

Archie Green: AG
Jarvis Rich: JR
Tracie Wilson: TW

TW: Maybe we'll start with some of the anecdotes from yesterday. I've got them on the other tape, but it's got the buzz with it. A couple of the things I thought were interesting stories that might be worth getting a clear copy of. One was, was it Bernie Karsh? Who came out here and tried to talk you into going back?

AG: Yes, he did. Bernie Karsh was a sociologist at Illinois who train at University of Chicago, and as I mentioned he was at the end of the Robert Parks tradition. Parks was a great sociologist whose interest was in occupation. And one of his students, Nells Anderson, in the early twenties had been an itinerant worker, and was a Wobbly, and Nells Anderson wrote a book at the University of Chicago called *The Hobo* and it is still in print. It was a classic of an ethnographic description of hobos and migratory workers, the main stem in Chicago. And he included a section of Wobbly songs.

By the way, it's a digression, but I recently edited a Big Red Song Book, I pay homage Nells Anderson.

Anyhow, Bernie had been in the YPSL, Young People Socialist League in Chicago. He was a social democrat, anti-totalitarian, but for social change. He was a good guy and a good sociologist. Bernie's hobby was aviation, when he retired I think he bought an old plane, fixed it up. Perhaps he had been in the Air Corps during World War Two. Anyhow, he came to San Francisco to attend a meeting where the Sociological Association, and his friend, Bill Friedland, who had been a fellow radical, interested in labor song.

Bill Freeland has an essay in the Wobbly book on the first recording of first LP album of Wobbly songs that Bill recorded. Anyhow, I had corresponded with Bill Freeland and Joe Glazer and various other collectors of hillbilly songs and labor songs, and as I remember, Bernie learned my name through Bill. Bill said when you get to San Francisco, look up Archie. He's a carpenter, and has a good collection of labor history. And Bernie was sitting right there, right where you're sitting on the couch, and said 'Why do you want to be a carpenter? Come to San Francisco, and work in the Labor Institute, and we'll give you a scholarship.' And the classic remarks I said yesterday, today and tomorrow: 'I'd rather be a shipwright in San Francisco, rather than a professor at the University of Illinois.' I really believed that then, and I believe it now.

But Bernie was persuasive, and he was flexible. So he said, 'What do you want to study?' Well getting a Ph.D. was not on my agenda, I had a wife and three kids, and I knew that it took a long time to get a Ph.D. so I chose library school because I had a good labor collection and I was interested in bibliography. By the way I also collected William Faulkner, before he won the Nobel Prize. And I had a good collection of William Faulkner in library history. Anyhow, I said, I'll be a librarian, and I was able to finish library school in one school year, September to June. I think I took a couple of summer school courses but the year was over, and I had my master's.

So I returned to San Francisco because I didn't like Urbana. In short, it was too flat, it was too dull, it was too conservative; it wasn't San Francisco or Berkeley. Anyhow, Bernie never gave up on me, and he persuaded some of the other people at the

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Labor Institute, at that time we were on Wright Street, near Sixth, upstairs in an old building, and they built the new institute across the street from the Armory. And I helped move the library, and it proved to be very easy. Librarianship was no challenge, but in that period in the library, Bob Downs was a librarian, I met him. And he turned out to be wonderful, perhaps you remember him, Jarvis. He was tall, a mountaineer, soft-spoken. He came from the Western North Carolina, maybe Ash or Bunk County. And Bob Downs liked hillbilly music, so when we had the New Lost City Ramblers play at University of Illinois, I remember this anecdote, the Ramblers had a song about 'Old Molly Hare' but it was a play on words because Molly Hare, the hare had various escapades. One of them involved hair that was Freudian or Bawdy, I can't remember. But Bob Downs, this dignified dean, had Mike in a corner and they were swapping stanzas that Bob had learned as a youngster, and they were swapping 'Bobby Bawdy stanzas.' You know getting this young folk singer, or singer of Folk songs, and this old dean of the school, who was very well known in the ALA, because Bob was a liberal proponent of free speech and in fact the ALA now has a scholarship in his honor, I think they award an annual prize.

Anyhow, Martin Wagner, Bernie Karsh, Bob Downs, and other people, they were very good to me. The librarian in that first year was Gil Donahue; he was a liberal Irish-Catholic, very liberal. He was the days before Vatican II, you know a tiny group of liberals were pretty good on abortion and good on race relations and good on the environment. And in fact, they would have Sunday meetings where they would not use the Latin mass, it was sort of an underground mass, and introduced folk song into there. You know, when the guitar became big, they would have a Catholic mass with some kid plugging away sounding like the Kingston Trio. You know, I thought it was an abomination; Gil and his wife, Sonia, they thought of it as progressive. Anyhow, Gil liked me, and then as it turned out, he resigned his position and went to Monteith College, an experimental college in Detroit, he was going up in the profession.

But at that time I was back home, working at the trade again, I even remember the building on lower Market Street, the Crown Zellerbach Building, and I was doing a trim, really good work on mahogany, and it was a good job. And then Martin phoned me saying, 'We have a vacancy, Gil has left, we want you to come back and be the librarian.' And famous last words, I said 'No, I'd rather be in San Francisco.' And he was very angry, and I must confess I didn't have the courage to resist him. And he rubbed it in, you know, he said 'We gave you a scholarship, we trained you, we made it easy for you.' This was before the folksong club, but I didn't have the strength to counter him. He was right, intellectually, but I was right emotionally, I lived here, my kids were here, I wanted to go up in the labor movement. I liked the waterfront, I represented Nancy Pelosi, you know, I liked the San Francisco mentality.

Incidentally, Nancy Pelosi is in my district, or I'm in her district, and I like her very much. I think she ought to be a candidate for president instead of Hilary Clinton, because I think Nancy has her head screwed on right.

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Anyhow, I was home and working on the Crown Zillerback and Martin gave me another week, he phoned again, he was getting short, I didn't have any answer. And you know, finally he wore me down, and in a matter of weeks. The first time I went alone, and Luanne in the kids stayed here, but on the second time we packed up and

TW: All of you?

AG: Yes all of us. Look, it was traumatic. Taking the kids out of school, it was traumatic. Here I am a Ph.D. and to think that all three of my children, David, Derek, and Debra have all rejected higher education and many friends don't understand it 'With your dad as a professor, why didn't you go to school?' And they'd never say it, but I think it's obvious.

When Dave and Derek got out of school the Vietnam War was on, so they went into the Navy. And Debra, as I said, she went into near Danville to work on a horse farm. I think the children were torn between their early experience when I was a tradesman, and the fellow tradesmen would come here George Hayward, Pile Driver, and iron workers who were big, dynamic and full of life and would favor the kids. And when we went to Illinois, all of the people we knew socially were intellectuals and they were namby pamby, and from the child's perspective, they must have seemed awful. They must have been seen, on the part of David and Derek, as a kind of punishment they didn't deserve.

You're getting a lot of psychological analysis, that you don't want, but also we returned in August because we had to meet the September deadline, and it was one of Urbana's hottest nights. And a friend of ours from Indiana let us use her apartment, which was locked up, an upstairs apartment, it was probably 120 degrees in the apartment, and here I took the three kids and Luanne into this hell hold inferno. If David and Derek grew up resenting the move to Urbana, they were justified.

Anyhow, we opened the windows, and we got through the night, and eventually we found a house on Pennsylvania Avenue. But in that second period, this time I was a librarian at the Labor Institute, if I started work in September then it must have been about November or December, that I had met Michael Fleischer on an airplane trip, and we had exchanged an interest in folklore song.

And as it turned out, well maybe I met him earlier, but at that time they were planning the first Chicago Festival, and I think he was chairman of the Chicago Folklore Society. And he asked me if I would come up from Urbana, and MC one of the evenings, and also if I would participate in a workshop or seminar, and of course I was eager to, because I recognized that he was interested in a traditional festival as contrasted to Berkeley University that would mix Odetta, traditional artists like Lightnin' Hopkins, and also far out artists, certain rock bands that were coming up to do experimental music. So I thought of the Chicago Festival as pure. The one exception was a New Lost City Ramblers, and they were city-billies, but they were, in my opinion, good teachers. But generally the Chicago Folklore group brought Mississippi blues men, bluegrass artists

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from Appalachia, and some native singers from Chicago, and I thought it was about as good as it gets on a festival activity.

I mentioned to you that another friend, Bob Shelton of the New York Times came to that first festival, and when the festival ended, which would have been early February of 1960 or 61, he wrote a review of the festival in the New York Times. And it stands out in my memory because he mentioned my name. I had never been in a big city newspaper before, so that became a point of pride, I suppose. So yes, I was mentioned in the Times.

But after the festival, just in my memory, but maybe a week later, back in Urbana Victor Lukas and Dick Kanar came in to see me. They were two students, I didn't know them, but I should have been warned because they were wearing Eisenhower jackets and surplus army goods, sandals, and they had beards. They weren't button-down fraternity boys, that was obvious, and they said that they had heard me in Chicago, and it sounded good. They wanted to start a folklore club, and would I be the faculty advisor, and I said 'Well what do I have to do?' It was a typical salesman approach, 'Nothing, just sign here.' So I signed, and I can honestly say at that time I thought nothing of it. You know, I was helping a few students, and two or three weeks later they came back, their petition had been approved by, there was some assistant dean who was in charge of all the student organizations, I don't remember his name, his office was in the Illini Union. And I suppose until then, he had only dealt with sororities and fraternities, there were very few independent clubs, and the independent students at Illinois didn't get into any trouble. So another week went by, and this Vic and Dick were going to have the first folk sing which was our term for the equivalent of a hootenanny. Anyone could participate, and I said well you have to get some notices on the bulletin board, and then they designed a notice. Then they came back to the office almost crying that the dean wouldn't let them put the notice on the bulletin board because it was supposed to be 8.5 x 11 and they used large paper. So I said, 'Let's go and see the dean.' And what it was, was a confrontation between a San Francisco union guy, and a stuffed shirt nobody assistant dean living by 'It has to be 8.5 x 11. It's not regulation.' And he was adamant, I mean the law was on his side, the regulation was on his side, and who was I? I didn't know him, I was a stranger. I was unconsciously advocating a breaking of the rules, but not only that, it was the subject that was dangerous, because I think the attitude of a square faculty member, because if he thought of folk songs at all, you know, he thought of Pete Seeger singing communist songs. Maybe Johnny Cash kept singing hillbilly songs. Which was worse in the square or straight world, I don't know. I wasn't a fan of Pete Seeger, and I wasn't a fan of orthodox country music, I was a fan of Old Time music, or traditional music, but I didn't have a chance to explain it to this dean, but he did teach us to conform to the size of the bulletin board, you know University regulations, and that's my memory of the club starting.

Recently I saw Vic Lukas at North Carolina, and he said that my memory is faulty because he said that he and Dick Kanar had come to see me *before* the Chicago Festival. And I have no memory of that, but he did write a paper on his introduction into folk

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music in Urbana, but what I think he means is that there was a folksong or folk arts club at the Unitarian Church with a fellow named Harry Babbid. Do you remember him? Vaguely?

JR: No I remember people trying to get me to remember him.

AG: Well as Harry Babbid, he was an energetic kid from New York, and he grew up on the Weavers and Seeger, and he liked that goddamn 'Frog song' you know, for kids, Seeger acts it out. Oh it just makes my blood curdle. You know, there is a Pete Seeger cult in every community across our land. And you know the kids felt they were progressive, or they were the social revolution, or they were Marxist, or they were something, but I thought they were disgusting.

But anyhow they had a club at the Unitarian Church, a folklore society and Vic and Dick were in that club, they didn't like the variety. You know they wanted another direction; they wanted to break off in the direction of more traditional music so we coined the name 'Campus Folksong Club' in contrast to the Illinois Folklore Society or whatever else it was. And from then on, never the twain did meet, we didn't invite them, they didn't invite us. But our folk sings were so successful; we had huge auditoriums, with hundreds of performers and good concerts. I don't know what happened to the folklore group maybe the remnants of it stayed within folk dance, but we absorbed the interest in folksong. And Harry Babbid, I think he was teaching chemistry some place. There's one, oh – you should interview Bill Becker.

JR: Yes, Bill Becker

AG: Because one Bill Becker made the transition from that club, to our club. And Bill Becker did receive his Ph.D. in metallurgy and went to work in Tennessee at Tennessee Tech. I think it's at Cookeville. Here you can look up Bill Becker somehow or call the Metallurgy Department. But he made that transition, and if Bill is still alive, he has a good memory, was always an officer in our club, very active. But if you could trace Bill Becker, Richard Kanar, and Vic Lukas I think they could give you their own perspective on the origin of the club, which would be quite interesting. It would show you that the memory of any person isn't necessarily whole or consistent, but at least that's how I remember it.

Oh, when we started the club, or as the club grew, it filled my life, I liked the club. I liked traditional music; I liked inviting artists and Appalachian performers. I liked the work, I enjoyed the organizational work. Everything I learned politically, from the young Democrats, or economically in the union, those forces came to the surface naturally. And I think in philosophy I think of myself a libertarian, a left libertarian. I teach by example and indirection rather than by authority. I'm not a proponent of any philosophy in the classroom or in my personal life, and when I would meet students like

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Bob Sayers and Jarvis Rich and Vic and Dick and John Schmidt, and other students Larry Crowley and his sister.

I don't remember the name of the first treasurer of the folksong club; he was a man from southern Illinois, veering on the Ozarks, liked country music. He collected our limited dues, and when he went home for Christmas vacation, he drove his car into a bridge embankment, and there was speculation that he was either drunk or that type of an accident, most officers think of it as suicide, but it can't be demonstrated because the person is dead. By why would he, an 18 year old, good looking youngster, bright, why would he be suicidal? Could he have been drinking? Maybe. Do you remember his name or anything or any anecdote like that?

JR: No, I remember him but I don't remember his name.

TW: I think I did see some kind of dead –

AG: Maybe when he died we had some kind of memory of him. The reason I cite that, was that the club obviously had students from Chicago, students from the West coast, East coast who happened to be in Urbana, and of course natives from Southern Illinois which brought us close to Ozark and Appalachian culture. And in that meeting, was exciting to meet traditional or singers remember the young tall guy from Chicago, Harlan Daniel, that looked like an undertaker, tall and thin, he wore a black suit.

Harlan came from Stone County. I knew two great Appalachian singers in the Ozarks, Ollie Gilbert and Granny Riddle. And in fact Harlan used to have arguments with me because I liked the Carter family, and he felt that the Carter Family were not traditional but modern. He thought of the Carter Family the way I thought of the Kingston Trio. He said 'If you want to listen to traditional music then you listen to Ollie Gilbert.' You know, he had a huge repertoire and she's still available on tape as well as Almeda Riddle. In my judgment, bringing these diverse elements together rather than surrendering the club to the Kingston Trio or to Pete Seeger, or who was a popular natural at that time? Oh, maybe that guy from Missouri that sang with, I think it was Dolly Parton that made, oh well I'll think of his name later, but in our club as an example of this spread.

We also had Johnny Hartford. Johnny had come from a well-to-do family; his father was a doctor in St. Louis. He should have been a middle class, should have been an exponent of the Kingston Trio, but something in his childhood turned him in the direction of traditional music, and he didn't go to medical school, he became a disk jockey on a country music station at Clinton, Illinois. And all of the kids listened to the Saturday morning program and they knew that Johnny Hartford, he was kindred, so they went out to see him and invited him to the campus, and would sing some of our folk sing songs, and became a close friend. He and I stayed as close friends until he died.

And in that period, Lyle Mayfield joined the club, because Lyle was a working class guy, he was a printer. He had been a printer in Greenville, in Southern Illinois, and

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he came up to Urbana for a better job as a printer on the Daily Illini. So Lyle and his wife Doris, they knew that when all the folksong kids were bringing publicity to the paper, you know Roger Ebert was on the paper, and Lyle asked about us, and we invited him and his wife to a folk sing, and they were good country singers, doing lots of country duets.

So right from the start we had a mixture of Southern Illinois, of Chicago ethnic groups, and sprinkling of East and West coast guys. Except for the interest in traditional music, and that I'll admit to, we didn't impose any ideology. I think I can fairly say that I didn't try to convert any of my students to trade unionism. In fact, later on in the sixties, when more radical students emerged on campus, you know imitating the Berkeley free speech fight, and oh they'd go down and picket and demonstrate. During that period some of the leftwing students, the Marxist, made fun the folksong club. See, philosophically, Tracie, thinking as our club involving the liberal students, the libertarian students, the students with open minds, instead of thinking of our club as an outpost, they saw it as a place for co-optation, I hated that term, still hate it, not even sure if I really understand it. They saw the University as the enemy; the University was big business, big agriculture, republican politics. And the leftwing students felt that the gears of production needed to be slowed down, I think that's a figure of speech that Mario Savio used at Berkeley, they had to stick a lever into the gears in order to stop a university from functioning, because the university's function was to socialize the youngsters, to serve the system. And so the criticism from the left of the folksong club, was that our focus on tradition, there is a politics in the focus on tradition, that we were diverting students from revolutionary thought and action, and in the sense of having enemies, the regents may have been enemies of the students, but the leftwing students thought of me as a collaborator. And that to me is really a terrible, terrible evil.

But anyhow, I don't think I had any leftwing friends, I was too outspoken in my hostility to Marxism, because philosophically I like William James and Horace Kallen and John Dewey. I think of myself as a pragmatist, philosophically. But anyhow, I didn't pay much attention to the campus Marxists, and I don't think they paid much attention to me.

And gradually in our folksong club, to show you how our breadth worked, we were able to win over Cici DeLong, I think Cliff DeLong was the bursar of the University; he was probably the third ranking Vice President or bursar. He handled all the money and it turned out that he liked folksong. He liked everything, he liked the Kingston Trio, and he liked Flatt and Scruggs and he like me. See Cliff DeLong in the bursar's office he handled Starcourse because Starcourse involved big money. Before the flying saucer was built on the edge of the campus, they'd meet in the auditorium for the gym, Josh White and Joan Baez and Peter, Paul, and Mary and Simon and Garfunkel; and that was their idea of folk music and they'd pay big bucks. I used to complain to Cliff DeLong, you have thousands of dollars for the phonies, but no money for us. But he was good, he said 'Why don't you let us be your sponsor? Work through Starcourse.' And I said 'That's sandbox politics. That's where you get fraternity boys and sorority girls and

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they get brownie points for activity. They want to imitate the Kingston Trio, and Joan Baez.’ And he said ‘Well, we’ll work something out.’ And he used the Starcourse accounts to give me cover.

There was one famous incident where we invited the Blue Sky Boys. Do you remember them? I think they were before you got there. Wasn’t there an auditorium in Lincoln Hall, and that John Schmidt recorded them, and that’s now out on a Rounder LP. And I wrote the notes, I think I wrote the notes. But that’s the one in addition to our three LPs, that’s the one LP that emerged from a campus folksong club concert. But anyhow, in order to get the Blue Sky Boys they were in retirement, you know, they were a lovely duet of sweet hillbilly songs. And they had stopped recording, and one of the brothers, Bill or Earl, one was working at an auto plant in Atlanta and one was a postman in Hickory, North Carolina. And here I was phoning both of them in order to persuade them to join together for a revival. And they felt they wouldn’t have time to practice and it wouldn’t be any good. So I said, ‘Just come and stand up on the stage and you’ll be good.’ And it turned out they were marvelous for a commercial recording.

At any rate, I ran up a lot of phone bills and I charged the phone to the Starcourse, and a couple of months later DeLong called me into his office, and he really wasn’t mean but he was formal. He said ‘How come you have such a big telephone bill, and you don’t even work for Starcourse?’ And I said it was to get the Blue Sky Boys, which he liked but he said it was causing too much trouble and even though he was a bursar he couldn’t rationalize my phone calls, so he cut me off of the telephone.

Well I transferred my phone calls to the Labor Institute, and Martin Wagner, who liked my work. I want to stress, see Martin Wagner, he was of German descent, formal, well-educated, and he loved symphonic music, and he had a huge huge collection of opera and symphony. But yet in our work Martin had been in Kentucky in the days of conflict in ‘Bloody Harlan’ and as an NLRB officer in the National Labor Relations Board in the beginning of the New Deal after the war. He was completely sympathetic to the Harlan County miners and against the mine operators.

So when I would bring someone like Sarah Gunning to the campus and she was part of Appalachia Clay County, adjacent to Harlan, and singing in her unaccompanied voice. But her repertoire was magnificent, hate the capitalist system, and songs about dreadful memories, the starvation of her children. You heard her didn’t you? You know she was plutonic. The plutonic folk singer, the unaccompanied, high lonesome voice, she could sing a traditional ballad and a coal mining song, a nonsense song. She’s out on two records, a rounder and Folk Legacy. Get those records, even if you have to have someone tape them for you, because that would represent the purest form of traditional music that I like.

Anyhow, when Martin Wagner, this high culture opera lover, hears Sarah Gunning it reminds him; do you see what’s happening psychologically? It reminds Martin of his youth, and his commitment to the Harlan County struggles. And that’s the class struggle in America’s most deepest contrast, the most blood, the most violence; you know the song ‘Which side are you on? You’re either working for the sheriff or a union

Archie Green
In his home in San Francisco, California. Part 2
Jarvis Rich present as well
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man.' You know, that is the most class-conscious song ever popularized in America. I had a good side, you know, Martin Wagner was on my side, Cliff DeLong was on my side, Bob Downs was on my side.