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Scene

The Next Turn

*A miscellany*

Heavy doses of U.S. aid continued to finance the fighting in Vietnam, protracted now as the puppet government in Saigon - with the shadowy assistance of American air power and military advisors - faced the communist forces from Hanoi who gathered their revitalized guerrilla allies as they advanced southward. News on the war's progress remained steady, but was seldom featured prominently since the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops. For home consumption, the war was now cast largely in ideological not military language. All the rear guard Movement radicals like us were rooting for the commies, while the official line of the Nixon administration, whether guarded or upbeat, masked from public scrutiny the fading chances of the discredited regime of President Nguyen Van Thieu and his demoralized army.

The Movement collectively amplified its broad opposition to continued support for Saigon wherever our voices were heard. A few groupings, one around old guard SDS icon Tom Hayden and the actress Jane Fonda, continued to organize medical relief and cheerlead vocally on behalf of the liberation forces in Vietnam. I'm certain we contributed to their efforts, even as, under Safe Return's roof we probably argue that Hanoi was doing smashingly well without us - meaning both the Movement and the U.S., and that we should now be focused on domestic issues. That said, the Vietnam War, viewed in all its complexities and shadings, still engendered the organizing principles that sustained the remaining activist corps within the United States. At Safe Return we viewed ourselves as operating within a generalized radical left culture where, to one degree or another, a comprehensive list of hyphenated *antis - imperialism, capitalism, neo-colonialism, racism, sexism* - stood for a revolutionary program. In practice we kept pumping

into the public discourse more digestible expressions of opposition, as within the campaign for amnesty. In the background, a few small groups and projects like ours were once again ramping up our longstanding, if recently sidetracked, solidarity work among dissident GIs who found themselves still serving out their enlistments in one branch or another of the U.S. armed forces.

One rear mirror reading, if you follow the internal logic of Safe Return's self-described *raison d'être*, might hold that Tod, Eddie, and I - hardly alone among innumerable other New Leftists - saw in aiming at the government a succession of impossible demands that could not be compromised or co-opted, a strategy for exposing fundamental hypocrisies and flaws in the American way of life. The shafting of deserters who we had recast as working class war resisters, and the demand for their complete exoneration, was one such scenario. This was revolution by piece work.

Beyond the margins of the micro-political sideshow being showcased in this memoir, the larger world took its course. Activists like us possessed obsessional appetites for political writing of every sort, and followed all the domestic and international ups and downs in the news. Like most engaged and literate Manhattan denizens we began each day with a healthy briefing of *The New York Times*. We might put our quasi-Marxist spin on the fact that inflation tore at the economy, and at gas prices having soared three-fold since the OPEC boycott. But we were immune from the impact of such negative trends. We operated no motor vehicles, rode public transportation, and we subsisted and entertained ourselves cheaply at a time when it was still possible to do so in the great metropolis. We traveled frequently, and on Safe Return's dime, which now paid lodgings when no option of a crash pad presented itself. This was no great perk in those day since, when Tod and I traveled together, he would usually drag us to some flea bag. If we arrived in our destination by bus or train, then we'd stay in the flop district near the

terminals, not to economize the few bucks it would have cost for a modest alternative, but for the seedy, atmosphere that fed the hip noir persona Tod cultivated, and I was content to go along with.

Over these months, and on through the summer, the single story that dominated the mainstream news cycles such that no one who picked up a newspaper or news magazine, or turned on the radio or TV, could escape it, was the spectacle of Watergate. The public embraced the scandal, relished the ever expanding details of a conspiracy served up serial fashion in the print media by investigative journalists, and captured live in the high drama of congressional hearings, culminating with the impeachment proceedings themselves broadcast live almost daily.

I retain a vivid memory of the Watergate public narrative and the manner of its unfurling. Equally strong is my pictorial memory of the televised images, watching the arrogant villains of Nixon's White House squirm and dissemble before their congressional inquisitors. It's not that I was much of a TV watcher in those days. I did have a portable black and white set in my apartment, and I would have been at home many nights early enough to catch the 11 o'clock news, wrestling the whole time with the bars of a rabbit ear antenna to capture a viewable screen.

Nixon's downfall was the ultimate repudiation of the Vietnam War, and, of the politics of paranoia that had become paradigmatic at the height of the Cold War. It would take another thirty years with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 before the militarist party, essentially by-partisan, could again pursue the massive use of force in a foreign war, a remarkable interval of peace for post-twentieth century Americans, which the First Gulf War of such short duration ten years earlier had barely disturbed.

In the spring of 1974, Nixon's downfall was a work in progress, and no one could yet reasonably predict how it would end, least of all foresee his resignation. A status quo hung in the

air, and, at Safe Return, we continued to operate as if the Movement itself had become a permanent fixture on the American political landscape. As we spent June tensely awaiting Lew Simon's chances for clemency, then, ever conscious of Fila's ticking clock, suffered through July the slow progress of Lew's separation from the Army, the pace of our activities remained brisk. The future was uncertain only in the act of making choices of the options before us. After Lew's release, we devoted some time to announcing his good news to our supporters, and in thanking particularly groups like the AFSC, CCCO and FOR - the latter to our consternation had used the case for its own fund raising campaign - for the pressures they brought to bear, sharing credit with them for this successful outcome. The greater burden of what busied us that month looked to the days ahead.

Third party initiatives to consolidate the Movement's many pieces into a viable opposition for the political long game were not uncommon. The latest attempt was the People's Party that the legendary baby doctor, and life-long peace activist, Benjamin Spock, had launched. News of the new party's inaugural convention probably came to us over the transom. Ed Sowers began a correspondence, inquiring about the fees for registration and tabling. This elicited a response from one Chuck Avery, who was apparently directing the party's organizational apparatus to which both Spock and comedian Dick Gregory would give their names for the pre-designated presidential ticket. Avery would turn out to be a self-inflated political boss in the paunchy body of a tall, long-stringy-haired and very angry gay man. At this stage we merely sensed the pomposity when Avery replied to Ed by delivering his *line* that "those who were going to engage in a capitalistic effort should help pay the cost of the facility," and would be assessed a fee of \$25 for literature tables. "We prefer that only free literature be brought. Selling turns us off."

This, in any case, was a shot across the wrong bow. We always distributed Safe Return materials gratis, asking for donations perhaps, but selling only a few items of merchandise like amnesty bracelets, and, over one recent stretch, boxed sets of Christmas cards, both more for educational ends than income. That the People's Party was in the hands of an apparent buffoon did not bother us, as I am certain we would have seen the entire enterprise as a failure in the making. Our only interest was to get a resolution promoting amnesty pegged to the midterm elections in November that we could parade among those constituencies where the People's Party might momentarily draw attention. A follow-up letter from Ed Sowers to the People's Party's procedure's committee confirmed that both Tod and I planned to attend the convention, and, as instructed, we would be submitting our resolution on amnesty in advance.

We still saw great value in making the widest possible public case for amnesty as a vehicle for education around the social and economic injustices we opposed, always hammering away on the criminality of the Vietnam War and those who led it. But we now did so by all but removing ourselves from formal relations with our counterparts in activist amnesty circles, whether one on one among its component member groups like AMEX or VVAW, or when gathered in coalition as NCUUA. Our communication, we with them, or vice versa, now rested largely on the routine mailings all Movement groups distributed to promote their politics and activities, and these continued to fly in from all directions. Even detached from personal contact, the rivalry with our adversaries thus continued through the mails

VVAW/WSO,<sup>1</sup> as the organization was now styled by the Maoist militants who had captured it, reemerged in its new wrapping with a handsome tabloid newspaper, and announced its call for a July 4<sup>th</sup> demonstration in Washington.<sup>2</sup> The demo would be multi-themed, A laundry list of demands appeared in their broadside set boldly against a day glow orange

background : Amnesty; Implement the Peace Accords; a Single Military Discharge, Increase of Veterans Benefits, and Kick Nixon Out! The editorial drawing is in the heroic tradition, featuring the masses led by Black GIs with their fists aloft, while in the distance Nixon is seen cowering under the Capitol Dome.

The inclusion of a singularly pragmatic demand for better benefits likely reflected an internal shift in VVAW in response to a change of emphasis in the larger demographic of antiwar Vietnam vets. This was illustrated most dramatically by the actions of one of its most high profile members, Bobby Muller, who was wheelchair bound from combat wounds. Muller had abandoned VVAW and antiwar politics when he founded Vietnam Veterans of America, a service organization patterned after the traditional veterans' lobby that pressures Congress for better benefits and health care. Since VVAW clearly understood the class nature of the veteran experience, the workers' welfare issue was easily wrapped within its program for revolutionary socialism.

A more recent VVAW defector was Ron Kovic, author of the stirring memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*. Linda Alband mentioned in a letter to Tod that our old GI movement pal, Paul Cox, was alarmed about Kovic also flirting with the creation of a service group of his own. In Paul's words, according to Linda, Kovic was being "maneuvered to becoming the next American Legion." Radical veterans like Paul and I generally defined our veteran identities in strictly antiwar terms, and despised the pro-military politics of what we called the 'hat vets,' like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars.<sup>3</sup> Many of us entertained similarly negative opinions about the Veterans Administration. I had even joined the Lawyers Guild for access to their medical plan rather than seek the health care from the VA to which I was entitled, such was

the depths of my alienation from every branch of the U.S. government that even legitimate self-interest did not transcend it.

The Movement was a medium for mobilizing ideas as well as people. The idea of the heroic Old Left was expressed in a mid-June memorial gala for the Rosenbergs at Carnegie Hall, headlined by stars among the CP faithful and fellow-travelers: Pete Seeger, Ossie Davis, Rip Torn and Ring Lardner, Jr., along with the Helen and Morton Sobell, close comrades - and Morton a co-defendant jailed for more than seventeen years - of the martyrs, and the most outspoken proclaimers of their innocence. Being a Stalinist shindig, and likely not a cheap ticket, it would have been a permissible omission for Tod and I and our Trotskyist intellectual circle. Speaking for myself, I found the claim of the Rosenberg's innocence transparently disingenuous, therefore politically counterproductive. But I also found in that position no obstacle to condemning the execution of political idealists whose actions, while personally and politically reckless, had no criminal impact bearing on Russian nuclear development. Shipping the Rosenbergs to exile in Moscow would have been punishment enough.

One flyer I plucked off hand from the Safe Return files announced *Kapital Slate*, "a Leftist-Marxist journal from the Department of Economics, Cal State University at San Jose." I would have identified - and Tod as well - with that hyphenated label, and we both aspired to read such a publication, even if I can't recall having done so in this particular instance. The impulse would have been pure, since we routinely challenged ourselves by reading analytical Marxist-oriented commentary, and consistently made attempts to produce it ourselves, and would do so again soon in cooperation with our Bay Area comrades. "We are looking for new ways of sharpening our understanding of the role the U.S. military institution plays both in domestic and world politics... becoming more research oriented," I wrote Louis Font in

Heidelberg where he was working with American GI dissidents during a summer break from Yale Law School. I would be meeting his wife and him there in August, and I was writing to confirm. As I say, this was one direction Tod and I were imagining we were headed, and Lou Font, a close comrade from CCI days, would have been seen as a potential collaborator.

In the political space created by the stasis around Lew Simon's case, a renewal of initiatives arose among our rivals and detractors. We learned from the June-dated issue of NCUUA's newsletter about their Broadway benefit from a performance of *Candide*, a modest shot in the arm financially, no doubt, but finally a small share in New York of the name recognition that Safe Return had long enjoyed among progressives at NCUUA's expense. And the coalition's activist wing had finally managed to project a coherent message around the amnesty issue. They produced a brochure featuring the saga of resister Dick Bucklin, as well as the account of a draft resister who, having fled his alternative service commitment, had been sentenced to five years in prison despite having surrendered himself voluntarily.

I don't recall the venue for this draft resister's trial, but clearly it was a place where the good news about amnesty had not yet dented the local traditionalist temperament. Following an amnesty confab in Kansas City in mid-May at a Jewish Community Center, well-stocked with NCUUA affiliates, including the WRL's New York-based leader, Igol Rodenko and a representative from the ACLU. Louise Ransom was also there, fronting for the high minded Eastern churchmen. All in attendance could easily read the unforgiving mood that prevailed throughout the hinterland in a headline from the *Kansas City Star*, referencing the status of the meeting's one prominent resister participant, Edward Sowders, as a "Patriot Turned Deserter."

NCUUA also floated a trial balloon in its new brochure for "considering a second national conference to assess our progress." In due course - if only for the sake of appearances -

we would receive an invitation from Irma Zigas to attend a “planning session” for said conference in the coming fall. The coalition’s black and white brochure had an amateur cast to it, and lacked SR’s attention to production values. This fact was backhandedly acknowledged in the summary request we had received around this time from Louise Ransom to provide her copies of all Safe Return and FORA materials for her Americans for Amnesty “library.”

Then, even in this hermetic moment when the city’s radical political culture seemed suspended in time, came a clarion call to the streets from the pen of Norma Becker, one of New York’s long standing and most effective planners of demonstrations against the Vietnam War. It was as if, for a moment at least, one New York Lefty, bred in an ethnic enclave of the Bronx and in the old left politics that went with that territory, had made her own abrupt turn from the glacial incrementalism of the popular front to a full blown revolutionary line.

The words of Norma’s manifesto, for that’s what it was, were strikingly defiant, and read like a battle order. “The people’s movement must take to the streets once again to demonstrate our resistance. Demand amnesty for the real heroes of the war. We can no longer leave the political field to the do-gooders, the due process lobby, and the liberals who are exhilarated by the impeachment process as a sign of a healthy society.” She had called for a large demonstration in Manhattan for sometime in either July or August of 1974. That call went nowhere, but another call by Becker nearly a decade later would yield spectacular results, and, by then was only tangentially related to issues that throughout the seventies were linked with mopping up after the Vietnam Era.<sup>4</sup>

Becker’s outburst demonstrated if nothing else the frustration of the radical element within the NCUUA coalition with the tactics and political waffling of their “do-gooder,” “due process lobby” and “liberal” partners. She herself, I have no doubt, put in long, probably

uncompensated, hours, most likely in the threadbare headquarters of the War Resisters League at 339 Lafayette. The three story triangular building at that address still delights the historical eye, and has probably been a lair for social agitators since the era of the Shirt Waist Factory fire. As *mise en scene*, 339 Lafayette would go unaltered to the sound stage; well into the second decade of the millennium it remains in that timeless state.

It is telling of some hidden affinity I suppose that both Tod and I always got on well with the WRL radicals, whose politics - but for the pacifism - oddly meshed with our own. At least there was sufficient common ground that we would soon become regular contributors to *Win*, the WRL's monthly magazine. And, if I have given the impression that we were isolated, even as we did not always cooperate with our peers politically - indeed we withdrew as we saw it in self-defense - that would be mistaken. A vibrant argumentative Left depended on a large subdivision of participants who were seldom co-thinkers in the particulars. In this milieu we circulated virtually on a daily basis, whether in an apartment living room party, or the lobby of a lecture hall or film showing where all present would rap their party lines, and many would hawk their party's printed matter. Tod and I - constituted as Safe Return - chose to collaborate on our own terms, offering roles for partners who shared the general purposes our actions sought to serve.

Requiring a trip to Indianapolis over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holidays to attend their founding convention was already an unpropitious harbinger for the future of the People's Party. Hoosiers are not urban cats; I get it. I cannot speak for today, but back then Indianapolis was not a city. It had a cluster of downtown skyscrapers that suggested giant silos, and in which, I suppose, the transactions of the regional banks and rural commodity traders were conducted. A little citadel for an outpost of capitalist agribusiness. For nightlife there was the usual strip of mediocre restaurants and transient bar life in motel chains, and not much else. Likely a lively scene could

be found at some road house where the fabled Brickyard morphed abruptly into the corn fields, an unattractive option for long haired radicals and city slickers back in the day. I don't think we would have lingered in Indiana for more than an overnight, not from fear, but boredom.<sup>5</sup>

I find no details in our files of our participation at the convention. But I distinctly recall one bit of political slapstick by the party ringmaster, Chuck Avery, who circled the room running the show regardless of who sat in the chair. A parliamentary dispute arose concerning the use of the impersonal pronoun *he* inserted in the text of a resolution that was in the process of being read by its author. Avery tongue lashed the offending male with a long and noisy objection to this sexist affront to feminist sensibilities. Avery grabbed the document and, figuratively speaking, blue penciled it on the spot. By the end of his tirade, Avery became so muddled he was incapable of distinguishing the impersonal pronouns from its homonymic third person singular masculine equivalent. And for some minutes thereafter Avery took to referencing all men as *she*. I suppose we got our amnesty resolution passed, but I don't recall any on-going contact with the People's Party after that.

NCUUA had posed the question of stepping back to assess our movement's effectiveness. Leaving apart the fact that we would have likely reacted toward the proposed meeting as - at best- another self-referential ritual, the question was by no means trivial. And by 1974, there's measurable evidence that the amnesty movement in all its voices was definitely, if slowly, shifting public attitudes. Collectively, we had certainly gotten amnesty into the public discourse, and placed the issue squarely on the agendas of our political and military institutions.

As for the latter, as I have already touched on in several places, Pentagon thinking on this issue was shrouded from public view.<sup>6</sup> In whatever way desertion and amnesty were being discussed and analyzed in their private councils, the subject of the catastrophic levels of

decomposition within the fighting forces could only be addressed publicly by the military in the cut and dry language of manpower policy and structures of discipline, and certainly not as a disturbing expression of a contesting power within its ranks, like a trade union. Unthinkable!<sup>7</sup> Thus the Pentagon, at several layers of immunity from public pressure, continued to wield a heavy hand in dealing with the post-war migration of deserters straggling back to military control knowing that, whatever else they faced, it would not be assignment to a war zone.

There were news accounts about individuals being apprehended while attempting to return surreptitiously, at the airports or while attending a funeral. We had to beg off several requests from deserters in Canada who asked to ‘safe return’ under our sponsorship, not only because we still felt burned from the emotional toll of Lew Simon’s ordeal, but because we had first created the ‘public surrender’ tactic to dramatize the amnesty issue as it developed in its early stages, elbowing it aggressively into the national conversation. And that goal had already been achieved. As a sign of new times on the horizon, we received one comical petition on behalf of a First Lieutenant, an Airborne Ranger in the Army, pictured with the longish blow-dried coiffure then favored by professional athletes and car salesmen; he was refusing to cut his hair.

What the public did not read about was the probable fate of most of these military returnees. Rather than simply pass them through a turnstile branded with bad paper, and be done with their fractured citizen army once and for all, the Pentagon continued to extract a measure of retribution through the time honored method of example setting that our movement was powerless to prevent. According to a study we received from CCCO, 90% of the 56,000 GIs who had been court martialed during the preceding year, overwhelmingly for extended unauthorized absences, had been convicted and many served time as a consequence. It didn’t

necessarily cut these men off from civilian employment, but many would be denied veterans' benefits, a considerable package, including a college degree for some if they wanted it.

Congress, on the other hand, was forced to be somewhat responsive to the consent of the governed. And amnesty was now an issue on which it was necessary for most candidates in the upcoming elections, incumbents and challengers alike, to have a position that went beyond the blustery categorical rejection with which Richard Nixon had first greeted the question well before his personal empire had begun to crumble. Thus we retooled our congressional lobbying efforts and launched Campaign '74 to engage the electoral process by circulating a questionnaire to get candidates on record about the specific solution they favored on amnesty.

After he had conferred with Lew Simon at Leavenworth, and toured the small antiwar and pro-amnesty circles of Nebraska and Kansas, Ed Sowders continued on to the West Coast to rally our active core of resister family members. Ed sought to generate as much regional publicity for the campaign as possible with the participation of our FORA stalwarts in Washington State, Oregon and California. But most of the organizing for this campaign was conducted through the mails or by phone.<sup>8</sup> Packets were sent to all our supporters nationwide, not just members of FORA. From returns we were able to construct a general picture of where political contenders for the U.S. Congress stood on the spectrum of possibilities that amnesty presented them.

We immediately folded the results of our survey into a funding proposal, breaking down the politicians' responses into several categories. Not surprisingly, only 8% of respondents favored unconditional amnesty for both categories of resisters, while an additional 5.5% supported those conditions for draft evaders only. Beyond that the case for deserters was taken up only with a question about upgrading "bad" discharges, favored by just 10.5%, mostly

members of the Black Caucus. 16.5% opposed amnesty legislation in any form, while a substantial 48% “favored amnesty with public service for draft resisters.” We characterized this half-a-loaf offering by office-seekers as “an attempt to please both sides of the public, those opposed and those in favor of amnesty.”

In contrast we found public views on the issue were typically well in advance of the politicians. Commenting in *Amnesty Report #4* that July we reported that, at least where draft resisters were concerned, the latest Gallup Poll had 36% of Americans in favor of amnesty with no strings, while “45% supported an amnesty with conditions.” The upshot was that the discussion about a hypothetical amnesty, not unsubstantially derived from the efforts of Safe Return and others over the past three years, was now firmly established in the political mainstream.

In the narcoleptic post-war atmosphere that gripped a weary nation, to suggest that resisters who refused “public service” might still be subject to criminal prosecution for having evaded the draft, was an even bigger can of worms for legislators than their position on amnesty itself. The governing class, we argued in our funding proposal, was “caught in a contradiction.” In this ever-expanding national discussion about resistance and amnesty, a picture was gradually emerging of how unevenly the obligations of conscription had been distributed across the draft aged population during the Vietnam War. Between 1963 and 1973, 89% of the draft eligible males escaped performing military service. This figure takes into account the more democratic and short lived conscription by lottery system installed by December 1969, entering a period of mass troop reductions. Finally, of the 11% who did perform military serve in what came to be known as the Vietnam Era, less than 4% had been deployed to the war zone.

It would become obvious in the coming years that Vietnam was a “working class war” which the vast majority of middle and upper class men were somehow permitted to avoid. Thus, whatever subjective feelings about amnesty were measured in the hierarchy of public opinion, even accounting for the tradition-bound masses whose sons did virtually all the fighting and dying and who therefore harbored considerable resentment toward both categories of war resisters, it seemed less and less likely from where we viewed things that the wounds of war would be reopened by dragging scores of young offenders before the courts exclusively for having avoided a civic responsibility that the overwhelming majority of their peers had managed to escape. Musing in that fashion on how cultural movement could trump the rule of law, we were actually anticipating how events in the real world unfolded when the government finally chose to act, which I take up in the next chapter.

This funding proposal containing the results of the Campaign ‘74 survey did well among our major donors, like Kit Tremaine who came in for a thousand dollars. I regret the shortsightedness of never having gotten to know some of our more generous supporters, like this woman from Santa Barbara who had made Nixon’s infamous “enemies list.” But neither Tod nor I ever seriously considered cultivating personal relationships that would motivate a wealthy donor to invest even more generously in our work. Several other major political players on the Left from our parents’ generation, or older, like Muriel Gardner and Joseph Buttinger, also donated generously, to Safe Return in those years. And to think that I might have learned their fascinating backstories thirty years earlier than I did, makes me confront our arrogant provincialism with a shudder.

But, to keep this in context, when we accepted a thousand dollars, all we had to do was say ‘thank you.’ A bigger chunk of dough would require tax exempt status on our part - which at

this stage the IRS continued to refuse us – or come with more strings, and we had no interest in such entanglements. The neglect of our non-profit's long term fiscal health was characteristic of a political culture intensely occupied with the present. Activism wasn't a career, it was a calling, renewed day to day, not projected over the long haul.

As we now geared up for whatever might come next, we continued to look at the one long term structure that our day to day existence depended on, our next mass mailing under a letter signed by Daniel Ellsberg. We were now in the business of renting or trading for names culled from a selection of progressive mailing lists whose recipients were likely to support our cause. The mailing did well, but not without a bit of blowback from an irate donor who complained about receiving multiple appeals. This was inevitable given the small, somewhat politically homogeneous universe we were mailing in, and so we displayed in bold type on an insert in the mailing packet this disclaimer: "Please bear with us if you have received more than one of this appeal. Elimination of dupes across mailing lists is very expensive."

With the onset of computerized mailing-list management, this process of purging duplicates from multiple lists had now become affordable. Until then our in-house mailing list was traded on gummed labels. Before the end of the summer we would have all fourteen thousand names on this list converted, at \$50 per thousand, to magnetic tape, rapidly becoming the standard for list brokers who sold our list to other groups or rented theirs to us. Renting the list was a profitable source of income on its own, and our most steady source of operating funds.

Not infrequently one of our prepaid return envelopes brought back something other than a donation. The worst was the occasional piece of toilet paper smeared with feces, or some weird promotional materials from the lunatic fringe, like Jews for Jesus who we knew in New York as aggressive sidewalk proselytizers. One repeat item among this trash was a brochure

from The Man Boy Love Society, featuring a cover photo of a sweet faced young boy sitting on the lap of a kindly looking older gent. Another mailing later that summer brought in a dividend that was not financial. We received an irate note from Peter Weiss of the Center for Constitutional Rights, the pompous husband of our arch nemesis, Cora Weiss, complaining of the use without authorization of his name on our list of endorsers. *Our* 'Peter Weiss,' we were able to haughtily reply, is the internationally known playwright of the same name.

A particularly poignant response to a Safe Return mail solicitation came from an erstwhile supporter. He wrote that he could no longer contribute. He had recently spent over \$2,000 defending his draft resister son, who was acquitted of whatever charges he had faced. But the good news only brought the man to the edge of anguish. "Our Midwest community rejects him, and to an extent us. We have left our church. I have been mortally wounded by our country's leaders."

Some of what we could net from a given fund appeal was siphoned off to pay office expenses and salaries. We were often in arrears on bill where our debtors could not easily leverage any disruptive consequences against us. It was amazing what suppliers would ship you in the mail and at their own expense. Two recliners sat in the office Tod and I occupied for years, and we never paid a dime for them. Sometimes the dunning letter came more as a friendly and unavoidable reminder, as with the plea from the civilian attorney who had helped us with the Tommy Michaud case, and to whom we still owed \$324.42. We probably made a payment. In other transactions, we might be less conscientious. The ethos of the politicized segment of the counter culture, as I have emphasized elsewhere, was unsympathetic to the sanctity of private property, the bedrock of capitalist morality.

By high summer in 1974 an outline of the work Safe Return would undertake over the next two years began to emerge. Amnesty remained the centerpiece of our public identity, and our activities on that campaign would actually intensify in the months ahead. This occurred for once, less from to our own initiatives, then from actions undertaken by the government in the wake of Richard M. Nixon's resignation from the presidency on August 9<sup>th</sup>. But we would also begin laying the groundwork for a post-amnesty re-orientation. A politics based on unfinished business from resistance to the Vietnam War would eventually give way to issues that were germane only to a postwar landscape. It wasn't strictly for maintaining continuity with the past that drew our attention back to the GI Movement, given that its antiwar mission within the military was already resolved. Emotionally, Tod and I were motivated by a deep seated anger to continue throwing brickbats at the military, and to support GIs who were challenging the antiquated conditions of life in the service.

With those goals in mind, I was off to Europe by mid-August on an organizing trip of U.S. military bases that would last three-weeks. Prior to leaving, and now unattached, I attended my old girlfriend Katie's wedding in our hometown of Babylon, Long Island. She had the reception at her parent's, next door to where my own still lived. I made a great show of bonhomie and indifference to convention, dressed in a provocative costume of tank top and short shorts, a thumb in the nose toward the sheltered, self-loving suburban spectacles I had come to despise. I felt no particular regret that Katie was marrying a man who was also a former classmate, and who had successfully wormed her away from me. I was too self-contented with my life overall, ever stimulated by the new horizons the political work was opening before me. But I cannot avoid the bittersweet admission, least of all to myself, that Katie, my first love, was the sweetest one to get away.

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3. The term “hat vets” derives from the ubiquitous use among these veterans of the soft overseas cap used by all the military services.
  4. Norma Becker was founder of the Fifth Avenue Peace Parade Committee, which, according to her obituary in the New York Times (June 27, 2006) brought ten thousands demonstrators to the streets in New York on Oct. 16, 1965, “one of the nation’s first major demonstrations against the War in Vietnam.” Becker would later further distinguish herself as a founder of Mobilization for Survival, “which on June 12, 1982 “summoned an estimated 700, 000 people... to Central Park in a boisterous and festive call for the end of the nuclear arms race.” I did not know Becker personally until the early eighties when I shared a program with her and Abby Hoffman at a evening retrospective on the Vietnam antiwar movement organized by the New York School for Marxist Education, the creation of Arthur Felberbaum and his closed comrades.
  5. It was only people on or inclining toward the left and hippies in those time who wore their hair long. The hard hat and ‘red neck’ elements were still relatively clean cut. In many places, as the standards of men’s hair length change, working class males often wore hair styles that were coiffed with blow dried.
  6. An internal study of related documents and studies by the branches of the armed services would make a ripe dissertation topic.
  7. Read on! Page TK