University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives
Student Protest Reunion Oral History Project
Interviewee: Joseph Hardin
Interviewer: Katie Nichols
October 2019
Length: 00:43:19

Katie Nichols: Okay.

Joseph Hardin: Can I have a pencil?

KN: Sure. This is Kate Nichols, and I'm interviewing Joseph Hardin, and we are at the Archives Research Center in Ellen's office. Okay, so can you tell me your name and the years you were at University of Illinois?

JH: My name is Joseph Hardin, and I was a student, an undergraduate student between '65 and '70. I came back after being away for a while, and was a graduate student then in the '70s and into the '80s. And then worked at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications here until '97 from '86 to '97. So the question, when was I at Champaign-Urbana, or was it the University?

KN: A long time. [Laughs.]

JH: Yeah. Off and on.

KN: Okay, and so, how did you become involved in student protest?

JH: Uh, how did I become involved is an ambiguous question. I became involved by being concerned about the war and about a lot of other issues, civil rights. In one case, a rout for me was some demonstrations and talking with other people, and then feeling that I needed to do some more. Founding the underground newspaper, *The Walrus*, which we put together, I can't remember—'67, I think, '66 or probably '67—and used it as a way to gather together some of the ideas and get them out there to people.

KN: Mhm. Okay. So, that was my next question, actually, what was your goal in founding *The Walrus*? It sounds like you sort of explained that. How did you get that off the ground?

JH: We found a place, we found—the first thing to do when you're putting together a newspaper is to find a printer. And we couldn't find a printer in Champaign-Urbana, but there was one in Rantoul who didn't care what we said. And that's good, because we said lots of things that other people thought were outrageous. So we found a printer, and I talked to some friends, a friend from high school who was up here, did the graphics for the masthead, and a few other friends contributed articles, and we learned how

to lay it out, I think, if I remember correctly, from the printer. He gave us the layout sheets, and we typed the thing up. I did the photographic work, and that's how we got it off the ground.

There was basically just a small group of people, largely already known to each other, friends that we had met through meetings, maybe some of them SDS, mostly. I don't know if we were doing SDS then. Mostly SFS, Students for Free Speech. And some other things. And so we basically found a place to do it, which was the basement of the Unitarian, Universalist Church on campus, which later became the Red Herring, but we used their basement because you need a lot of room to lay stuff out. So that's how we got it off the ground. I can't remember what exactly the question was.

KN: Oh, it was—

JH: How did we get it started?

KN: How did you get that going, yeah.

JH: Yeah, so that's how we got it going.

KN: Okay. And so when you, when you decided you had concerns about, you know, the variety of things going on at that time that you wanted to take a stand against, how—so for example, when you were going to get involved in these groups, like SFS or SDS, how did you find those areas to get involved in? Was it through friends?

JH: Partially through friends, partially through notes that were put up, notices. Sometimes, you know, a friend, and you would say, 'What is all of this business that's going on?' There were demonstrations that you could participate in, and it—were used to find people like myself and get it, get them involved, or at least give them other people to talk to, a place to find other people to talk to. There were meetings in various places. In the Union, in the Unitarian Church, Universalist Church there, and that's how we basically, that's how we found routes into the existing activities. And then out of that—out of that interaction, out of that activity, sprung things like the newspaper. And that gave you another opportunity to sit around and work with other people, talk with other people, and decide what you were for as well as what you were against, and figure out a way to say it. Because a lot of times what we felt were things that didn't have normal, or didn't have established ways of expression. So we had to figure out, how would you make this clear to people that you think that there's a whole lot of things, including structures, that are limiting. How do you work within those structures, to change the structure, to bring them down, or change them?

And when you're working on a newspaper, it's kind of hierarchical, too. There's—we didn't have, like, a board and stuff like that. It was a bunch of people, but it was, it was clear who you know, that a couple people were making decisions, final decisions. Like with the first issue, there was one guy who wanted

to put in an article, and I said no, because we didn't really understand the article that he wanted to put in, and the feeling of the other people in the group was basically, let's just put in stuff that we all, you know, firmly agree on. So we had to work that out, stuff like that. But you're basically working in an anti-hierarchical mindset, trying to figure out how to do things consensually, collectively, cooperatively, and that can sometimes take a lot of time and be difficult.

KN: Sure. And what kind of reception was there when you put out your first issue?

JH: Uh, it was, you know, mixed. We hawked it on the quad behind the Union. And the number of people who bought it—I think we charged a nickel or a dime, I can't remember. Depending on how long we stood out there and held up the newspaper and said, you know, Walrus Underground Press. And there were a couple, as with anything, there's a couple people who were natural salesmen. Bob Solomon was one guy who would go out there and sell tons of newspapers. And I think at times we left them in places, also. People didn't have to buy them. We encouraged subscriptions. We encouraged a lot of people to come and help, and some people did. There were very few subscriptions, and distribution was sporadic, as was publication.

KN: Right, okay. Um, so I saw in your bio paragraph that you sent that you attended the Democratic Convention in 1968.

JH: Yep.

KN: Can you tell me a little about, bit about that? Were there a lot of UIUC students there?

JH: Well, there was a group of us that went up. We drove up together. And we took a couple things ourselves, and a couple of silk screen presses, which are big frames that are stretched with silk that you put a cut out, or you—a blocking material, you basically paint on them, and then you can make big posters. And I mean big posters, three feet by four feet by three feet, depending on how big your frame is. But we'd gotten into that because we were trying to find a way that we could help with stuff that we thought would be going on up there. And one way that we we could, we felt, was we were close by. We could bring something that was cumbersome. And I think I had a station wagon at the time. We stuck it in the back. But when we got there, there were a couple of occasions where it became useful.

One was working with some of the Black Panthers that were there, they had a number of, obviously, a number of issues, but a number of cases where they'd like to see things that we were doing slightly changed. In one specific case, we were working with the Peace and Freedom party at the time, which had Eldridge Cleaver as one of its candidates, because we, this was the group of people that just were—had had it with the Democratic Party. I mean, we were not interested in "getting clean for Gene." Other people that you may interview for this were. We wanted, you know, big change. We wanted something significantly different than that, and felt, in retrospect, probably incorrectly, that it didn't make any

difference whether Humphrey or Nixon got elected, right? So we didn't care what went on in the convention itself, unless they, you know, had brought out somebody like Gene, the—a radical candidate, which clearly they weren't going to. And the other potential candidate been shot, Bobby Kennedy, so there really wasn't any interest in doing stuff with the, with the party. We were there basically to express the fact that we thought this was a horrible state of affairs and the war was the main issue. And if they couldn't get that straight, then they may as well just go home.

And so we were supporting a different, a completely separate party, a new party, the Peace and Freedom Party. And like I said, Eldridge Cleaver. Cleaver was one of the candidates. And there were a couple of the West Coast Black Panthers that were there and came over to the place where we were making posters of Eldridge. And there was, it was a head shot that Brian—can't remember, starting with Fagan?—had done just, an excellent artist, had just done on the spur of the moment. And we put a Peace and Freedom button on him with a dove on it. And one of the guys, I can't remember if it was Bobby Seale or Fred—no, I don't think, I'm not sure if Fred Hampton was there. And anyway, it was one of the West Coast guys who said, you know, 'When we take these posts—these are great posters, by the way.' And we said, 'Wow, far out.' 'When we take them into the community, we need these people to know that the brother is with the Panthers. So why don't you put on, you know, another part of the poster on the other side of his shirt, or whatever, the other side of his, of the poster a Black Panther Party button.' And so we worked on that, and did that.

And so we did a bunch of stuff like that. We, you know, went to the demonstrations down in in front of the Michigan, I can't even remember what it was. Was it the hotel? There was a park. There was uh, Grant Park, where the cops came and, you know, tried to beat everybody up, and were relatively successful at times, and marched a couple times out where the National Guard stopped us and tear gassed us and all that kind of stuff. And, you know, felt at times that we were doing something worthwhile and making it clear that there was a strong opposition to what was going on inside the convention, and that the focus should be on making it —publicizing as much as possible to the world that there was a native opposition in the United States to the war that the United States was waging in Southeast Asia.

KN: Okay. What were you studying when you were an undergrad there?

JH: I started out in pre-med, switched over to sociology, and graduated, if I remember correctly, with a history minor and a chem major. Or a history major and a chem minor.

KN: Okay.

JH: So it was kind of, you know, build your own program.

KN: Right.

JH: At that point in time, I had no intention of continuing with the studies. There were lots of other things that I felt were more important to do.

KN: Right, right. And it's hard to imagine this—your studies taking any kind of priority when you had all this other stuff going on.

JH: Yeah, there was a lot of time that I got an A, a B, a C, a D, and an E. [Nichols laughs.] I remember one semester, not a lot of times, but there was one semester where that happened, and my grades were nothing to talk about. So, as an undergraduate anyway.

KN: Right.

JH: So, yeah, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what I wanted to do and trying to help with what I thought were the most important things that were going on.

KN: Mhm. And do you feel that there were any lasting repercussions that came out of your, your activism while you were in school?

JH: For myself, or for the world?

KN: For, for your—both. Both. For yourself, first.

JH: Well for myself, absolutely, because it was a formative period. Um, the idea that the United States could be wrong. The government is something that is contingent, that it can change, and it can make mistakes, and it can be fundamentally mistaken at times, was something that we were not taught growing up. It was some—it was a very different period. The '50s were—and the early '60s—were a great period to be a kid, if you were in the middle class and white in the United States, because there were so many things happening. Everything was getting better. The sense of progress was not just palpable, it was ingrained. There was—there was, wasn't a question. There wasn't any fear that there would be, that things would get worse, that things would economically or socially.

The Civil Rights Movement had given us the idea that relations between the races and the idea of white racism, one was getting to be a thing of the past. The relations were getting to be better. And that, with the i—with the notion that we could at least try and stop a war, that was a huge deal. And in '68 we basically deposed a president when Lyndon stepped down, and we considered that, you know, a first step. The fact that Nixon was elected in '68 was in a time, at the time, in a sense, disappointing, and in another sense, it just reinforced our ideas that the United States was largely a very reactionary conservative country. So the job of somebody like myself who felt that way was to find ways to work to change that.

So when I left school, immediately, I worked in a preschool that had Latino and African American kids in it, and then I went on to work with a bunch of community businesses in different places, including Champaign. And the idea of being politically aware, and that being a big part of my life, was always something that was critical, I mean, for, you know, politics. Some people think it's just, you know, a dirty word, right? That it's people trying to make money or screw other people over. But for, well, like for people, like ancient Greeks, it was basically the way you interacted with other people. The idea of politics, the polis, was the city, right? I mean, it's what it is that you do when you're with a large number of other people, how you, how you act, how you interact, how you work together, things like that. So it's at the foundation of the way that I think about things, and that was a result of the time I spent in the '60s and the people and the events and my responses and my reading and thinking and stuff like that.

The effect it had on the world is obviously much more complicated. The world didn't, you know, wake up and say, 'Ah, we have to change things.' For the established interest in the kind in the country, they dug in. And so we had a period of what I consider to be very disappointing, very unenlightened, very reactionary, very destructive activities in the political sphere in the United States, while at the same time, the seeds were sown for what's called, what's been called, the Cultural Revolution, with sexual mores, with women's liberation, with all different kinds of people who were not included or not allowed to be included in everyday activities in the political sphere or social sphere in other cases, coming out in lots of different ways, coming out and establishing their own power bases and that becoming something that was much more accepted in the United States.

I mean, in the 1960s the notion that homosexuals would be accepted as just another type of orientation of choice or not—just that's some people think it's just the way that they are—but that was almost beyond the pale in the '60s, even on the left. There were lots of homophobic reactions—as there were misogynistic reactions—in the left in the 1960s. I can remember one of the leaders here saying that women think with their cunt. And that, you know, is something that would be totally out of the question right now. I mean, that kind of thinking. And the way we got from there to here, really, I think, was partially brought about by the fact that we spent so much time just saying, 'Look, here's other options. Here's other ways you can be. Here's other ways that you can relate to other people. Here's other opportunities. You don't have to do what everybody has done before or what people say you should do.'

So now, 50 years fucking on, perhaps we could look back and say some of the seeds that we sowed have been successful, were successful in sprouting and growing into strong and effective movements, and with strong and effective people who have made their voices heard so that women minorities of different types, whether it's a racial minority or a sexual minority, or orientation toward this, that or another, that those are much more accepted. And indeed, that's my hope right now. Diversity is the hope for the country. If you can't, if you can't, if we can't work together, and if we can't get people who have been in the past oppressed in different ways, left out in different ways, ignored, degraded, whatever, in different ways, demeaned, to come together then then we have a bit—then we're not going to have the kind of

society that I want. And it looks like some of that is happening. So the question of how, what, how did this affect the rest of the world is, like I said, complicated, and over a 50 year period, it's hard to—it's almost impossible to sum, but that gives us an idea.

KN: Yeah.

JH: Right.

KN: Can you tell me a little bit about Earthworks Garage?

JH: One of the things that we thought at the time was that there were better ways to do everything, whether it was being in relationships or being in politics or living your daily life. And there was a community that was, that was growing up of people who felt the same way, and that community then would need services. And there was a better way to do things like garages, things like grocery stores, things like record stores, things like secondhand stores. So Earthworks—restaurants—so Earthworks Garage was one attempt to make that real. To say, 'Okay, if that's what you think, then why don't you try and do it?' And so three of us, Don Christianson, Mike Metz, and myself, said, 'We know enough about cars, and we've got this book that tells us how to rebuild VW engines, so why don't we open a garage?' Right?

I mean this, this is not the kind of thing that you would encourage anybody else to do. [Nichols laughs.] This is the kind of thing that you do in a surfeit of confidence and feeling that this is going to be exciting, right? Just basically feeding off the energy of, of the time and of the period and the fact that you didn't want to go do a straight job. You, there wasn't anything that you could look at, that you could have the kind of passion for, that you could building something up from nothing, and helping other people and showing other people that there was another way for it. So we were hippie entrepreneurs, but at the same time, cultural, you know, priests, preachers. I'm not sure what the right—there's a P word that I can't remember, who wanted to get that, that message out, and this was the way that we decided to do it. So we found an old garage—there was, by a building that other community groups, other community businesses, were in. There was an old garage, just an empty garage, and so we put some work benches in there and started blowing up cars.

KN: Okay, very cool. Let's see. Did you—would you say that there were any allies on faculty or in the administration?

JH: Sure. Yeah. In the administration, that's a much more difficult question. There were, there was at least one person, the ombudsman, and I can't remember his name, big guy. Bill? Phil would remember. Phil might remember his name and his wife, they were hired by the administration. Their job was to keep everything cooled out. So like with Project 500 they did some excellent work in just getting people to talk to each other. So within the administration, not so much. Within the faculty, sure, there were a

number of people who were very supportive, very active, worked with us in a number of ways. In the political science department, English department, they were scattered all over the place, ag department, that then and in the following years, contributed to the newspaper or to activities and different movements, different—working on different political problems as time went on. So yes, within the faculty, there were plenty of faculty who felt strongly about what was going on with the war, especially. There were a number of faculty who had gotten the idea—especially women—who had gotten the idea that there was something fundamentally wrong in the way that sexual relations were set up. So there was a number of people that helped us.

There was another—there were faculty members who started their own paper, and we helped them. *The Laputa Gazette* was started by some people in the English department, and we, I remember sitting down with them and basically saying, 'Here's how you lay out a newspaper. Here's where you go to get it printed. Here's the kind of things that we found are easy to do and the things that are hard to do,' and getting them off the ground. I'm not sure— in fact, I came back with my wife, and we took digital images, pictures of all of *The Walrus* newspapers that were here and gave them back to the archives here. We haven't done that with *The Laputa Gazette*, and I don't remember—I think that last year we had somebody do it, but *The Laputa Gazette* was someplace else. It wasn't here. It was like over in the stacks or something.

KN: Oh, okay.

JH: There were other groups that helped us. There was the newspaper that was put out by the Black community called the, the *Plain Truth*, which was a model. It was the first underground newspaper that I was aware of in Champaign-Urbana community, and it was an organizing tool for—and consciousness raising tool and community building tool—for those in the Black community that were trying to change things there. A lot of the skills, a lot of the methods and techniques and, and just energy ideas that came out of that, out of the African American community that was working on their, their issues were things that we just took over. We just said, 'This is a good way to do things and learn from them.' And that's an example, too.

So not just faculty, but other groups within the religious community. There were a number of places, the Methodist Church, Unitarians, Quakers, of course. One of the first people that I ever saw demonstrating was, I can't remember his name, is a Quaker who just stood on the steps of the auditorium quietly over lunch hour in. And I don't remember if he had a sign or not, but there were at least some articles that said he was a silent protest against the war, and that was, I think, one of the first times that I had seen somebody protest against [unclear]. So within the religious community, within Black community, within the faculty, with not so much the administration. The administration, this—universities are a business.

KN: Right.

JH: They're not interested in change, and they're certainly not interested in a message that hierarchical exploitive economic enterprises are a bad idea. That's their job, right? So they were pretty much in opposition.

KN: Right. Okay. And what year did *The Walrus* stop?

JH: I don't know. *The Walrus* went on. We passed it on to a couple of other people in '69.

KN: Okay.

JH: Another collective, actually, it was a group of people who did things that we would not have imagined, actually. When I look back, when I go through the issues of *The Walrus*, there were things that were, that I thought were just outrageous at the time. That freaked me out. And were basically the next, you know, round the next turn of the wheel. As political consciousness evolved, developed, changed and, and was expressed, there was probably, I think it went on until '76.

KN: Oh, okay.

JH: I'm not sure I'd have to go back, and—

KN: I could very easily find it [laughs].

JH: Yeah, you can go check in the other room. But it went through a lot of different guises. There were other spinoff papers. You've got a poster of *The Geek* up there. That was one that was—there were many different parts of the, the alternative community, the movement, underground, whatever you want to call it, and some of them were more political than others. I mean, it's—at times there were people who would identify as freaks or hippies, but not as politicos, right? And there were people who would identify as being political and not necessarily being interested in the counterculture. They—it was, it was a much more complicated situation.

There was one group that worked at, that set up something I helped set up called The Print Shop. The Print Co-op? The Print Shop. I think was called The Print Shop. It was up on Springfield Ave. I think the place was blown away when all those buildings, Beckman Institute, and everything that grew out from it, were established. I was in just a little itty-bitty building, and we found a press because there were certain things that we couldn't get printed even in Rantoul. So in the end, we basically had to get our own press. And I, like I said, when I did, I mentioned what some of the things I did for *The Walrus* was photographic work, and so I set up a dark room at the print co-op, because the way you made the sheets, the plates that printed offset still do this, was to use a photographic process. You did your layout, took a picture of that layout, and you made a huge negative, and you burned that into the plate, right?

And then you developed the plate, and that was what you put on the press, on the wheel of the press, and basically inked it and it spit out the newspapers or the posters or alternative papers like *The Geek*.

The Geek was certainly much more of a political paper than *The Walrus*, even. *The Walrus* was much more politics and culture when you look back at it, if you did a comparison. And there were times in which different parts of the community, different people, not surprisingly, felt that they had a message that wasn't being sufficiently covered even in alternative papers like the press, so they put out their own. There was an excellent issue of it on the women's movement, women's issues, that I think, gosh, Gail Reed and a couple other people did. You have a copy of it here. It got stuck in with the—I ran across it when I was doing *The Walrus* stuff. But that came out of The Print Shop.

KN: Right.

JH: And so there were lots of other places, lots of other, uh, organizations. There was a BSA paper. The Black Student Association put out a paper. I've mentioned, the *Plain Truth*, it went on, I don't know for how long. *The Laputa Gazette*, I don't remember how long it went on, either, the faculty paper. They did some excellent coverage of Project 500 and the administration response. And the faculty response, too. They, they, I don't know how long they went on. So if you went back and you looked at all the primary sources that are available, there's quite a few. And again, I've forgotten the question.

KN: That's okay, that's—we like it when the interviews go like this [laughs]. [Crosstalk] good stuff that way. Okay, so before we wrap up, is there anything else that you want to talk about? Anything you want to mention?

JH: Um, I don't know. I think we're here partially because Mike wrote a book, and I think that it's an excellent book. And I think that it, as any finite effort must, had to focus in on something. And it focused in on the leadership of—that was present at the time. I'd like to emphasize that there's, there was so much else going on. That there were lots of people who were involved in lots of political activities and lots of of countercultural activities that would never figure in the kinds of confrontations that he described in the book. Or people that might show up for a demonstration, or when the National Guard was sent in, who felt strongly enough that that was important, but who never went to an SDS meeting. One friend who is in one of the pictures that's in the book and was on and it's—that pictures in the book, because it was on the cover the second issue of *The Walrus*—later became the chairman of the Economics Department at Eastern University, and when I talked with him about the book, he said, 'So—it's important to remember that so much of the change went on in the streets.' Which doesn't mean that people were out there fighting in the streets.

It meant—it means that so much went on in the individual lives of people outside of the context of any type of organization. It was such a period of questioning, of changing understandings, of trying to build new understandings. In one of the earliest issues of *The Walrus*, there's an article, a small—it's like a

note that's by, I think, Kathy Berkey and Gail Reed announcing that they're having, they want to have a meeting of women to talk about things, and they weren't sure what to call it. They said, 'We're not sure if we're trying to set up a union. We're not absolutely sure what this is all about, but we have this—we have a feeling, we understand, and we're beginning to believe strongly that we need to talk about this.'

That was the essence of the period, of discovering all the different things that were possible, and all the ways in which the existing ways of doing things, existing structures, existing relationships, existing institutions, limited possibilities that cut people off from realization of of a better—of dreams of a better life, of other ways of interacting with other people. And better ways. And that kind of questioning would be a different book, a book that talked about that kind of understanding, that kind of roiling of the individual and personal and collective belief system and trying to make sense of it, and at times failing miserably and falling back into ways of doing things that were more traditional and more limiting. And at times, for a moment, feeling a spark, feeling that something was different, and that was done individually and in small groups that would—whose stories would take, of course, volumes. And that's why I bring it up now, because it's something that would be a much larger and, in many ways, equally, if not more, enlightening in interesting way of looking at what happened during the period.

It would be interesting to take Mike's book as a starting point and say, 'Okay, we have a basic understanding of what happened among the leadership and in the traditional press, the campus paper, the local paper, and what the interaction with the existing institutions was.' Now with that as a background or as a given understanding, what was going on among people's lives and in the way that they were thinking about things, and the way they were talking and trying to build new things that led to, in some cases, those activities, but in other cases, very different activities and activities that didn't lead to anything other than an understanding of what it was that we were trying to do and an understanding of different ways of doing things. And that, I felt was, was like I said, epitomized in that initial tentative questioning appeal that was put out by those two women at the beginning of a period of massive change in the way that we understood relations between people, and especially, including between men and women.

So that kind of—you asked me, what kinds of things would I like to talk about, or what other things would I want to investigate. It would be those things. It would be those things, and how people started thinking about their spiritual or their religious beliefs, how that interacted. I mean, there's been a huge falling off in the years afterwards, in participation in traditional religious organizations. And does that mean people have lost a sense of spirituality? I don't think so. But those kinds of things are parts of the cultural revolution, which is a difficult and incomplete term, but the, the opening up of possibilities that was in some ways initiated or was part of the activities that went on in the political sphere.

KN: Right. Okay, well.

JH: Okay. Great, thanks a million.