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Interview with Orville and Marilyn Winters

Cherice Bock

George Fox University, cbock@georgefox.edu

Ralph Beebe

George Fox University

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Transcript of interview with Orville and Marilyn Winters

War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends

December 5, 2017

Cherice Bock: The following recording is an interview of Orville and Marilyn Winters 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 December 5, 2017.

Ralph Beebe: Well, welcome. And most of my questions will be directed to you, Orville.

Orville Winters: Alright.

Ralph: But you can answer, Marilyn, whenever, whenever you—

Marilyn Winters: Okay.

Orville: She speaks for me!

Marilyn: Oh, yeah! [laughter]

Ralph: That's right. First, what year were you born?

Orville: Was I born?

Ralph: Yeah.

Orville: '33.

Ralph: 1933. Do, where, where were you born?

Orville: Redmond, OR.

Ralph: Yeah, and you moved to Greenleaf in 1947.

Orville: I think so.

Ralph: Yeah, I can remember that. I was a sophomore at the Academy. Your dad became the principal there.

Orville: Yeah, OK.

Ralph: So, when you registered for the draft, or, how did, what did you register as?

Orville: Noncombatant.

Ralph: Okay, this would be—there were three choices: 1-A, of course, you didn't. 1-O means that you wouldn't go into the military at all, or 1-A-O is what I think of as noncombatant, is that what you...?

Orville: Uh-huh, I think so.

Ralph: So you were—

Orville: Right.

Ralph: You would go in, but not carry a gun.

Orville: Right, yeah. Actually, it was kind of a moot question, because my deferment was based on the fact that I was a minister in training, and so that gave me a, I never received a draft notice of any kind, they just accepted that.

Ralph: Okay. So, you never were drafted, they left you alone...

Orville: Left me alone, never heard a word from them.

Ralph: They didn't want you.

Orville: Didn't want me. [laughter]

Ralph: Yeah. So, many of my questions that I ask other people I don't need to ask you, because I ask when were you drafted, where did you serve...

Orville: Right.

Ralph: But yours was straight conscientious objection—

Cherice: Noncombatant.

Ralph: Noncombatant, which is conscientious objection, but not, not objection to entering the service, but objection to carrying a gun and killing people.

Orville: That's right, yeah.

Marilyn: I don't know if you want to know this, but my brother was a conscientious objector also, Arnold Lee.

Ralph: Arnold Lee, yeah.

Cherice: Great! We'll come back to that. It would be great to hear about that, too.

Marilyn: Okay.

Ralph: How did you make the choice to not be in the military?

Orville: I've thought about it since, since then. It just seemed like the, it was no big deal for, for me. I had no association with Quakers until we moved to Greenleaf, and then you were a Quaker or you weren't part of the group. But it just made sense that I could serve as medic or something like that, which was consistent with what I, you know, believed, but I didn't spend a lot of time or much effort in making that decision. As I remember, I don't think, at Greenleaf, they said very much about it. I can't remember the church, any sermons, or Sunday school lessons, that kind of thing. At the Academy, it was, "Well, Quakers don't believe in war," and that was kind of the end of the discussion. And so, really, it wasn't something I had to wrestle with. It was a Quaker community, so okay, that's what they believe, that made sense to me, so it was no big deal.

Ralph: No big deal, but it did say that you were a conscientious objector to carrying a weapon...

Orville: Yes, yes, exactly.

Ralph: Going out... So it was a fairly important difference, probably for those young men who did go out and...

Orville: Right.

Ralph: And risk their lives. We cowards stayed home [laughter], and that's what they thought of us to some degree.

Cherice: Do you know how they communicated that to you at Greenleaf Academy, that Quakers don't believe in war? Was that just kind of an underlying message that somehow you got, or was that stated specifically?

Orville: Yes. I don't remember in any class. It was just kind of passing remark: Quakers don't go to war, Quakers don't baptize, Quakers don't take communion, this, this was part of the package.

Cherice: Okay.

Orville: Yeah.

Cherice: Did you go to Greenleaf Friends Church, also?

Orville: Yes.

Ralph: Okay, so your Christian faith, your Quaker faith, had a lot to do with that decision.

Orville: Everything, right.

Ralph: If you hadn't moved to Greenleaf, do you think it would've been different?

Orville: That's a hard question, because I was, I was never in any contact with Quakers until I went to high school, and so I was pretty young, what, 14? 13 or 14 when I first was anywhere where they even, the subject ever came up. And I just accepted it as part of our package. I was much more convinced of Quakerism because of their view of the, the ordinances, and focus on relationship with Christ, and so that pacifism part was just part of the package for me.

Ralph: It wasn't for all the Quakers, but lots, lots more Quakers took this position.

Orville: Yep.

Ralph: Yeah. Did, do you, can you carry it, or is it appropriate to carry it a step further to what Jesus felt, or rather than just what Quakers felt?

Orville: Not at the time. That was part of it. I remember thinking this is what Christ said, and it seemed inconceivable to me to, to go to war, and claim to be a Christian, it just was part of the whole package, and it made sense to me. I...I mean, it was just kind of obvious to me, and I didn't, I didn't have to wrestle with it, because it was so obvious.

Ralph: But had you not moved to Greenleaf and gotten involved with the Quakers, presumably you're saying you would've gone ahead and gone into the military, if you were drafted.

Orville: I don't know. I, I think, I think I would have believed what Quakers believed, without being introduced to Quakerism, because that was just part of being a Christian to me. Being exposed, then, to Quakerism gave a framework for that, and helped—I'm much stronger in, in my conviction that, that pacifism is, is right than I was back then. The older I get, the more sense it makes. And really, it—Vietnam changed my—didn't change my thinking, but it solidified my thinking. It was first, well first time I was old enough to really understand what was happening in—and war just, politically, was stupid. It wasn't as much a spiritual thing as I get older, as it's just plain stupid.

Ralph: Do you think you, you took that position relative to World War II? Of course, you were a kid.

Orville: Yeah, I was pretty young. I... It was never discussed, I think. We, we weren't real active in any church.

Ralph: This was before you came to Greenleaf, right?

Orville: Right, we lived down at Eddyville.

Ralph: Yeah.

Orville: And there was no church out there. We had an old car, so we didn't go to church a whole lot. My father's family were all Methodists, my mother's were Quakers, and so that's just the way I grew up.

Ralph: Yeah. It's interesting to me to think about, suppose that you, that you and I had, were just a little bit older, and subject to the draft for World War II. What would, what would we have done then?

Orville: Uh-huh, yeah. I think I would've made the same decision then.

Ralph: Yeah.

Orville: Who knows, you know, but I, it just made, just made sense to me.

Ralph: What if, what if you had been born in Germany, as a German, and Hitler's soldiers are all each of them carried a belt buckle, or wore a belt buckle that said, "Gott mit uns," "God with us."

Orville: Right. Well, my father's family were Germans.

Ralph: Oh.

Orville: And they immigrated to America. And I do remember my father mentioning that his relatives, or who, cousins, or nephews, or whatever, on their tombstones in Germany is the inscription, "For God and country." And I don't know, that, that's a good question, because they believed what I believe, but applied it backwards!
[laughs]

Ralph: Yeah.

Orville: Yeah, I don't know.

Ralph: Yeah.

Cherice: I'm interested in hearing about Marilyn's experience as well. She grew up in the yearly meeting, so what was that—you know, did you receive training on the peace testimony as well, and that sort of thing?

Ralph: Let me just insert that her father—and I don't know the exact figures—but he attended yearly meeting every year for years and years, and he was recognized, not—he wasn't a pastor, but he was recognized as one of the really great leaders in the yearly meeting.

Marilyn: And he was a pastor, yeah.

Ralph: Oh he—

Marilyn: Oh yeah,

Ralph: I had forgotten that.

Marilyn: Several years he was a pastor, yeah.

Ralph: I guess I'm thinking after he retired.

Marilyn: Oh, no. His first pastorate was at Star Friends, and he was at Whitney Friends...

Ralph: Yeah, I had forgotten.

Marilyn: And he was an interim pastor at Greenleaf, and in, then he, then at, oh, Vancouver he was a pastor, Vancouver First Friends. So, yeah, I grew up in a pastor's home, so...

Cherice: Uh-huh. And what did you, what was your experience in terms of the Friends position on war or the peace testimony?

Marilyn: I grew up with Dad, from a long line of Quakers, so, they all believed in, that war was wrong. And, and as a result, my brother was a conscientious objector. So none of my family were part of war, didn't go to war.

Orville: We were discussing this with Arnold a year or so ago, and his recollection is that, he said, "My dad never talked about pacifism, it was not a big deal with him." And in spite of the fact that Arnold went, he didn't feel that he got that from his dad.

Marilyn: That was just accepted as part of the Quaker doctrine. Yeah.

Cherice: Okay. And did he end up serving, doing alternative service?

Marilyn: Yes. He served at the Elks Rehabilitation Center in Boise, Idaho, his two years, or whatever it was, yeah, alternative service.

Cherice: And what about you? If you had been having to make the choice about how to register for the draft, what would you have done?

Marilyn: Probably done the same thing, probably do alternative service, or whatever. Yeah. Because that was just part of my upbringing, even though he may not have talked about it a lot, but in church and stuff, it was just accepted that that was the stance.

Cherice: How do you think that was communicated to you?

Marilyn: Well, Arnold may have thought there wasn't any talk about it, but I think that there was talk about it in the home. Not as relating to us, but just as their general principles, that it was wrong, war was wrong, and so I just grew up believing that. So it was kind of like him, you just accepted what you were taught. My grandparents were ministers, Quaker ministers, so I come from a long line of it [laughs].

Cherice: Yeah. Do you know, was your dad drafted? Did he have to make that choice?

Marilyn: I don't think so.

Cherice: He was between the wars, then, probably?

Marilyn: Yeah.

Cherice: And when did you two meet?

Marilyn: Ten years ago.

Cherice: Oh really?

Marilyn: Well, actually, we went to school—both went to school at Greenleaf. He graduated the year before I became a freshman.

Cherice: Okay.

Marilyn: But his dad was the principal, and his mother was the commercial teacher, business teacher, so I guess I've known about him for a long time.

Cherice: Uh-huh. But you didn't go through these choices together at the time?

Marilyn: No.

Cherice: Okay.

Marilyn: Didn't even know each other that well.

Orville: I don't think we really ever met until about 12 years ago.

Cherice: Okay, great. And so you went to Greenleaf and you lived in several different Quaker communities—

Marilyn: Yes.

Cherice: Growing up?

Marilyn: At that time, when I was going to Greenleaf, we lived in Star, Idaho, and then part of the time, Boise, where Dad was pastoring at Whitney.

Cherice: And do you feel like this was a fairly—the peace testimony—was a fairly strong emphasis in most of the communities where you lived, or did your dad bring that to the community?

Marilyn: I think it was pretty well accepted. Grew up at Star Friends Church, and that was the stance there, and there were probably 100, 150 people that attended at Star Friends at that time. And in the community, there were strong Quaker families, so...

Cherice: Did either of you receive pushback for your stance, or your family's stance on war and conscientious objection issues?

Marilyn: I didn't.

Orville: I never did. We went to Greenleaf, then we went to Fox, and then I went to seminary, and Asbury's Methodist, so they, they didn't necessarily have that stance, but it wasn't hard for Methodists to be pacifist.

Cherice: Okay. And then you pastored after that in Friends churches out here?

Orville: Yes, yes. After seminary I started the church at Tigard.

Cherice: Okay.

Orville: And I was there for 11 years, and then we moved to Fresno and I was there for 20 years, so, then I came back to Oregon.

Marilyn: I spent a couple of years at Northwest Nazarene University, but they didn't have a particular stance. I mean, most of those boys went to war, so...

Cherice: But they didn't, you didn't feel like anybody was pushing back on your opinion?

Marilyn: No. If I'd have been a man, a boy, I might have, because they didn't even accept women in the Army at that time.

Cherice: Yeah.

Marilyn: Or, the military.

Cherice: And you said your opinion changed during Vietnam, or at least got deeper, maybe.

Orville: Right.

Cherice: So, did you counsel students that were growing up during the Vietnam era about their draft decision?

Orville: I'm sorry, I...

Marilyn: Did you counsel people, young people, about...?

Cherice: About what to choose for draft registration?

Orville: No, I really didn't. I don't, I don't know. Well, I do remember at Fresno, of course, you know, I went to Fresno during, in '66, so right in the middle of, of that. And some, there were a few—two or three—of our youth that, they knew enough to know that as Friends, that was our position, and they wanted, I did some paperwork, you know, for their draft boards, but, we didn't make a big deal out of that, no.

Ralph: And in the '60s, the issues were an awful lot of patriotism and anti-Americanism...

Orville: Yes.

Ralph: If you opposed the war. But then, then you were unpatriotic.

Orville: Right.

Ralph: But the war became very unpopular, then, by the end of the '60s.

Orville: Right.

Ralph: And so it's, different than just a conscientious issue, it has to do with patriotism, and if you were for the war you were considered, by an awful lot of people, considered way out, whereas for most people, generally, being for the—a war that your country is in is of course a patriotic thing. But the war became so unpopular that there was... So it's hard to really put it down as this or that on the, on

these issues, because it wasn't just conscience issues, had a lot to do with just the feeling that, that we were wasting people's lives.

Orville: Yeah.

Ralph: It really wasn't a conscience issue.

Orville: It was a political issue.

Ralph: Political issue, yeah.

Orville: Looking at Vietnam, we paid an awful price, and we lost that, but now Vietnam is a trading partner with the United States, and we don't worry about Communism and all the hoopla that was part of that. And, and the wars since, since then have been just as, as pointless as that was. It didn't have the emotional part of it, but still, you know, Korea, that's, that's never [laughs] never been settled, you know, and probably never will be. And then, Afghanistan, Iraq, and up until, well, even, you know this, up until that time, World War I and II, you went in, you fought the war, there was a victory. Now there's no end. We're in endless war, and it looks like we're going to be there for a long time, and none of that makes, makes sense. Just, just the other day, our, some news broadcast said we are, we're fighting in wars in 300 different places in the world, just, you know, some of them just little, special serv—units, but we're there.

Ralph: But after World War II, the, the big deal was the fear of communism.

Orville: Right.

Ralph: And Russia, that represented Russia, and where we had been allies, then after World War II, we, there was always that struggle, and so all over the world, was really the struggle between the United States and Russia, or between communism, or between communism and the "good guys."

Orville: Right, yeah.

Ralph: [Someone came into the room] Go ahead...I'm sorry. So, any other questions?

Cherice: I have one more, I think, at least. We'll see if it goes anywhere after that. But, so you talked about these things as, kind of, your political views changing. Were they things that you spoke about in church at all, or were they, you know, were you trying to separate your politics from your pastoral duties?

Orville: Yeah, yeah. For me, I guess, frankly, it's always been more of a political view than a religious view, although because of my exposure there's such a religious part of that, but...

Cherice: As a pastor, did you talk about it at church, though, or was it something you separated out as your own personal stuff?

Orville: It was kind of a separate...yeah. I hadn't thought of this for years, but you asked about what changed my mind, or how I got into that. I do remember when I was at Greenleaf, in high school, and this is strange, I don't understand it, but I do remember it. Some of us high school kids were sitting on the front steps of Greenleaf Church, and Keith Williams came by, for whatever reason, and he saw us there and he stopped, and we were just talking, visiting with him, and how we got into it, I don't know, but he made a very strong statement for pacifism, and, and that, I still remember that as, if there's one event, one experience, it was, rather than a sermon or a Sunday school class, or whatever, that convinced me that pacifism was right, that, that was it. And I don't think he ever knew that. [laughs] And I'm not sure how that all happened, but I remember it happening there. Yeah.

Cherice: Great. Yeah, well, and I'd ask the same question of you, Marilyn. During the Vietnam War especially, when these types of political conversations were probably pretty hot, do you remember how your Friends church dealt with issues about the war? Did people talk about it, either pastors or other leaders?

Marilyn: I don't recall. It was just something that was kind of accepted in our circles, and I don't recall them talking about it.

Cherice: So even into Vietnam, it was kind of unspoken?

Marilyn: Yeah. They, they were against it, I know that—and thought that this was not, we shouldn't have gone in there, but, you know, about what we would do personally, I don't think there was a lot of talk about that. Everybody just thought that it was wrong. [laughs] So, yeah.

Cherice: So it was just kind of assumed that whoever was going there was against the war, but you didn't necessarily discuss it a lot?

Marilyn: Right, yeah.

Cherice: Okay. I think that's all my questions.

Ralph: Okay, well, thank you so much!

Orville: Alright.

Cherice: Thank you. It's good to hear your stories and thoughts.

Orville: Didn't get very much concrete stuff. [laughter]

Cherice: Kind of how it goes. We're interested in your thoughts, too, and the way that you made decisions, and influences and that sort of thing, so this was great, thank you.

Ralph: Good.

Orville: So.

Marilyn: Thank you!