League school, or a fine West Coast school, you should do it." And I guess that I guess that notion took hold.

And then, with my dad, we did the big tour. I guess it was probably fall of my senior year. We, we visited Princeton, we visited Brown, and we visited MIT, and we visited Dartmouth, and we did the tour. And that, actually seeing these places and trying them on for size, definitely got me convinced that "yeah, if I have a chance to go to one of these schools, I should do it." And I was particularly drawn to Princeton, but they had the poor taste to not accept me.

HOWARD: [laughter]

BIDWELL: Dartmouth admitted me. I had a couple of... well, the older brother of a classmate of mine, who was Dartmouth—he was probably Dartmouth '69, two years ahead of me. And when I was here, I visited him and I was pretty taken by the place. So decided to do it.

HOWARD: Interesting. So, your tour was your fall of your senior year, so it's fall, would it be, '66?

BIDWELL: [pause] Yes, I guess so, unless it would have been previous spring? No, I think it was fall, I think.

HOWARD: So do you remember when you had learned that you had gotten in?

BIDWELL: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I forget what the timetable was back then. When did admissions decisions go out back then... March? Maybe somewhere along in there.

HOWARD: That makes sense. What was that a celebration? How did that feel?

BIDWELL: I don't remember it being this huge celebration. In part, I was disappointed that I didn't get into Princeton, so I think it was kind of mixed. Also, a little bit apprehensive, because many of my friends were staying locally. And it was beginning to dawn on me that "huh. I'm headed to an all-male school, way, way isolated. Hm, how's this gonna work out?"

And, I had never traveled much with the exception of—and this is a footnote that may or may not be of interest—I lived for one year on Long Island and spent a lot of time in New York City [NY] for my sixth-grade year because my dad did a one-year stint in the New York office of the accounting firm that he was with. And that was an eye-opening year. It was the 1960 Presidential election year, the Kennedy election year, and it planted a seed of fascination with New York City and big cities generally. In any event, with the exception of that, I'd never lived outside of Denver, Colorado. It was beginning to dawn on me that "wow, just going to northern New Hampshire, away from all my friends and my family... this is gonna be quite a bold adventure." I think I was a little apprehensive and a little nervous about this.

HOWARD: How did your family feel about it?

BIDWELL: Oh, they were very proud. They were very proud. This is, I think, what they had probably been imagining for a long time. Although, in retrospect, it was the beginning of a geographic separation that never closed. I headed back East imagining that I would always that I would return to Colorado. I loved Denver. I love my mountains. They were a huge part of my growing up. And, I had a very strong connection, especially to my dad. So, I had always imagined returning. Turns out, I never did. So, in retrospect, it was a big move because I never headed back to the place I grew up in and that I was very attached to.

HOWARD: You mentioned something I wanted to ask you about. The mountains were a big part of your growing up. How did that play out? Were you a skier, a climber? Did you just like them?

BIDWELL: Interestingly, I grew up not as a skier, in part because many of my friends weren't skiers and my parents weren't skiers. My dad was a cripple — he had clubbed feet — so he was always limited in what he could do. My family didn't ski, my friends didn't ski, so I just didn't fall into that circle.

But I was a hiker, a camper, loved fishing, including ice fishing, and a manual auger going through three feet of ice in February to catch two fish that big [gestures a short length]. I grew up loving them. Through my dad I was very attached to Colorado railroad and mining history. There were a variety of historical, history seeds planted back in, back in those days. I was fascinated by the mountains and their beauty and just how they worked.

I remember the first time I really grasped what the Continental Divide was, what it meant. For a seven-year-old kid that meant you could stand on the Continental Divide and pee and half would go to the Atlantic and half would go to the Pacific. I thought that was such a cool concept! I grew up just fascinated by the mountains and their history and their beauty.

HOWARD: I know the mountains we have here are not quite as impressive, but I'm curious, when you were visiting here, did you feel any sort of excitement about the opportunities to do outdoorsy things here?

BIDWELL: Well, this is a story I tell often. Back then, as I'm sure is the case now, you're encouraged to do a freshman trip. I don't know what they're called now.

HOWARD: Freshman trips!

BIDWELL: Okay, there you go. And you could sign up for fly fishing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking, and if you wanted to do hiking, you had a choice between easy, more moderate, or challenging. Well, I grew up in Colorado. I grew up climbing 14,000-foot mountains. I think 'well, what can these wimpy little mountains here have to offer?'

So, of course, I signed up for the challenging and oh, man, was that a humbling experience. I got it handed to me. It was not good. It was rainy most of the three or four days, and we were doing three and four summits a day, 4000 footers and 5000 footers. Oh man, I got taught a lesson. I learned then and have continued to realize that hiking in these mountains is generally way more difficult than hiking in the Rockies. There, you've got altitude issues, but generally the trails are more gradual, they're drier. You hike in the Whites [White Mountains], and it's always wet and slippery and



rocky. I learned the hard way to have a great deal of respect for the mountains back here and have continued to love the White Mountains.

HOWARD: Right. You arrived here for your first-year trip — do you remember what year that was?

BIDWELL: Yea, would have been fall '67.

HOWARD: Did you keep in touch with anybody on your first-year trip? How was the group?

BIDWELL: It wasn't a particularly bonding experience with guys who became friends. I think it was partly because they knew what they were signing up for [laughter]. They were much more accustomed to this kind of hiking, and stronger at this kind of hiking, than I was. Maybe I was a little embarrassed to be the guy bringing up the rear. So no, that did not form lasting connections through my Dartmouth years.

HOWARD: After your trips, you arrive your freshman fall. How was that? What were you planning to do? What was the experience like to finally get to this place?

BIDWELL: Well, the day I arrived, it was as challenging as I had imagined it would be, because this was flying from Denver, through Chicago [IL], to Boston [MA], catching a... finding the subway down to Park Square, which is where back in those days you would catch a bus, and then—this was before Interstate 89 was completed, so to go from Boston to Hanover back in those days on a bus took forever. Then all of a sudden, you're just dumped out in front of Parkhurst or somewhere along there, and like, "here you are!" It was like, "wow.". And there was one other person from my East High class who was here, though we knew one another but we weren't close friends. He went on to be the incredibly impressive lead singer for what were then the Injunaires.

HOWARD: Really! Wait, what was his name?

BIDWELL: Tony Russell [Hubert Anthony Russel '71]. Tony Russell. He's back in Denver as a dentist, or he's probably retired. Oh, man, what a voice! He was a Black guy and man, could he do Smokey Robinson. And Marvin Gaye. You know, it was probably racial stereotyping that he wound up

singing those parts, but man, he was the real deal. Who knows — there's probably nothing recorded of him. Well, that's not true. I have a vinyl!

HOWARD: Oh, really?

BIDWELL: Oh, yeah! Of the Dartmouth... were they the Injunaires?

HOWARD: I think that was the term until the seventies, '72 or '73 or something.

BIDWELL: Although even then, they called themselves the 'Aires. I think that was the official term, but even then, it was kind of grating. But in any event, what caused that digression? You'll bring me back on track?

HOWARD: In a second, I just think our audio might have... [fixing secondary and tertiary audio recorders after failing]. There we go. Well, very good to know. It's always exciting to hear about Aires alums, so I'll look into that.

BIDWELL: Hubert Anthony Russell. Went as Tony.

HOWARD: So you didn't know him well at first, but you had heard of each other. Did you end up becoming closer at all?

BIDWELL: A little bit. A little bit. I was in the Glee Club only for the first year. [Prof.] Paul Zeller—

HOWARD: I was going to ask you about Paul.

BIDWELL: Yeah. Is he still kind of like a name around here?

HOWARD: Yes.

BIDWELL: Well, he was a legend then. But it just didn't take for me, and I was getting involved and other stuff, and I just didn't do it after one year. But I still got my tie! [laughter]

HOWARD: Oh, is it the striped one! [laughter]

BIDWELL: Still do!

HOWARD: Yeah, they're interesting! I've seen them in some pictures. So where was your freshman dorm — you told me it was French [Hall]? How was that? How was “the Tundra?”

BIDWELL: It was horrible.

HOWARD: [laughter].

BIDWELL: It was just horrible. I knew, from what was sent to me in advance, that this was my dorm assignment, but I don't think it dawned on me just how far away it was. Of course, back then it was really far away, because all of the build up around Tuck [School of Business] and Thayer [School of Engineering] and everything down there, of course none of that was there. There was just a few buildings at Thayer and the cemetery, and then this vast wasteland [laughter], which it certainly seemed like in the winter months. I had friends living in the Topliffs [Topliff Hall] and the Gold Coast, and I was thinking “man what's this all about?” Even by those standards, this was like Stalin-esque architecture, compared to these stately other dorms on campus. “What the fuck is this all about?” [laughter] But met a lot of guys who have stayed as friends. French Hall, back in those days, it was... wow. There was crazy, crazy, crazy stuff that went on there.

HOWARD: I was going ask you, what was the atmosphere like?

BIDWELL: Ugh... Maybe it was in part because there was a sense of isolation, and nobody will ever know what goes on. It was an especially heavily drinking crowd. There was also... I was up here last June for my delayed 50th reunion and we got a bunch of guys together talking about those days and telling stories, and I'd forgotten some of these crazy stories. There was this one guy who was a chem major who had access to real pure alcohol and would mix up drinks with that.

HOWARD: [laughter].

BIDWELL: There was this group that called themselves that the Debauched Hospodars. They were like Dartmouth's version of a motorcycle gang back in the day, and one of them would actually bring his motorcycle and park it in the common area. It was quite the scene.

I was so naïve — I had hardly drunk a few beers in high school and so I got drawn into it, but not too far into it. It was not a healthy scene.

HOWARD: [laughter].

BIDWELL: Let's just say... but, I remained enough apart from it to stay, more or less, focused on the real reason I was here.

What were, at the time, called the Wigwams — the Wigs, that's what they were called — I have no idea how they got that name, but there were three of them: Hinman, McLean, French. One of them has now disappeared in the expansion of the whole complex down there. I do think the isolation created a peculiar, and not always healthy, kind of camaraderie down there.

HOWARD: I was going to ask you about the camaraderie. A lot of those dorms now, as well as the Choates [Dorm Cluster]. I don't know if you're familiar with—

BIDWELL: Oh! Sophomore year, I spent two semesters in the Choates.

HOWARD: Oh! There you go.

BIDWELL: And I would say, I mean, “that's barely an upgrade! I mean, come on!” That's actually, more than anything, what led me to fraternity life, was not the whole Greek thing, but cheap housing where I can cook and save money on meals and housing. As well as something that looked a little bit more like a residence than French Hall or Little [Hall] or whatever, one of the Choates.

HOWARD: What was it like academically? How was it adjusting to college coursework?

BIDWELL: That too was humbling. I realized, “oh, wow, I'm not gonna coast through this stuff.” And English 1, “Milton's Paradise Lost,” nearly killed me [laughter]. Didn't have the best— it could have been made more interesting than it was. It was challenging, and I think the fact that I was exploring alcohol with some disreputable friends probably had an impact on my academics in those first couple of terms. So, I wasn't excelling by any means, because I found it challenging and I wasn't bearing down the way I could have, and should have.

HOWARD: You said that you were involved with fraternity life, and you told me you were in Phi Tau. When did that rush process start?

BIDWELL: Oh, I guess it was spring of sophomore year. Yeah, I guess that's when it was.

HOWARD: I remember you mentioned that you were in France for a little bit. Was that before then?

BIDWELL: Yes, and that was a... [pause] In retrospect, the two winter terms I spent off-campus probably had as much of an impact on me as anything. Fall of my sophomore year, I took French 1 because I didn't have a language and was a little bit interested in French. And there, I learned about this Foreign Language Program. This was in the days where John [A.] Rassias was, and was for many decades after that, God of Foreign Languages. I learned that there was this program. I had always assumed you had to be reasonably proficient in the language and then go study abroad. But no, this was designed to take someone who had very little of the language and go study it intensively for a semester, for a term. So, much to my parents' surprise, I told them, "I think this coming winter term, I want to go to Bourges, France." They said "what?" But I did.

It was a hugely significant time because it was the real deal immersion — living with a family that spoke some English, but it was all French around the house — and there were intensive French classes. It was a real immersion in the culture, and it was fascinating. And I would hitchhike up to Paris many weekends, or take the train, but often it was hitchhiking. As a matter of fact, at reunion this last year, a friend of mine who I hadn't seen in many years, but who was in Bourges with me, he still had his sign that said (for hitchhiking), "PARIS" on one side, and "BOURGES" on the other. He still had his hitchhiking sign from, 1968, '69. So, this was winter of '69.

And that is where I became... This was where France was in upheaval. Massive strikes and sit-ins. It started with students, but it expanded, and it was about the Vietnam War. So, I began to look at US foreign policy through the eyes of Europeans, and that was really when I started... it took me a while, but I got there, winter of '69. Being in France just really opened my eyes. Watching the protests, and watching the way the United

States was viewed, and looking back at the US through that lens was a big awakening for me.

So when I came back that spring, because up until that time — well, this is a this is another little — when I had a faculty advisor who was assigned to me right at the start when I got here, who listened to me talk about chemistry and engineering. And he laid out a program where in five years, I could have a degree in chemistry, a major, and a master's in chemical engineering, and that's what he was recommending. I said, "okay, that sounds good."

Well, I shouldn't have followed his recommendation, or he never should have given such recommendation. It's liberal arts college. You should be here to dabble. Well, I didn't do much dabbling because I was math and physics and computer science. That's all I was doing beyond what I had to take. But I came back from France abandoning all that. Threw it all out the window and started over with the dabbling that I should have been doing from the start.

HOWARD: What dabbling were you doing? What classes? What departments?

BIDWELL: Well, the most significant dabble was with GOVY 105, which is sort of "Introduction to Political Philosophy." Or no, it wasn't... it was in 105, Dartmouth Hall. But it was, I don't know — GOVY 5. That just, wow, that blew my mind. I was so fascinated by this stuff. I wondered 'Why haven't I been studying this before?' So I guess I took a psych class, a sociology class, and a government class. And that was it for math and physics. And I dabbled, I took some French classes. But I was really drawn to government, and so, though I was taking some interesting history classes, it was government that became clear that's what I wanted to do.

HOWARD: And that ended up being your major, right?

BIDWELL: That was my major.

HOWARD: When did you declare it? Do you remember when you fully committed to it?

BIDWELL: I don't know; probably somewhere early in my junior year. Probably somewhere along there. But there were a number of government

professors who just really had an impact on me, and I was really drawn to the political philosophy side but also urban politics. That was really the thing.

HOWARD: You also mentioned that class from Professor [John] Kemeny, I guess President Kemeny at the time, “Computers and Social Sciences.” When did you take that?

BIDWELL: Exactly. [pause] That was probably winter of my junior year. That was probably 1970. January 1970.

HOWARD: Okay. What was that like?

BIDWELL: Well, I was just smitten by John Kemeny. I was already greatly admiring of him as President and the way and the way he handled it. Do you know his background a little bit? I mean, he was research assistant to Einstein.

HOWARD: I did not know that. That is remarkable. [laughter]

BIDWELL: He’s got some cred. So he was this brilliant mathematician and physicist, but he was this Renaissance man. I think he was Hungarian, and always spoke with a charming accent that added to his magnetism. He was a very, very progressive President of the College. He oversaw the transition to coeducation and he also was the guy unfortunate enough to be President during the takeover of Parkhurst [Hall] — or no. He probably took over a year after that, but through the days of upheaval on campus, he was he was President and had to manage a faculty and student body in revolt. But he insisted, when the Trustees appointed him President, that he would continue to teach.

And this one class, I think it was called “Computers and the Social Sciences.” I said “God, that sounds pretty cool.” Well, he was such a gifted instructor. This was a big lecture hall. But he was so good as an instructor, just wonderful. Turns out even way back then, that was sweet spot, where quantitative sciences and social sciences come together. I mean, there wasn’t anything called... I don’t know, what’s the major now? Quant...

HOWARD: QSS. Quantitative Social Sciences.

BIDWELL: Yeah. Of course, that didn't exist. But it turns out, in many ways, that's what this was, in a very preliminary fashion. But it was great. And my project that I did was to write a program that would simulate a presidential election. And it was, actually, not bad, and I still have that paper with John Kemeny's notes saying it was "very nicely done" or whatever. That was a class that obviously really registered with me, both because of—it was with John Kemeny, as well as just the inherent interest in the subject matter.

HOWARD: It sounds like you're a fan of Kemeny's. I'm curious what you thought of his leadership amidst all of the turmoil, the suspension of classes for a week. I've read some of his speeches about that. How do you think that he managed it? Do you think he did a good job or a poor job?

BIDWELL: I think he did a very good job. [pause] It was a very difficult line to walk, because you had faculty members who were extremely outspoken against the war and you had some very conservative faculty members. So just dealing with... As a matter of fact, in the archives, I've gotten a lot of stuff written by faculty back in those days. He was managing a lot, and I have no idea what his relationship with the Trustees was in those days, but he seemed to have their confidence and I thought he did a great job in managing an incredibly complicated situation. He obviously he had his own sympathies to the anti-war protests. He recognized as well as anybody the just ridiculous nature of this foreign policy that had the United States jumping into this civil war, where the French had gotten burned, and we hadn't learned from that mistake. He got that, but he had to balance it all.

HOWARD: Interesting. So, let's jump back to when you are coming back now from France. Your eyes have been opened politically, you have started dabbling in other classes. On the extracurricular side, did you get involved any more with the anti-war movement? Is that where your connection with it begun on campus?

BIDWELL: It is, because that spring—yeah, that spring—was the takeover of Parkhurst, and though I wasn't involved in that, and I wasn't really involved in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], I was always kind of around the edges of it. That spring was really about me educating myself. I wasn't ready to man the barricade and be on the front lines and be part of the crew taking over. I was still—my eyes had been opened, so I was taking in



a lot of information. I was in learning mode. So I participated in a lot of the teach-ins and lectures going on on campus and read a lot. I was reading a whole lot during that period of time. So that was my time to get educated and to be very much aware of protests, and I guess... No, I didn't go to Washington [DC] for any protests then. The following fall, I certainly did, so by the following fall, I was really much more engaged in campus anti-war protests and heading to Washington for protests.

HOWARD: So at that point, you've educated yourself, you are now at the point where you're feeling comfortable going to demonstrations. How did that feel? Did you feel any difference from before your eyes were opened in France?

BIDWELL: Well, I think I was a little bit guarded in my participation, because there was clearly a part that was intent on violence and destruction of property, and that did not feel right to me, but I wanted to be there. So I was involved in protest, but did not want to align myself with the more radical edges of that protest, but it felt totally right and righteous to be part of it. Can I just show you something here?

HOWARD: Yes, please do.

BIDWELL: Let's see. [Produces copy of conservative newspaper, the *Manchester Union Leader*]. October '69, the *Manchester Union Leader*, run by Willie Loeb [William Loeb III] was just this incredibly reactionary newspaper, but this reflected the—so there was there was a big demonstration coming to Manchester [NH], and now they're [indistinct] [gestures to headline] "ATTENTION: All Peace Marchers, Hippies, Yippies, Beatniks, Yellow-Bellies, Traitors, Commies: Help Keep our City Clean by Just Staying Out!" [indistinct] And this editorial calling protesters "Hanoi's little helpers."

HOWARD: Wow.

BIDWELL: This was the mood. Meldrim Thomson [Jr.] was this incredibly conservative governor, but by the standards of the Republican Party in New Hampshire back in those days, this was kind of—just the level of venom that was already setting in, and this was still just fall of '69. It was like, "wow." So yeah, that's a classic. "Assail the shocking intrusion of Reds." Red-baiting and fear of the Commies was alive and well.

HOWARD: Wow. No uncertain terms.

BIDWELL: It was a deeply polarized time, and a different kind of polarization than we've got today, but that's a whole other topic.

HOWARD: How did you feel growing into yourself politically with opposition like that? Did you ever feel uncomfortable reading things like that or being associated with it?

BIDWELL: No, because I had somewhere in that process, I was... there may have been a time where I was going along, because that's what all the cool guys were doing, was protesting the war. But it was pretty soon before I was really, totally drawn in. I felt like I knew my history, I knew what was going on, and I was just totally in opposition, and it didn't matter to me how that might upset people. It was a very, very challenging time with my parents through those years.

HOWARD: Interesting. Can you tell me more about that? Were they—

BIDWELL: Well, I mean... I don't think we talked about it much. I guess they knew that I was involved and that I was headed off to Washington to be involved in demonstrations. But it really strained my relationship with my parents, especially my dad. He eventually really turned around politically, probably post-Watergate when he finally accepted what a scumbag Richard Nixon was, and he finally understood how totally misguided this war was. But, in the early years, it was a very strained relationship, as it was for so much of the country.

One [pause] really big event, in this whole period of time for me, was the summer of 1970. And I don't know if you're sticking to the chronology here, if that's jumping ahead?

HOWARD: That's fine. That's fine.

BIDWELL: It was in the spring of '70 that I got involved. That's when classes were shut down, and I got very much involved in Continuing Presence in Washington and was spending time in Washington. Then, for the first part of the summer, I was involved in just working with various anti-war groups in Vermont and New Hampshire based here on the campus, but then, my parents had planned this trip. I'm sure I talked about that.

HOWARD: I read about it — I would love to hear it straight from you, though.

BIDWELL: There's this big family trip to Europe. My parents had never been to Europe, and so this was like a dream-come-true to take my sister Janet [S. Bidwell] and me. Man, I was not good company. Looking back on it, I was just a total pain in the ass here on this trip that meant so much to them. I was so wrapped up in anti-war fervor that to go on this sort of conventional, touristy trip of, trip of Europe...

What really got us off to a bad start was, we were in Brussels on July 4. July 4 of 1970. There was this tradition there, this massive military parade in Brussels, the primary intent of which was to thank the United States all these years later for liberating Europe in World War Two. All these US flags and all this glorification of US military power, it just did not sit well with me. And I don't remember exactly how I handled it or what I said, but I was clearly not on board with all this.

Unfortunately, that kind of set a tone for the remaining weeks that I was with my family in Europe, I was just so tuned into criticism of US foreign policy and US culture [indistinct]... you know, looking back on it, I was so immature and so unkind to my parents. But that was the time. But it was coming back from that trip where it became clear to me that I was going to apply to be a Conscientious Objector. Obviously been thinking about it, I'd been studying the process beforehand, but that's when said, "yep, that's the path I'm gonna take." Or, try to take.

HOWARD: I'm happy you brought that up, because I did want to speak to about that. So why don't we start in, I guess it would be December 1969. I remember reading your story about the draft lottery, would you mind telling me what that experience was like watching that?

BIDWELL: It was in the Pit Room. The TV room, the scummy, reeking-of-beer Pit Room in the basement of Phi Tau where we were all gathered around to watch the numbers be drawn. It was just surreal to think that this really potentially life changing, incredibly consequential turn in your life was going to be decided but pulling a ping pong ball out of a barrel or whatever. It was so... surreal.

I remember sitting there thinking, like watching this group from above, what a strange scene this whole thing is, but there I was in the middle of it.

I'm sure this wasn't really true, but the story that many of us took away from it was it seemed like the ROTC guys and the pro-war guys were getting the big numbers, and it was the anti-war guys that were getting the low numbers to be drafted.

I was 167, which at the time, I don't know if right then or soon thereafter, they were projecting that up to 195 would be called. I realized, "wow, this is real, all this policy level and intellectual level stuff about the war and US foreign policy and blah, blah, blah... now it's this very real, it's very personal. I got skin in the game now."

That was a big moment. That was a big moment. But, my process of thinking through my Conscientious Objector application process, and that was well underway at that point. I was going to go that route no matter what the number was, but that added a little urgency to it. Let's just say it made it very real. You know, all of a sudden it was "huh, if I don't get my CO status, then would I go to Canada? Would I resist and possibly be thrown in prison? I don't know." But all of the sudden, those were the choices.

HOWARD: I'm curious what the atmosphere was like in the Pit Room as you were watching everything go down, because I imagine some people must have gotten some fairly low numbers. Did you feel a sense of camaraderie or rallying around those people—?

BIDWELL: A sense of camaraderie and just a sense of doom. Yeah, there was definitely camaraderie with folks wherever their numbers turned out to be but it was like "wow, this is really happening." It was a very, very strange night, but it crystallized what had been amorphous and heady. Became very, very real and personal.

HOWARD: So, now at this point, you have some "personal skin in the game," to use your words, and by the end of the summer, you had made your decision when you were on your way back from that trip in Europe to apply for CO status. When did that process start?

BIDWELL: I think that fall.

HOWARD: Around what year is that? Do you remember?

BIDWELL:

Well, this was fall '70. September '70. I think, when we got back from Europe, I think I didn't go back to Denver, I came immediately here to campus. I know I intensified—I picked up my reading, and there was just an enormous amount of literature available to the American Friends Service Committee. The Quakers were hugely invested in, and effective in, draft counseling. I've so many little booklets and guides on the draft and the Conscientious Objector process, which was changing. Because somewhere in those days, there was actually a Supreme Court decision that said that your objection to participation in war didn't necessarily have to be religious-based, as conventionally thought of, but could be ethically- or morally-based without being rooted in a particular religion. That was right up my alley, because though I was raised as a Methodist, that was not my thing. I considered myself somewhere between an agnostic and an atheist in those days.

Studying all that stuff, understanding it, and then that fall on campus, besides meeting with some of the some of the women who were involved in draft counseling on behalf of AFSC, I started spending time with [Rev.] Paul [W.] Rahmier, R-A-H-M-I-E-R, who was the Dean of the Tucker Foundation. And... no no, is that right? No, he was Chaplain. I might have it mixed up. I think he was both. There were probably several chaplains, depending on denomination, but he was a College Chaplain, and the Dean of the Tucker Foundation, and he was, oh my God, he was just so wonderful. He spent a lot of time with me really probing me, and challenging me to think things through, and suggesting things to read. He was hugely influential through that time.

But, I also had a bunch of — this is when I was living at Phi Tau — classmates living in a fraternity who were very much involved in this similar process. I would stay up all night talking about this stuff. So, I had benefit of a lot of peers, draft counseling from AFSC, Paul Rahmier. I also had conversations with several professor friends in the Government department and had benefit of all sorts of stuff being churned out by faculty — written treatises of one sort or another.

So I had lots of input, and lots of guidance, and lots of hand-holding through the process and that continued. I said two off-campus terms were hugely influential; the winter of my senior year, I was a Tucker Foundation intern in Jersey City [NJ]. Professor Mike, Michael [A.] Bailin, there, was hugely influential too. He was very supportive and spent a lot of time with

me. There was a lot of different opportunities for soul-searching with really smart people that helped me through that process.

Maybe not so much then, but soon thereafter, the sense of guilt set in. It still is with me. I had—look at the resources that I had access to at Dartmouth College to guide me through this process! What an incredible privilege that most folks didn't have! So somewhere along the way, this seed got planted and never really left me that some poor Black kid from Jersey City was going in my place, who didn't have the options that I did, who may or may not have come back. That's a part of all this. It's that I got my CO status, in large part, because of my privilege and access to expertise and information.

HOWARD: I'm curious, what was that like? Because I know you were working on these essays while you were teaching in Jersey City. What was that like, seeing the people who, as you said, didn't have access to these resources while working on these essays? Was that ever a tough juxtaposition for you?

BIDWELL: I'm not sure that that set in until a little bit later, when I stepped back from it and looked at the bigger picture. I think I was largely compartmentalizing. I was, you know, “this is my day job, teaching,” which is a whole other experience, teaching with the nuns in Jersey City. That was a trip. And then, I was also writing several papers on urban education while I was there, and I was writing my, or working on my essays, so all those things were going on, but I think they each had their compartment. It wasn't until later that it was all a little more integrated.

HOWARD: A couple other things I wanted to ask you about: because I know once you got your CO status, you were moving to Boston, perhaps in anticipation of being drafted, I'm interested in talking about that. But, while we're on the page of Dartmouth, there are two big things I want to talk to you about, one being CPW [Continuing Presence in Washington] and the other being NYU. So for the first thing, [indistinct] when did you get —

BIDWELL: Before we do that, I've been drinking coffee. I'm gonna make a little—

HOWARD: Oh no, feel free!

BIDWELL: I'm gonna make a little pit stop.

[Recording paused for several minutes]

BIDWELL: [Re-enters the room] Okay. I want to be sure there's a chance for me to ask you some questions.

HOWARD: Oh yeah, of course! Wonderful. Tell me about CPW. How did you get involved with that?

BIDWELL: Well, you know, it's not totally clear to me exactly how, other than I had taken a couple classes with Dennis Sullivan, and when we got to know one another. As a matter of fact, I would visit him in his farmhouse over in Norwich. A really nice guy, a really brilliant guy. And through him—this thing was his brainchild, along with Eric Martinez ['70]. I wasn't there at the beginning. I'm not quite sure how the two of them concocted this thing, but somewhere early on, through Dennis Sullivan, I was aware of it, got interested in it.

And I guess it appealed to me because I was realizing I was maybe not—even though I was now fully educated, I still wasn't necessarily a, you know, “storm the barricades” kind of guy as much as I was working the nerdy end of the anti-war movement, and the political, congressional, votes side of things. Ultimately, that's what was going to end this war — was stopping the funding of it. And I also agreed with the sort of fundamental concept of CPW that massive protests really haven't moved the needle that much in terms of administration policy, or congressional votes.

So I decided that yeah, I totally bought into the premise that where the action is, is pressuring. It's taking all this anti-war activity out there, but moving it to particular members of Congress and putting a pressure on them, and beginning to remind them that their own constituencies out there were not as supportive of the war as you might think. So, I totally bought into the notion of helping the folks that were lobbying their congresspeople to be more effective in doing that. And the mechanism was—I think it was, the claim was, probably the case, there'd never been any computerized database of voting records, so that's what this was about.

So I totally bought in to the premise of it, and got involved, and headed to Washington, and I think there was one period where I was probably there

for about a couple-week period of time. I was just a grunt in this effort, but I helped with answering the phones and lining up housing, as there were folks offering housing for people coming to Washington to lobby, and I got involved in writing some press releases, that kind of stuff. I certainly wasn't involved in the computer side of it. So I was not in the core of it, not in the leadership of it, but happy to be a part of it.

HOWARD: Do you remember when you formally affiliated? When you started doing real work for them?

BIDWELL: [pause] Good question. Of course a watershed date there was May 4<sup>th</sup> of '70.

HOWARD: Right.

BIDWELL: Cambodian invasion and Kent State. Was I involved before? I don't think so. I think was probably after that. I would say... so, my involvement wasn't over a long period of time. If that's true, that I wasn't involved until May... I might have the answer in some of this stuff. But if that's true, then I was intensively involved in May and June, and then, when I got pulled out of all that work to head to Europe with my family, which just seemed so wrong [laughter]. Perhaps, but I don't know... I'll have to go back and look whether prior to May 4<sup>th</sup> I was involved. Or, it might have been after May 4 when these guys put it together.

HOWARD: Do you remember; post-Europe, did you re-engage with it?

BIDWELL: No, and I have a feeling, and this is probably why there's so little evidence of it in the in the record, I guess, although that's why I want to find out what you've learned.

HOWARD: Yes.

BIDWELL: But I think it was relatively short-lived. I don't know that in the fall of '70... what was going on with CPW at that point? In any event, I wasn't... I was not involved, and it's in part because... well, I was jumping back into classes, thinking through whether I wanted to do this Jersey City thing and deciding that I did, and convincing my parents go along with that, and starting to think through the whole CO process. So, I guess in some ways I pulled back to focus on those things a little bit.



HOWARD: Interesting.

BIDWELL: But, that fall, there were certainly demonstrations in Washington I was going to. But that's a good question. What was going on with CPW? So what have you found out?

HOWARD: CPW shows up in the Congressional Record, I think August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1970. It was in a speech — it was mentioned in a speech — from, I think, one of the Republican senators.

BIDWELL: In a supportive way?

HOWARD: Eh, in a not-so-supportive way.

BIDWELL: Okay!

HOWARD: There was a speech about how—the senator was advocating for more variety of political views that were presented at educational institutions. They were talking about how things swing too liberal, “we want to hear more moderate and conservative voices,” and the senator was describing this Exeter internship program that did a good job of it. And, he mentioned at one point visiting CPW, the Dartmouth “lobbying group,” and that was written in in quotes.

BIDWELL: [laughter]

HOWARD: It sounded interesting.

BIDWELL: Interesting! [Produces paper files from bag] Yeah, this is the same stuff that you've got. [Finds congressional record] Here's a congressional record, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1970. Was this part of what you had?

HOWARD: I don't think so.

BIDWELL: Okay. Well, if it would have a role in the archives, I'll leave this.

HOWARD: Oh, it absolutely would. Thank you. We're doing a whole research project post-our interview.

BIDWELL: Just give me a second, let me see if there's, in all this underlined stuff, there's a mention of CPW... I assume that's why it's in here [gestures to file] [searches through pages for CPW mentions]. I don't know. There probably... [indistinct] very well be. I have not gone back to look at all this stuff.

But all this was to try to pinpoint when CPW got started, and when did I first get connected with it?

HOWARD: Mhm.

BIDWELL: I'm not certain, but I would guess, after May 4<sup>th</sup> of '70 is when it got going. And Dennis Sullivan is no longer with us, which is where Eric Martinez comes in. I do have a phone number for him, I think. It could be a phone number if we want to track down the guy!

HOWARD: Yeah, I think he'd be a great interview.

BIDWELL: We could call him up right now!

HOWARD: We could give it a try! Well, it'd be hard to transcribe [laughter]!

BIDWELL: Well, I'll let you work your way through your process.

HOWARD: So, tell me about law school. When did that start up as a point of interest for you?

BIDWELL: Uh huh. [pause] Well, in the winter of '71, When I was in Jersey City, Mike Bailin, who I am still in touch with, he was just this brilliant government professor but a lawyer by training.

HOWARD: Do you happen to know the spelling of his last name?

BIDWELL: Yeah. Michael B-A-I-L-I-N. And he wasn't that much older than us. So I was I was 20 then, I doubt he was over 30. He was a young professor in Government, but he was heading up this Jersey City project, and he was... as I said, I was writing a couple of research papers on urban education, one way or another, and he was my, sort of, faculty supervisor for that. But, he also ran a great Friday night poker game where we played Dylan and drank Rotgut wine. It was a great... but I saw what he had done

with a law degree, and it got me interested in the public policy and civil liberties aspects of the law. I think it further focused me in those directions. So I got thinking ‘huh... hm... I think so. I think law school might very well make sense.’

So, I started looking into various law schools. I don't know if I applied to any others, I'm not sure I did... I think I just applied to NYU because at that point, the fascination with New York that had started in that year of sixth grade, and was deepened through this time in Jersey City right across the river from Manhattan... I got into New York a lot in those days. And I just loved the whole feel of Greenwich Village, and “Oh my God, going to law school in the Village. Wow, that sounds pretty darn cool.”

So, I applied, and I got in. And so, let's see, what would have been the sequence of events... in March... well, let's just say it was March when I found out about that, too. I don't know when law school admissions notices were going out. I scored very high on the LSATs, so I had a good shot at being admitted to a school like that, and I was.

But then— [pause] When did I realize that I didn't want to start law school and then be pulled out? I'm not sure exactly when in the chronology that happened. But, through another Government professor, I wound up with a really interesting summer job in Boston after graduation.

And it was probably living in Harvard Square that summer. By that time, I had my CO status. I'd gotten word. It was probably along then when I realized, “you know, I don't think it makes sense to start law school, be pulled out... Why don't I just defer and take a job here in Boston that would qualify for my alternative service? You know, if and when my number comes up?”

So I guess it was probably that summer, that I decided “I think I should defer.” And I think part of that decision, too, was: I was getting myself really interested in the world of Boston, Boston neighborhoods. This summer internship—I don't remember if that was part of any of this I talked about—but there was the 12 College Exchange back in the day. Its principal role was as a laboratory for coeducation. That's how—it was through the 12 College Exchange that women from Vassar and Smith wound up on the Dartmouth campus, for example.

But in theory, it was also about educational and academic research projects undertaken jointly by the 12 members. And so Michael [P.] Smith, a Government professor that I'd gotten to know pretty well, he wound up heading up this feasibility study to look at the feasibility of the 12 colleges setting up an urban research project in Boston, specifically in the Dorchester [MA], Mattapan [MA] neighborhoods of Boston. So, I wound up for two months—I was his assistant director, but man, I was running it because he was totally absent. He got me to run the project, and he never had virtually anything to do with it. So I was kind of running this feasibility study with four other—there was a Wellesley woman, a Williams guy, and we had a great time. And for me, it was like, “wow, this is an opportunity to interview anybody and everybody involved in urban politics and urban social service delivery in the neighborhoods of Boston.” So it was great.

I think part of my deferring was that I realized ‘there's some pretty interesting things going on here in Boston that I'm starting to get involved in.’ But I think it was primarily not wanting to get pulled out if my number came up.

HOWARD: That makes sense. I remember when we were on the phone, you told me that there was a point at which you had gotten very involved with things in Boston and you never ended up returning to NYU. Do you remember a point at which you saw Boston as a more permanent home beyond that summer that you were beginning to connect with things and understand the neighborhoods?

BIDWELL: Oh, I don't think there was a point in time. It was a gradual thing, but I came out of that summer—Then the following year, I was teaching at a Head Start program, teaching daycare. I had a lot of time to continue my looking around and seeing what all was going on, and I was starting to get increasingly interested in community education, the whole urban education, urban politics thing that I've been writing papers on and studying undergrad, and the Jersey City time, and what, at the time, was this big movement around community control of education. There was a big sort of experimental project in the Bed-Stuy neighborhood of New York around this. This whole notion of more community control of public education got me really involved.

So I started... I actually found a course at Tufts that I took. Somewhere along there, I decided — I can't say there was a particular time — but I

was realizing “there are really a lot of interesting things going on here in Boston.” And this is when Kevin [H.] White, mayor of Boston, was trying to be a version of John [Vliet] Lindsay, a progressive, innovative mayor, and Kevin White was that, until he turned to the dark side.

That’s when this community education program, Community Schools program, got going in Boston, and I started to meet people involved with that, and realized “wow, this could be right up my alley.” So somewhere along in there, I realized that ‘there are things that I want to try out and pursue here in Boston, and I think I’ll defer again.’ At some point, it just took. I kind of abandoned, at least for a while, turned out to be permanently, this notion of going to go to law school.

But to this day — my daughter reminded me of it a week ago, she said, ‘Dad, you keep talking about wanting to live in the Village at some point, just...’ so we’re looking at doing a house swap, swapping our house in Northampton with a professor at NYU, who’s got a gig at Smith or something. I still gotta scratch that itch and live in the Village! It is still going to happen at some point. But, back then, I decided there were just enough interesting things in Boston. And a part of it, too, was that my senior year at Dartmouth, I met the woman that I wound up marrying. But, she was still, for my first year in Boston, an undergraduate at Bradford Junior College, which kept me a little drawn to the Boston area. So, I think there are a number of things that were causing me to want to give Boston little more of a try.

HOWARD: When, timeline-wise, were you moving away from urban politics and social services delivery and more into the community education side? Do you remember around what year or period of years that was?

BIDWELL: Well, yeah, I think it was... It might have been while I was... I just taught daycare for a year. It would have been fall of ‘71 to the summer of ‘72.

HOWARD: Mhm.

BIDWELL: I think it was summer of ‘72 that I took this class at Tufts and met some people that were tied into this developing Community Schools program. There was a job opening. There was the Assistant Director of this new Community School in Jamaica Plain in Boston. Where are you from? You grew up in Connecticut, right?

HOWARD: Yes.

BIDWELL: You know your way around Boston a little bit?

HOWARD: A little bit? [laughter] Not a whole lot.

BIDWELL: Well, in any event. This is just a Boston neighborhood that had a new [indistinct]. And just as a really brief digression, the whole approach to Community Schools in Boston was that... because the control of the schools... the Boston Public Schools were under the control of an incredibly reactionary Boston School Committee. A bunch of really racist, totally old school — predominantly Irish, some Italian — white folks. So, Kevin White, as mayor, was on a building streak. There were a number of new schools being built in the neighborhoods of Boston. New, mostly elementary schools. And he got an ordinance passed by the city council and said that any new school that's built will remain the jurisdiction of the School Committee during the day. But, afternoons, evenings and summers, a portion of these new schools will be controlled by a locally elected Community Council elected in the neighborhood with a budget coming from the city, but with an ability to go out and raise other funds, too. It was a very innovative thing, and it was incredibly threatening to the old guard where so much of Boston political life was built on the patronage in the schools. So, all of a sudden, to have a portion of the schools put in the hands of all these Kevin White liberals and neighborhood activists was very threatening to the status quo, but it happened.

In the first... probably only the second year that the program was underway, there was this opportunity in Jamaica Plain, and I got that job, and was there for a year as assistant director and then as director for a year. Then, I worked for the city-wide program, organizing new Community Councils in other neighborhoods where new schools were being built. I very much got into my community-organizing role during those times, all of which further deepened my sense of connection to Boston, and Boston politics, and Boston neighborhoods, social services and education.

HOWARD: Well, your mention of Boston politics is interesting, because you have obviously a great grasp of what was going on. I'm curious, was your political activism shifting from that point from the anti-war days of later

Dartmouth to... did your focus then become more on the community education side?

BIDWELL: Yeah. Probably the very first organization that I got involved in in Boston, right early on, was Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty. I'm not even sure what led me there—probably a friend. But, I always had deep reservations about the death penalty, and there was this organization that was actively organizing against the death penalty, and I got very much involved in in that work. And then, I guess what we would call today anti-racism work in the public schools.

I was still going to anti-war demonstrations in Boston, and around, and still very much had my eye on that. But in terms of activism, yeah, you're right. My activism was probably shifting more to urban and neighborhood politics around, more than anything else, education issues. And, of course, education issues intersect with racial issues in Boston. They were virtually one and the same back in those days.

HOWARD: To shift to your personal life: so, back when you just moved into Boston, your wife-to-be was still an undergraduate. When did she graduate and when did you two end up back in the same place?

BIDWELL: Well, Bradford no longer exists. It was just a junior college. So after my first year in Boston, she graduated from there, and then went to art school for the next two years in Buffalo [NY], so we sort of had a long distance, on again, off again, relationship. And then, in summer of '74, I guess it would have been, she moved to Boston, and we picked up the pace of our relationship. Well I actually, when I was becoming school director, [indistinct] I hired her to be part of a summer program, and then she continued to work for the Community Schools while I was there. We deepened our relationship, but didn't marry until 1976.

HOWARD: I imagine that also probably deepened your connection to Boston.

BIDWELL: Yeah, and I was developing a great network of friends, many of them intersecting with my political life, so there were many things deepening the connection to Boston.

Let me digress for one story here. It's how we met, my wife and I. She grew up in a very, very conservative, traditional, Irish Catholic family in

Albany [NY]. One of nine kids. She was the first girl after five brothers, five sons. They were so protective of the “princess,” and she went to Catholic schools, went to the same St. Catholic school her mother and her grandmother went to. So, they sent they sent her off to Bradford Junior College as a very protective girls’ school. What they didn't count on was her very first weekend at Bradford, a girl on the floor, in her dorm, got a call from a guy at Dartmouth, saying “we need girls to come up to serve as rush hostesses at our fraternity party” [laughter].

So literally her first weekend at this protective girls’ school, unbeknownst to her parents, she was in a car up to a fraternity party at Dartmouth, and that's where we met.

HOWARD: Oh, there you go!

BIDWELL: And that's where we met, at Phi Tau, and let's just say I wasn't the kind of guy that her parents had pictured her being with. So it took a while! [laughter]. It was not at all with what her parents had in mind when they sent her off to Bradford Junior College.

HOWARD: I imagine.

BIDWELL: But it all worked out.

HOWARD: It worked out.

BIDWELL: In any event.

HOWARD: One thing I also wanted to ask you about: as you're deepening your roots in Boston, and you're growing up past Dartmouth, is you had had this conflict with your family about your views towards the war and about your CO status. I'm curious about how those riffs grew over time. Did you heal them? How did that work out?

BIDWELL: Very good question. [pause]. I have to give my dad a lot of credit for—he was a very smart guy. I think he began to step back and... well, as I said, Watergate, I think, helped him to start looking at the Nixon administration and his foreign policy through a different lens, and I think he began to realize that “wow, we're really headed in... and maybe what Dennis has been saying all these years makes some sense.” And he would credit me



with being part of his political evolution, but he was gradually coming around.

And a big event in the *rapprochement*, if you will, was in October of '76, when Marianne Bidwell and I got married in Albany, [pause], I asked my dad to be best man. That was symbolically that was a big deal. I think he was he was honored, and it was a big deal for me to ask him, and so that was a big step there too.

HOWARD: You had mentioned earlier that this was a situation that you saw in a lot of people at Dartmouth. Conflicts with their family and extended community about where they sat relative to the war. What was that like? Did you find camaraderie in other people with it? How did other people deal with situations in their family like that?

BIDWELL: It was all over the place. Everybody had a different story, both in their own reaction to the war, their own family situation. I certainly had some friends who were similarly at odds with their parents. There were others whose parents were against the war and more politically aligned all along. But, the war was a hugely defining part of the culture and the politics. It was also... it was the music, it was the dress, it was smoking dope. It was just on so many levels... there was a massive generational difference, as I mentioned before, in a way that's, I think, different today. It was a real split with our parents' generation on all those levels. We were a generation that wanted to distance ourselves from their music, and the way they dressed, and the way they wore their hair, and the martinis that they drank it; it was for good reason. There's been a lot written about the counterculture in those days.

But, at the spine of all that, was the war. The war permeated all those other dimensions. It really was... There's good reason that there's courses taught on it.

HOWARD: [laughter]

BIDWELL: It was a hugely defining piece, and actually, it's interesting... I read the readings for the class that I'm going to sit in on. You're not in that class, right? It's about the very different reaction to military coming back from the Vietnam War to military coming back from Gulf War I, where they're celebrated and there's this collective guilt in the country about the way

soldiers coming back from Vietnam War were treated. But that was just how polarized everything was and polarized along so many different dimensions.

HOWARD: So what was it like—what motivated you in keeping with your beliefs and standing true to them with the pressure from your—not pressure, but the situation with your family. Because, you know, if you have strangers and newspapers who are writing things, if they disagree with you, like you said, you found that you're able to stand strong against that. What was it like when that pressure was coming from someone like your parents?

BIDWELL: I either stood up to it or ignored it, although they weren't particularly confrontational about this. I just proceeded with confidence. I wasn't sure where it would all head, but I was sticking to what I believed and seemed right and the chips would fall where they may in a lot of different dimensions of my life, including with my family.

HOWARD: Where did your sister stand in all of this? What were her thoughts?

BIDWELL: She and I were so very, very different people and still are. She was never politically engaged. She went to college, and she stayed in Denver. Stayed very, very, very close to my parents for their whole lives. I don't think she ever really quite got me. And I'm sure she was totally pissed off at the kind of surly guy I was that summer of '70. This dream-come-true family trip to Europe, and I was surly, and distant, and unappreciative. She has always been just very, very, very different from me. She's never, for whatever—she never had the intellectual curiosity that I did. And she was also burdened by through the schools being “oh, you're Dennis's sister!” You know, that whole thing. Because I was the straight-A student, and she came along three years later. I think she was always resentful, for many ways, for good reason. We were always very, very, very different, and she was much more inclined to continue to just be in alignment with her parents' view of the world and her parents' politics, and I was the black sheep. I was off doing my own very different thing.

HOWARD: So, the last bit of “bridging the gap” that I want to do is from your—so we talked about your immediate postgrad time in Boston, and now you're in Northampton. We talked about your marriage too, but generally, what did your career look like? Did you stay involved with politics? Did you go more to the education side? How have you spent the last few years?

BIDWELL: Wow. Wow.

HOWARD: It's a big question [laughter].

BIDWELL: Generally, I would say the arc was urban education and urban politics, which led me to the philanthropy and grantmaking side of that. I wound up working for a group of foundations as a Program Officer funding social services and youth programs in Boston neighborhoods. Which—well, let me let me back up.

So urban politics, community organizer during the days of busing, riots and craziness, which kind of burnt me out.

HOWARD: Yeah, it sounds like a lot.

BIDWELL: And then decided... at this point, I guess I had abandoned law school possibilities. This was 1975. I decided I wanted to do a one-year master's in education at Harvard, to go across the river and process all this stuff, which I did. It was a valuable experience. I was definitely more interested in the public policy aspects than the in-the-classroom aspects. But then, I had a chance to move from that to working with this group of foundations. Did that for a few years; it was very interesting work. I decided I didn't want to give away the money so much as I wanted to be doing stuff. But I had a knack for fundraising and operating in the philanthropic arena, if you will, so then, I got into fundraising work for the National Trust for Historic Preservation is where I worked for a while.

But that got me real interested in sort of the economic development and real estate sides of neighborhood life. So, I went to work for a real estate consulting firm, where I was working mostly with nonprofits and government agencies, but I learned a hell of a lot about real estate. Real estate valuation, real estate market analysis, and all that kind of stuff, but still focused wherever I could on nonprofit organizations and more neighborhood, community development kinds of things.

HOWARD: Right.

BIDWELL: While I was doing that, I decided I wanted an MBA, and Boston University had this wonderful program within their MBA program focused on nonprofit and government management.

HOWARD: Perfect.

BIDWELL: It was a really, really excellent program. I did it part time over many years because I was working full time through all that. All this time, I was doing real estate work, with a lot of it nonprofit. But I'd always had — this goes back to my Colorado days — an interest in conservation: conservation of mountains, conservation of land, and I decided that's what really interested me.

So, I spent a long time finding the right position where I could take my real estate work and my nonprofit work and my fundraising work. There was a job in Washington at American Farmland Trust, a national nonprofit organization involved in the conservation of agricultural lands. So, we moved to Washington. Had two young kids at the time; it was a big move. But it was a tremendous opportunity. I really, really enjoyed that work. Working with land trusts and local units of government all around the country. Mostly on the transaction side, but also on the public policy side of protecting agricultural lands. In the course of doing that, I was able to combine fundraising, and real estate, and land conservation, and realize that there's really something to this world of real estate and philanthropy, because I brought in a lot of gifts to American Farmland Trust that we're gifts of real estate.

So I decided, "you know, I'm just gonna go off and do this on my own." Well, it wasn't all that way. American Farmland Trust was downsizing, and I had since moved my piece of the organization up to Northampton. So I became an outlier in the reorganization and in the downsizing, so they laid me off.

HOWARD: Really!

BIDWELL: Which was a good kick in the ass to me, because I'd been thinking about hanging up my shingle and doing fundraising—or doing this kind of work on my own anyway. In 2001... matter of fact, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 was when I signed my separation papers. An auspicious day in which to launch your own business.

HOWARD: Right.

BIDWELL: So I created, sort of out of whole cloth, this real estate gift consulting practice, where the world of fundraising and gift planning and real estate all come together. It was very much a niche, but I did it for 20 years. Matter of fact, one of my major clients through a lot of that time was Dartmouth Hitchcock. I was up [here] a lot, helping Dartmouth Hitchcock bringing gifts of real estate of various sorts.

So, in retrospect, it all fits together. There's a flow. But, through it all was a fascination with nonprofit organizations and how they work and where they get their money from. There you go. Maybe a longer answer than you were looking for

HOWARD: No, it was perfect!

BIDWELL: But there's the arc.

HOWARD: I have one more bit of jumping around to do, that I should have asked you about when you mentioned it, and then we'll do our general wrap-up. You mentioned the Parkhurst Takeover, and we've talked about that in our class, about what an event that was. What was that like?

BIDWELL: [Produces front page of *The Dartmouth* from May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1969] You mean that?

HOWARD: Wow.

BIDWELL: I assume archives here have all this stuff.

HOWARD: Actually, I've not seen this picture.

BIDWELL: That's the only edition of the Dartmouth that somehow I wound up with all these years later. May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1969. This, by the way, is Peter [A.] Bien [who] was a philosophy professor. Look at this [shows a document authored by Bien]. This was his analysis of the war.

HOWARD: Wow.

BIDWELL: And a sociology professor.... you had all these faculty members. Oh, and then there was this: President Dickey's speech to the faculty in 1969. Kemeny took over the following year.

HOWARD: Mhm.

BIDWELL: [Shows a document and gestures to title] "The Faculty Position on the ROTC Problem." I don't know how I ended up with all this stuff, much regret of my wife who wonders when I'm ever going to clean all this crap out of the basement.

HOWARD: [laughter].

BIDWELL: For the [indistinct]—this was still in my learning phase. I wasn't ready to join the join the takeover, though I came to the demonstrations. I was still educating myself. As I said, I wasn't ready to be on the front lines. But, it was a huge event. I think part of it was to see so many students who I respected, and faculty who I respected, endorsing this aggressive anti-war position definitely had an impact on me. It lent legitimacy to the anti-war position and further moved me along in that process.

HOWARD: The last big question I have for you is, looking back on it, your general impressions of things and what your reflections are on it. Are you happy with the stances that you took? Would you have done anything differently? You mentioned the guilt about how you were able to attain CO status and how you've carried it with you all this time. Maybe that can be where we start? What has that been like? Do you think there will come a day that you can reconcile that?

BIDWELL: Oh, well, I guess I have reconciled it. You know, you have to figure out what you're gonna do with your privilege. Do you just go about blithely without self-awareness, using it? Or do you recognize it, it is what it is, but there are things that you can do with that privilege. And I guess I fall more into that camp, and that's been I suppose the way I've reconciled it is that I can't change the fact that I was born a middle-class white guy that opened doors that wouldn't have been open to others. But where I do have agency is the things that I've been able to do with that privilege.

I guess that's the way one often reconciles that. I feel like I'm more aware than ever of my privilege. And, have I done everything for the world that I

could have done with benefit of that privilege? No. But I'm mostly satisfied with what I've done, with the choices I've made. I'm not—

The big question — would I have done anything differently — is would I have gone back to law school [laughter]. Who knows? Who knows what direction that would have taken me? I do—Oh, I guess I talked about this in one of those UMass interviews, was that... I don't know that I've reflected on it before. It was something that she asked me.

I do think what would have made me a good lawyer has benefited me in a lot of other areas. A certain methodical way of thinking, a way of organizing my thoughts in writing. It's played out in a lot of other areas, even without the degree. So no, I wouldn't change anything. It had a flow. As I say, in retrospect, it makes some sense how the pieces fit together. So yeah, I wouldn't change any of it.

HOWARD: A related question is, do you feel that your viewpoints on the war and how things went, your opinions on the political issues at the time, have they changed at all over the years? Are they roughly the same as they were when they were happening real time?

BIDWELL: With regard to that war, and the kind of foreign policy that characterized the US at that time, no. Nothing's changed. I'd say it... [pause] Those days were so powerful in my opposition to the war, so fervent, that it has planted almost permanently a certain skepticism about US foreign policy, and the motives behind it. There are times where I've had to look at that and say, 'that skepticism always makes sense, but it's not black and white.' I would say that generally, through the years — and this happened when I served in government. I was on city council in Northampton four years, after being on the sidelines of politics and involved in campaigns and telling everybody how they should be doing things, I just decided it was time to step in myself — so that process, too, has made me understand that very few issues lend themselves to a black and white analysis, including US foreign policy. Very few issues are as simple as what can fit on a bumper sticker.

So, I've come to appreciate the complexity of public policy decisions, including foreign policy decisions. However, I think that no matter—even bringing that view of complexity to things, that wouldn't have changed the

analysis of US involvement in Vietnam. That was just disastrous on so many levels and was clear from the get-go that it would be.

HOWARD: That is all of the questions that I have. The last [indistinct] we'll do a traditional ending of the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

BIDWELL: Oh!

HOWARD: Final comments for the record?

BIDWELL: Let me look at something.

HOWARD: Sure!

BIDWELL: Because when I did this first interview at UMass, I actually put together some thoughts in preparation for it. [pause].

No, I don't think so. I must say, Patrick, you've done a really good job of questioning and pursuing the conversation.

HOWARD: Thank you!

BIDWELL: I appreciate it. Well, I appreciate it in part because, you know, my family's heard all my stories, so they never ask me about any of this stuff, so it's interesting to be asked to reflect on this after all these years, because it's not something that very often happens. I imagine other folks interviewed through this project have similar reactions. There aren't opportunities very often to be reflective about this and to be asked to synthesize this and to draw conclusions. It's been very interesting, and I appreciate the way you've gone about it.

HOWARD: Thank you!

BIDWELL: I appreciate your level of curiosity.

HOWARD: Well, it's very interesting stuff.

BIDWELL: So now can I ask you a few questions?



HOWARD: Let me end the recording, I'll give a formal end —

BIDWELL: That doesn't become part of the record, huh?

HOWARD: Well, the story is about you! So, I'll give it its formal ending, but then yes, absolutely.

BIDWELL: Okay.

HOWARD: Well, to formally end, thank you so much for your time. It was very interesting to learn everything that you've shared. I think that's great. Thank you very much. I will give us an ending here.

Dennis Bidwell '71. Oral History Interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project.

Bidwell discusses his childhood in Denver during the 1950s and early 1960s. He then shares his Dartmouth experience through debauched dorm life, his emerging political awareness during a study abroad term in Bourges, France, his shift to majoring in government, his teaching as a Tucker Foundation intern in Jersey City, NJ, and his involvement in the anti-war movement, including with the Congressional lobbying group Continuing Presence in Washington (CPW). He also describes watching the 1969 draft lottery, applying for Conscientious Objector (CO) status, and conflicts with his father over his CO application. Bidwell describes his post-graduation move to Boston, work in community organizing and education, and deferring his acceptance to NYU Law School in anticipation of alternative service. Bidwell describes his later career change to nonprofit funding and real estate philanthropy and his move to Northampton, MA. Finally, he offers final reflections on his activism and on healing familial rifts over the war.