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Interview with Paul Morse


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Transcript of interview with Paul Morse

War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends
November 16, 2017

Cherice Bock: The following recording is an interview of Paul Morse for the project War and Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940–1975. You will also hear the voice of Ralph Beebe, one of the researchers for this project, and I am Cherice Bock, the other researcher. The interview took place at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, Oregon on November 16, 2017.

Ralph Beebe: Well Paul, thank you for being here.

Paul Morse: Yep.

Ralph: Some basic questions: what year were you born?

Paul: 1937.

Ralph: That tells us about your eligibility for being drafted militarily. So you were born in '37. Do you remember when you registered for the draft?

Paul: Well, when I was 18.

Ralph: Yeah.

Paul: Whatever year that would have been. '55?

Ralph: And were you drafted?

Paul: No, I was not drafted. I had, I signed up for it, I registered, but they didn't ever call me.

Ralph: Mm-hmm. Do you know—of course, this was in '55, between wars. The Korean War had just ended.

Paul: Yeah.

Ralph: And the Vietnam War hadn't started yet, so, so that was about... Well, so you were never drafted. Did you ever appear before the draft board?

Paul: No, I didn't ever appear. If you appear before the draft board, they would ask you questions if you registered a CO, I assume.

Ralph: Yeah.

Paul: But I, I didn't ever answer any questions.

But I did hear, before I registered, I, I had heard at church—I attended Greenleaf Friends Church—and somebody, I have no idea who, but somebody made me understand that if I, if I wanted to register CO, it would help my, my situation if I had written some kind of an essay or something, indicating my belief about war and, and why I would not want to participate. So I did write an essay. I'm not sure who I turned it into, but I think it was to the church.

Ralph: You don't have a copy of it?

Paul: No, no, I'm sorry, I don't have a copy of it. And I have just gone through my mother's files and it wasn't in there either, so...

Ralph: Yeah. Okay. Well, so you didn't have to appear before the draft board.

Paul: No, I didn't.

Ralph: And...

Cherice: What was, what was in the content of the paper that you wrote, that essay that you wrote? Were you wanting to be a conscientious objector, a non-combatant, or what was your position on that?

Paul: Yes, I, while I didn't—in my paper, I just explained my strong belief that I didn't want to kill anybody, and therefore, well, because I, I felt like God was saying I shall not kill, and that's about it. I remember writing two or three pages about why I didn't want to kill anybody. And so I registered conscientious objector.

Ralph: So you're saying you wouldn't kill any bad guys to protect the good guys?

Paul: Yeah, that was, yeah, that's what I was...[laughs]

Ralph: I'd like to hear a little more about that particular point. Why did you register as a conscientious objector? (Excuse me.)

Paul: Well, because I felt, I felt real strongly about, "Thou shalt not kill." And I remember arguing with somebody about what I would do if I had a family, or at least a wife, and some bad guy came and was going to kill my family, what would I do then? And I thought about that. I thought, "Oh, I don't know what I would do." I would expect that God would take care of them and me. I don't know.

Ralph: It's a very good question.

Paul: Yeah, it is, yeah, it's a good question.

Ralph: And each of us who take the position you did have to live with that question.

Paul: Yeah. However, recently I met some, somebody, an older man, who said that he, he didn't, he didn't feel like he wanted to beg God to forgive him because he couldn't forgive himself, because in the war he had killed somebody, and it went, it stuck in his soul the rest of his life, and he couldn't forget it, and he couldn't forgive himself, and he wasn't sure God would even forgive him, and so there's consequences for what we decide to do or not do, and I prefer to take the consequences for being peaceful.

Ralph: I can, I can imagine that person thinking about the family, the wife or parents—

Paul: Of the person.

Ralph: Of the person, of the family he killed.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ralph: That would be, that would be very hard. Well, I would like you to talk a little bit more about the actual decision, conscientious objection (and I'm not sure you're familiar with these terms but) 1-O meant total conscientious objection, you wouldn't go into the military, 1-A, of course, you would go into military, 1-A-O you would go in the military but you wouldn't carry a gun. Did you—how would you feel about those three choices, or just two of them, of course?

Paul: I remember those three choices, and I chose 1-O.

Ralph: Yeah.

Paul: So I was—my brother chose 1-A-O, so he went to Fort Something in North Carolina, so he served. He didn't go—he didn't carry a gun, but he did spend some time in the service, but I didn't.

Cherice: How did you feel about the, the difference between your choices?

Paul: Well I would, I felt like I had a stronger case. [laughs]

Cherice: In what way? Why wouldn't you want to serve your country?

Paul: Oh, I would have. If, I purposed in my mind: if I, if I got called up and went before the draft board, I would go, I would serve at some hospital, or I would spend time in service of my country, but I wouldn't carry a gun.

Cherice: Yeah, you would do the alternative service?

Paul: Yeah, right. And I had friends who did that. I had a friend my age who did that in Boise. He went and served in the hospital. Not too long back, I asked him how long he served, and I was surprised that he served more than two years. It was three or four years.

Cherice: Do you know why you weren't drafted?

Paul: I think I know why, and it was because I, I, first I went out of high school and I went to college, so they deferred you for college, and while I was in college I got married, so they deferred you for marriage again, so I never heard from them, ever.

Ralph: They were probably just as happy, because people who were conscientious objectors were a problem. If everybody would sign up 1-A, there would not be a problem. But if you sign up 1-O or 1-A-O, then they've got to figure out something to do with you.

Paul: Oh, well I didn't think about that! [laughs]

Ralph: Well, you've already talked about this a bit, but did your Christian faith and Quakerism—how did those things influence you?

Paul: Well that was the influence. I, I just heard—but I don't know, I don't ever remember any of preaching about "thou shalt not bear arms," but I read it, [laughs] I read in the Bible, "Thou shalt not kill," and, and I understood that the Quaker doctrine was strong for peace, meaning, don't go to war, don't, don't fight. And so I, I just adhered to all I knew about Christianity, which was the Quaker doctrine and I believed it, and I still do, so that was it.

I don't, I don't remember anybody ever questioning me about my decision or suggesting that I messed up and made the wrong decision, not—I don't remember having to defend my, my CO decision or my faith.

Ralph: Even though you wouldn't protect those South Vietnamese from the Communists that were taking them over?

Paul: Well, they were not in the picture when I was making my decision.

Ralph: Okay, Koreans.

Cherice: South Koreans?

Paul: Koreans—and you said the Korean War was over!

Ralph: It was, in '53.

Paul: In '53?

Ralph: Yeah, so—

Paul: I thought that was, that was it. Yeah. Now see, you're talking about going over there. If they came here, then you, then somebody would have a stronger case to argue with me about defending my home from terrorists.

Ralph: Suppose some terrorists came over and attacked your home.

Paul: We've had, we've hosted Arab students for 20 years. They've been right in our home. [laughs] [pause] I don't know. [pause] I tell myself I would, I would try to defend my home and my family, but I don't think I could point a gun at a person, you know, and shoot him. I did carpenter work every summer, and at one time I was sitting on this paint bucket, having lunch, and one of those—it was a sheet rocker, I was sitting with the sheet rockers, because I put up ceilings. And this guy said that he, he had a close friend who had somebody come to his house, break into his house in the night, in the middle of the night. He broke in there, and this, this man was telling me, "My friend shot this guy. He was right in his house and he shot him because he, he was breaking into his house! And so he was defending his home." And he said, "That guy, it just changed his life and ruined his life because he shot somebody," whether or not he was in the wrong—the guy was in the wrong. It turned out the guy was drunk and he just went in the wrong house. But I, but as an adult, I can't forget what that guy said. "Don't ever kill anybody. You won't be able to forget it." I think, "Well, maybe I made the right decision as a kid!"

I think, I think God has reasons for saying, saying things. However, just this morning, I was reading about David going out there and fighting, killing thousands of people. I think, "What's God, what's God thinking?" Well then, right after that, it says, God says, "No, David, you've got too much blood on your hands. You can't build my house, your son will build my house." So I think God hates killing. Someday we'll figure out what he's thinking, God.

Cherice: Do you—can you tell us more about hosting Arab students in your home? Does that have to do with your sense of the peace testimony at all?

Paul: No.

Cherice: No, no, just something that you did?

Paul: That had to do with mission, mission. We had a mission conference in our church, and here was somebody mentioning that they worked with ISI: International Students Incorporated. And so we thought, "Hey, they're coming to us, and maybe we could join the force to win them for Christ." So that was our reason for hosting them. So we have really enjoyed that. We've, you know, we've stopped, but, but a couple of them came to Christ.

Cherice: Wow. Sounds like in some ways, though, you were kind of thinking about how our culture calls Arabs terrorists, because that's how it came up, that you were talking about them. So you were thinking of them a little differently, right?

Paul: Yeah, oh yeah.

Cherice: So can you describe that difference, between the cultural view and your own view?

Paul: Well, the cultural view is just the view you have when you have fear, so... We went to a Muslim country, Morocco, and lived there for four years and, and all of our parents were scared for us. They didn't want us to go, said, "Are you sure this is the right thing?" Because they didn't understand the dangers. And I think that's—our cultural fear is, we don't understand the real danger.

Cherice: Mm-hmm. And so, what's your perspective on Arab culture, or having—building relationships, I guess, and having people in your home, opposed to the cultural view of fear?

Paul: Well, in order to have any kind of sense of what should be done or what, what your position ought to be, you need to know the culture you're dealing with, and you can't know it unless you study it, and studying it is easy when they live with you. [laughs] So, so we got to know them really well, and so when we went to live in the Muslim country, we didn't really have culture shock, because they didn't do anything we, we didn't already know and expect in the way of, oh, what their religion requires of them. So it was easy.

Ralph: This is a very important, interesting topic. I'd like you to go back in the story of, how did you get attracted to that? How did you come to go into this ministry of helping the Muslims, and so forth?

Paul: Well, we, we really got attracted to the idea of closed countries sending their students over here to our country, and what a, what an open door it was to inter—interact with them. So, so we went back to Colorado, because this couple that came to our church, to our mission conference, they said, "Hey, we're going to have a big ISI conference," and so we went. We drove back to Colorado, and, and, and as soon as we got home from that conference, they contact—that couple contacted us and said, "Oh, would you—we have a, we have a student who's coming to Portland. Would you host him?"

We said, "Look, this is—we just got back! This is kind of sudden. Yes, we'll do it."

And he happened to be an Arab. We, ISI just is not one country, it's anywhere, and this guy was from Oman, so we hosted him until—he was going to the University of Portland, and so we hosted him for a few weeks, and when he left he said, "Hey I have a" (he said a cousin, but it was some guy from, that he knew from his country,

looking for a place to stay, and he knew we had an open bedroom because he just left it). [laughs]

Cherice: Yeah.

Paul: So he said, “Would you host him?” So, it was kind of word-of-mouth, and they, you know, so all we ever hosted was Arabs, so that’s how we got into the Muslim thing. It wasn’t, they need it worse than somebody else. So, we learned that nothing, nothing, nothing changes. Change takes time. So about seven years after we met the one who came to Christ, it took him seven years to decide that it couldn’t have been Ishmael that was—that Abraham offered on the altar. He said, “You don’t give your second best to God. You give your best to God. [laughs]

Cherice: Huh, interesting.

Paul: And he said, “Anybody knows that a free woman’s son is, is worth more than a slave woman’s son, so, so then he started—we gave him a Bible, and so he started comparing the Bible and the Quran, and he said, “I find a lot—” he found too many things that were different. And he said, so he compared which one’s right, and he kept finding the Bible is more accurate than the Quran, so he just became a follower of Jesus. So he still lives here in this country.

Ralph: You have any more questions, Cherice?

Cherice: Well, I guess to me that sounds like you’re working on building relationships with people from maybe a country that our country doesn’t get along with that well all the time, I don’t know, maybe Oman not too much, but from the Middle East. So, so in some ways it seems like a peace-building activity. Have you ever thought of it that way?

Paul: No! [laughs]

Cherice: Yeah, yeah, but it seems to flow naturally from the faith tradition that you were taught?

Paul: I think so.

Cherice: Yeah?

Paul: Well, the tradition is: share the gospel. So it doesn’t matter who needs the gospel, share it. That’s the idea.

We had a Japanese high school student live with us during the time in between Arabs and it seemed like his, his God—he didn’t have much of a God except movie stars. That was his God, and he had a camera and he, we went to the Starlight Parade, and he just followed that movie star, taking pictures of him on that float.

Cherice: So, so it sounds—I guess, to take it back to your, your upbringing in the Quaker church, it sounds like you were taught something about the peace testimony and something about evangelism, and—

Paul: Yeah, yeah. All of the above.

Cherice: So, how do you feel like, I guess how, how did those things come across to you from the Quaker Church particularly? Did they come across as separate things or the same sort of theme?

Paul: No, that was just part of our beliefs. I didn't see it as separate.

Cherice: Yeah. So maybe describe the way that you would have envisioned your faith as a person from—was it Greenleaf Friends that you were a part of?

Paul: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Cherice: As a person from Greenleaf Friends, what does that mean to, to believe in, in what Greenleaf would have said at that time, when you were drafted, relating to the peace testimony and the need to share the gospel?

Paul: I don't think they, they built into me the, the need to share the gospel quite as much as the need to believe the gospel myself. So I kept hearing pastors and evangelists saying, "You need to have devotions." So I tried doing that, and I could not keep it up.

Cherice: Yeah.

Paul: And finally, finally when I was 35, I told God, "I can't do this, but I really feel like I need to. I need a miracle here." And he gave me a miracle. I've been having a quiet time every day since 1972. And it's not, that's not what's going to save you, but it's really going to go a long ways towards keeping you from jumping off of the, off the path, the narrow path.

Cherice: So it sounds like that sense of personal connection to God was important to your church and—

Paul: Yeah, yeah.

Cherice: And part of that was the peace element and...

Paul: Part of it was that, yeah.

Cherice: But also other, other pieces, so...

Paul: Yeah.

Cherice: So you learned about the need to share the gospel, but maybe not from Greenleaf at the time?

Paul: [laughs] Well, I probably shouldn't have said that, because they, as, as a high school kid, the youth department of Greenleaf Friends Church took us down to the jail. Once a week we went down to the jail and, and held Christian services in the jail to win them to Jesus. And once a week, we went out to the farm labor camp, where the Mexicans lived, to hold a service. Quincy Fodge took us out there. And so they are winning, they're, they may not talk about it, but they did it. I didn't enjoy that much, I just did it, because that's what you do. [laughs]

Cherice: Yeah. Was that connected with the peace testimony at all, or was it mostly seen as evangelism?

Paul: No, that's evangelism.

Cherice: So, even though you're doing prison ministry and, you know, we might call it farmworker ministry, it was seen as evangelism.

Paul: Yeah, by me.

Cherice: Right. Yeah.

Paul: Did you ever go to a jail service?

Ralph: I did.

Paul: Where from?

Ralph: When I was at Greenleaf.

Paul: You didn't live at Greenleaf, did you?

Ralph: I, I went to Greenleaf Academy.

Paul: Yeah, oh, so you lived...

Ralph: When Quincy was, was on the faculty, my senior year is when he came.

Paul: Oh.

Ralph: And we went to the jail in Caldwell.

Paul: Yeah, that's where I went.

Ralph: Yeah.

Paul: But, but Quincy didn't teach at the Academy when I was there.

Ralph: Oh, well he did when I was.

Paul: Oh, I didn't realize he ever did.

Ralph: '53 and fifty—yeah, '53 was when he came. It was my senior year.

Paul: Oh.

Ralph: And he was a coach.

Paul: Okay.

Cherice: So, it sounds like he had a pretty major impact on both of you? I don't know very much about him, but how would you describe him?

Ralph: Well, he was certainly a good influence. And...

Paul: I don't know what he did for work when, in '55, when I came to the Academy.

Ralph: I thought he was still on the faculty but...

Paul: No.

Ralph: See, I left in '54, so I don't know much after that.

Cherice: But he did some sort of ministry, apparently, or just led the youth in these—

Paul: Yeah, he took us to the farm labor camp. Evidently he knew a little Spanish. I don't know. But somebody else took us to the jail. I think it was the pastor, Oscar Brown.

Ralph: Yeah.

Paul: It was the pastor, took us to the jail. And I did know this, as a kid, that, that one of the results of going and doing ministry at the jail was, our pastor befriended one of the guys in the jail, so when he got out of jail, he wanted to come live with the pastor, but I think, I think he said, "No, I can't do that," so the guy came and stole his saddles out of his barn, and...

Cherice: Oh no!

Paul: It was bad.

Cherice: Yeah. So, do you think it was either one of those people that introduced the idea of the peace testimony, and that you should write an essay about your beliefs in conscientious objection?

Paul: I don't think so, but I don't know who it was that actually inspired me to write this essay. Man, I don't know. My file cabinet is giving you "empty."

Cherice: The brain filing cabinet?

Paul: Yeah.

Cherice: I hear you! So, did everybody in the youth—in your youth group, do you think, write an essay like that, or was it just you?

Paul: I really don't know. I didn't have—hear anybody tell me. Even the guy, my friend who served some time with—because he was a conscientious objector, I don't remember him saying that he ever wrote an essay. I'll ask him someday. Leon Williams, was who that was.

Cherice: Yeah, so you—

Paul: My brother didn't. He didn't write one.

Cherice: Okay, and he was a noncombatant?

Paul: Yeah, right.

Cherice: So, you somehow got this information that you should write this essay?

Paul: Yeah, yeah.

Cherice: Both of you are kind of similar.

Ralph: Yeah.

Paul: Did you write an essay?

Ralph: No, not specifically that.

Paul: Did you go before the board, the draft board?

Ralph: Well, I, I think I escaped the actual board itself, but I did turn in, I did turn in some documents, which included a little bit of writing, but not, not a big essay.

Cherice: But you were both influenced somehow at Greenleaf, you were—we don't know exactly what happened yet, but maybe we'll find out in the course of our research, who it was that was influencing all these people to care about the peace testimony.

Paul: Oh, okay, yeah, that'd be good! We've got some Greenleaf people around here.

Cherice: Uh-huh, yeah.

Ralph: But I, I, I'm thinking that the major influences for me were people here at George Fox, after, after I left Greenleaf, because I don't think I thought too much about it, even though, I of course, when I came to Greenleaf, I was 18.

Paul: Oh, had you already registered?

Ralph: I think so, I'm not sure.

Paul: But you're a senior...in high school?

Ralph: High school? Oh, excuse me, when I came to George Fox, I was 18.

Paul: Oh.

Ralph: I'm sorry.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember watching him play football, when I was in high school.

Cherice: That's great!

Paul: Oh, it was nice, he was good. And he was my football coach when I was here at George Fox.

Cherice: Oh, that's great! Alright, well, I think that's all of my questions, unless there's anything else that you want to add about your choice for the draft.

Paul: No, no, because I can't remember very much. [laughter]

Cherice: That's okay. It's good to hear the stories about the ministries you were involved in, too. That's great.

Paul: Yeah.

Ralph: Okay, thank you so much.

Paul: Okay!

Cherice: Thank you very much.