

Interview with John Abbott

Date: March 8, 1999

Interviewer: Judy Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores

Camera Rolls: 73-76

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Interview gathered as part of “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors.” Produced by Paradigm Productions. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Interview with John Abbott, conducted by Paradigm Productions on March 8, 1999 for “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors”. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors”.

00:00:11:00-00:01:47:00

Interviewer #1:

—if you need me to repeat anything.

Interviewer #2:

OK.

John Abbott:

You gotta speak—

Interviewer #1:

OK.

John Abbott:

—at and to me—

Interviewer #2:

Gotcha.

John Abbott:

—because I don't do too well, here.

Interviewer #1:

OK. Start by introducing yourself.

John Abbott:

I'm John Abbott—

Interviewer #1:

Tell—

John Abbott:

—John Hunley Abbott, after my father, Hunley Abbott, who is from a family of southerners named Hunley.

Interviewer #1:

Where were you born?

John Abbott:

Charleston, South Carolina, 1918. That makes me a war baby.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. First World War. You know, let me tell you one thing which is that you won't be hearing my questions, so you need to give, sort of build the question into the answer. So instead of just, if I say, "when were you born?" [background talk] instead of just saying, "1918:—

[cut]

Interviewer #1:

— no you told me that—

Interviewer #2:

—wait a minute—

Interviewer #1:

I'm sorry.

Interviewer #2:

OK, go ahead.

Interviewer #1:

You told me that on the phone, I think. Could you just—

Interviewer #2:

Talk about the Oxford Pledge.

Interviewer #1:

—talk about how you were feeling about the war, about war in the '30s and about signing the Oxford Pledge.

John Abbott:

I don't know what the Oxford Pledge is.

Interviewer #1:

The pledge against war. Didn't you tell?

John Abbott:

Hmm?

Interviewer #1:

I thought you told me that you'd signed it. There was a pledge that you refused to fight.

John Abbott:

I could have. I signed a lot of things. [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, but talk in general about—

John Abbott:

—but—

Interviewer #2:

—how were you feeling in the '30s when, when it felt like there was a war approaching and you wanted to not participate or to stop it. Talk about what it felt like then?

John Abbott:

I was, I was gonna be eligible for the war. I was going to school at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. I was taking Industrial Design as my major. I was sitting in the classroom and all of a sudden, the, the teacher got up and said girls, you can be excused. We're gonna, this is just for the boys.

Interviewer #1:

Hold on, I'm sorry, one second the sound man's got some problems.

Camera Crew Member:

The fridge, the fridge just came on—

[cut]

00:01:48:00-00:07:22:00

Interviewer #2:

—sitting in Pratt that day when—

John Abbott:

Yeah, we're sitting in, in this classroom and the teacher says, girls, get lost. So she starts passing out papers. And we looked at the papers, they were the, and whatcha gonna do for your country papers, you know induction. Well, I was in my second year, and the law was that I, I could finish my schooling. Pretty soon, after, after I'd signed the papers, which, well, my feelings were, this is a, this is a real shock, although I knew very well that one of these days I was gonna get it, and I was. But I read questions like do you believe in a supreme being. What in hell is a supreme being? Are you a pacifist? What's that? I knew absolutely nothing about conscientious objection. I knew nothing about supreme beings or pacifists or whatever. I spent most of my formative years from five on, after school, out in the woods. Learning, learning from nature what I could, and learning about who I was. Learning that I wasn't an Indian, because that's what I felt I was. I was out there imitating Indians. Why? Because they were the ones that informed the white man on how to, how to handle themselves and what to do, even in war. Which I, of course, wasn't interested in, but

nevertheless, I spent my years that way, getting to know who I was and getting to know what nature was. And nature has lots of laws that you don't break. Anyway, after I, I got that, I decided that I better go find out who a supreme being is and whether I believe in God and things, questions like that. So they recommended that I go see a Quaker minister, and there wasn't one about a half a mile away. I went in, made an appointment and saw him. He says, oh, fine, well we'll answer that question by my telling you a little story. And the little story was about a man standing on a curb and along, a little girl comes next to him and here comes a big truck rolling down the street and all of a sudden the little girl takes out in the middle of the street. And what do you do sir, what do you do when you're in that situation? I thought for a half a second. Well, of course, I went to go out there and grab her from in front of the truck. You believe in God then. I said, really, just from that huh? OK, I'll accept it. I went home and I was still wondering what, I, how I could possibly believe in God by trying to save a little girl's life. I was well-meaning, but believing in God. God, God lives up there or somewhere that, he's, you know, too big for me to have him just stand in my way or, or help me along, or whatever it is. This is a different ball park. Anyway, the draft board finally sent me a, a notice before I'd finished my second year, saying they want-, they needed to see me because the state superintendent had said, this man has got to go, to camp. Well, I says, what about the fact that I'm allowed to earn, stay for the rest of my schooling, one more year? He says, the state offices say, you've got to go, that's it. We have to obey them. I went, and told, they said, you can have an interview. So I went to Ossining, New York, which is also the seat of Sing Sing Prison. And it's not too far from Scarborough, which is where we lived. So I went to my parent's home in Scarborough, went to Ossining, to the local board, met them and talked to them about how come, and I said, well, you guys can say whatever you want to, but I'm not gonna go, and I'm gonna report your action to the district attorney in the city of New York. I went home to see my mother and father before I went back to Brooklyn to school. And they wanted to know what had happened. And I says, told them what had happened, and mother said, well, who told you to say tha-, those things? I said, because I'd, I always told them that I didn't believe in God, I didn't believe in any of these religious things. And I told them, well, God told me to say those. My mother says, Oh! and my father said, she was sick in bed for three days. Anyway, I reported to the district attorney in New York, and by the time I got there I realized that, that it was silly because he had nothing to do with Selective Service. But after finding out that he was a psychiatric [pause] representative of Selective Service, he went all through an interview with me and he says, well, everything seems to be normal, I don't see that we can find any excuses. He says, well, by the way before you go, would you accept my invitation to come and visit me over the weekend at my house? I said, you can go stick it up you know where. And my father was sitting right next to me when I said that. [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

John—

John Abbott:

Anyway, he did promise—

00:07:23:00-00:09:20:00

Interviewer #2:

—let me just jump in here for a minute—

John Abbott:

Uh huh.

Interviewer #2:

—because, we were talking about, you know, do you believe in a supreme being and you know—

John Abbott:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—what is God? and so forth. But putting, putting that aside, by the time you were contacted by the Selective Service, did you have an opinion about whether it was right for you to participate in war and kill people?

John Abbott:

My opinion at that age and earlier, when I was a young kid in grade school, going to my gods out, out in the woods, my opinion then was war was the wo-, the stupidest thing that men ever did in their lives. There were no winners in it. Even if you got there and killed people, you don't settle anything. So to me, war was an absolute end of the road. There was no sense in it for me or anybody else. But I was not about to tell anybody else what they should or shouldn't do, because I wanted to have them give me that same privilege, of whatever views I had, I wanted them to respect mine as much as I respected theirs, including my own brother. Older brother who went to Los Alamos, New Mexico, when I was in solitary confinement, he wrote me a letter which I got, telling me about how he's working on a device that can save w-, the lives of millions of people and shorten the war. And guess what, no more Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So do I believe in war, no, not today, not—haven't from the very beginning. It still doesn't make any sense. I cry, I weep when I see what United States and other countries are doing in Europe, southern Europe now. Hey, you don't need that. And whoever says to them about the situation, you need to mediate, you need to get together with people, you need to talk about it. You don't need to go out and kill people to make things different.

00:09:21:00-00:09:49:00

Interviewer #2:

But, but the people in the 1930s, or going into 1940, were saying, well, you can't talk to someone like Hitler. How did you respond to that?

John Abbott:

As far as I'm concerned, you can talk to anybody. There are madmen, you can talk to them, there are people who are, are [clock chimes] heads of the Catholic Church in this world. [clock chimes] What are? That, that's a clock.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah but I want, I want you to say that one more time when the clock stops.

[cut]

00:09:50:00-00:11:26:00

John Abbott:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

John, people, the question you were responding to was, was what did you say to people who said, you can't talk to someone like Hitler, you've got to fight him.

John Abbott:

Well, what I say to them is the same thing I'd say today with the situation that's going on now.

Interviewer #2:

Hang on for a second, this is one of those things that, what I say to people when people say you can't talk to Hitler, we need—

John Abbott:

Right!

Interviewer #2:

You have to say it, though.

Interviewer #1:

You have to say Hitler.

John Abbott:

Oh. Hmm.

[laughter]

Interviewer #1:

What would you, how would you respond to people who would say, you can't talk to Hitler?

John Abbott:

Well, fine, if you can't then I will, or somebody will and somebody's going to, sooner or later, he's gonna come to his senses but it's gonna be hard because he's already a nut in our ideas, right, but he's not the ruler of the world. The circumstances are that he got into power because nobody had any power in Germany. They were all starving to death. They all didn't have any jobs. It was just as, almost as bad as in the United States.

Interviewer #2:

I don't want to interrupt you, but say, Hitler got into power, because we don't know who you're talking about. Say one more time.

John Abbott:

Hitler got into power [laughs] they, they did not exercise their rights. They did not take, take the opportunity to tell Hitler what to do. They didn't insist on it. They gave him every-, anything he wanted because he was offering them pie in the sky.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

And hey, when you're starving, don't have any work and somebody's offering you everything, you'd go for it, just the same as you do. We had Hitlers here in the United States in offering the same thing. People had been out of work for so long, they'd do anything.

00:11:27:00-00:11:52:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm, mm hmm. Go back and tell the story about how you realized that you weren't capable of killing a living thing.

John Abbott:

There was a dogwood ring, which I went to many times out in the woods. Not far from home, but it was a beautiful place. And I could sit in the middle of that ring and look out, sort of like I was in, in sort of in [phone rings] a heavenly spot. [phone rings] [laughs] You didn't pull that out.

Interviewer #2:

I did.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, you know what, you didn't unplug the—

[cut]

00:11:53:00-00:12:30:00

Camera Crew Member:

You're rolling.

Interviewer #2:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Tell us about the, about your experience in the woods.

John Abbott:

I was sitting in, amongst the dogwoods and feeling wonderful and it was a nice, sunshiny day, and I, when I got up from there, I was, on my way home actually, and walking down a little path, it was just a little path. And by that I mean, mostly bushes and just, where the animals had gone through, maybe even an Indian. But all of a sudden, here was this animal on the ground in front of me. [plane overhead] And I re-, realized that it, it was dead. It wasn't moving, and I went—

Interviewer #2:

Stop. I told you the planes would arrive—

[cut]

00:12:31:00-

John Abbott:

Ring of dogwoods?

Interviewer #1:

Hold on a sec.

John Abbott:

No?

Interviewer #2:

Now go.

John Abbott:

Now go. I was sitting in this ring of dogwoods enjoying the late afternoon sunshine, got up and walked down this path, just, animal path. And all of a sudden, here in front of me was this body lying there in the path. And I realized that it must be dead 'cause it would have gotten up and moved otherwise. Went and found out that it was a bird. I picked it up in my arms and found out that it had one leg broken off of it, blown off, as I understood it, because they were shooting the, the birds, the ducks, in the Jersey marshes not too far away, and this one was on its way someplace and came in to land and died in front of, on my path. I took it in my arms and went home, next door to Mrs. Vail, who was always helping me with my questions about nature and gave me a little handbook to put in my back pocket so I could tell the names of the trees and the plants and so forth. And she went and said, I've got just the box for that. She got me a shoebox and put the duck in it. A wood duck, not a wooden duck, a wood duck, which is only seven, she said, only seven of them were known to exist. They'd just about shot 'em all off. This is what men do, you know, they shoot people off in any numbers until they're almost extinct. Anyway, give it to your father or you go with your father, 'cause he works in New York City, and take it to the museum and ask them to accept it. We did just that. They did accept it and they did ask me to come back and see it when it was being dressed and prepared to be in the front window on the main floor. And they presented me with a scroll saying that I was a donor of one wood duck to the Museum of Natural History. And since then, in all my résumés, that was one of the first things that I would say I was proud of.

00:14:26:00-00:16:21:00

Interviewer #1:

What did that make you think about, about shooting?

John Abbott:

Well, if you're trying to ask me about the difference between shooting to kill to stay alive or shooting for sport, which is, this is gonna give me kicks, buddy, or shooting to get some meat to stay alive with, there's a lot of difference. There's a tremendous amount of difference. And I don't see any, and, unless we're cannibals, I can't see why we should kill, kill other people—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—from just that point of view alone. I wouldn't like the meat anyway. [laughs] Oh, I know they do do it. But no, I, I don't call shooting or killing a sin, it's just something that I believed doesn't, I, I can't do that. I didn't ever say, I won't kill. I just said, I can't. And this was my main reason for being in a CO camp. Because I preferred it, because I was scared stiff of being, going to prison or whatever else it was they were gonna do with me. I mean, I knew that there were more of them and they're more powerful than I am. I can't stand up and fight 'em. So with all the beliefs I've got in the world, if I'd slap my bible and it says, you can't touch me, it has nothing to do with wha-, the way I felt. What I felt was, the world is a beautiful place and I don't want to be any part of messing it up. I don't want to have a, have any part of having anyone that I know, go to war for me. And believe me, they're not, and weren't, they went for their own selves. And I preferred actually leaving a slave camp and going to prison, which is, I knew was the result if I didn't go back in that pri-, in that slave camp, I'd have to spend time in prison. So I got two years in prison.

00:16:22:00-00:18:07:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about the slave camp—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, what does that mean? People—

Interviewer #1:

What was, yeah, what do you me—

John Abbott:

What's a slave camp?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

John Abbott:

Well, when you work for no money with the threat of imprisonment and no other outs, that's a slave camp. We had lots of camps like that for slaves in this country, right from the beginning and we imported people from all over the world or asked people to come and live in our, in the United States and put them in what's called a slave camp, or, no it wasn't called a slave camp, but they were. They were slaves. The Japanese-Americans that were in Manzanar, what were they? They didn't get paid—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—what were they? They were political slaves.

Interviewer #1:

Do you see some—

Interviewer #2:

Well, but, but not to play the devil's advocate, John, you were there because you said, I won't go in the Army.

John Abbott:

No, I didn't say that. I said, I can't. I can't go in the Army. I can't because of my beliefs which are that this is not the way to run a world. This is nothing that I can do. There's a lot of other things I could do, and if you'll, if you'll let me, leave me alone, I will be of more benefit to this country than you can imagine. The route that you're going in sending me to, to prison, and I ended up in being in three different prisons, cost the United States government thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars. Not just room and board. They, anytime I was moved from one prison to another, it cost big bucks, to get on a train with two guards with me, handcuffed, arm, ank-, ankles and wrists. [laughs] Oh, what a joke.

00:18:08:00-00:19:12:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about CPS camp. What was your experience there?

John Abbott:

Well, actually, if you know the story about Uncle Remus and the Tar Baby—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—it's about not being thrown in the briar patch. Well, you know, I've already told you, that I love being out in the woods. So here I am. I'm sentenced to go spend time in the woods, in the mountains, in the wh-, my l-, I've never been in a place that's as beautiful as Southern California mountains, with woods and streams and oh, I fell in love with it. But, I also found that the principle of what was going on was just too much for me to stand and at the beginning, I was afraid, I was frightened about going to prison. I made my decision in the beginning to go to camps because I was chicken. When I got to camp, then I had to fight the other part of it, which was how much I thought I, [laughs] I was gonna miss being in the mountains and loving the, the place in nature.

00:19:13:00-00:21:33:00

Interviewer #2:

You, you had a sort of a sarcastic comment, you know, because when, when people were sent to CPS camps, they were supposed to do work of national importance.

John Abbott:

[speaking simultaneously] National importance.

Interviewer #2:

So talk about work of national importance.

John Abbott:

Work of national importance, I found out right away, was the first day, sweeping pine needles on the road in a public camp in Shalayo. We were out there doing it. I says, well, I'm gonna lean on my shovel or my broom and I'm gonna talk to these guys and find out what they think. What are they here for? Where are they from? So I was standing there and talking

and leaning on the tools and the, and the, s-, the fire service man, Art Becher, good German stolid type, by that I mean, he was physically brusque and overpowering in, in his stature and in his words, when you heard him order you to do something, you know you were told. He says, you're not gonna be on my crew from now on. You're out. As a matter of fact, I'm gonna see that you get kicked out of camp. So, when I got back to camp, he says, you're just not on my crew anymore. We're gonna talk to the other boys in camp and maybe we're even gonna move, move you to a federal camp. Well, I told the rest of them and of course there were not very many men there, that if they put, put up with that, his having the right to fire us or move us out of camp, this is not his jurisdiction, and pretty soon, they would be on, in, in line for the same kind of treatment. So they ag-, they made the agreement that I'd be put on camp overhead. And what that meant, was that I could get up at 2 o'clock, help make breakfast, see that everybody was served, take care of the dishes, and then I'd have the rest of the day off for myself, to wander around in the, in the forest and woods which I loved. And the rest of them could go out there and serve their god in sweeping pine needles or making trails that didn't need to have people running up and trails down, because they had gas rationing and you couldn't even get to the camp.

00:21:34:00-00:23:06:00

Interviewer #2:

Well, in, in Studs' book, you referred, when he talked to you, you referred to it as "work of national impotence."

John Abbott:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

I liked that.

John Abbott:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

Talk about it.

John Abbott:

[laughs] Well, talk about it?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Just could you say that?

John Abbott:

Well we were always making jokes or words, switching things around. Like the sticker on your gas rationing window card said, is this trip really necessary? And we would cross it out or say, is this war really necessary? And work of national impotence, yes. Here we were, up in a national park sweeping up pine needles off of paved roads, taking care of the toilets and so forth and so forth and so forth, and the war was, the war was going on full steam ahead. And why couldn't the men that were there, why couldn't they be used to do something that was important to our country? And there's lots of jobs to be done, because everybody else was working in a war, job—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—when I f-, walked out of camp, I went to a hospital. I knew they didn't have any help. There was one Japanese, 80 year old Japanese man, doing the entire yard work for the Pasa-, the hospital in Pasadena, by himself. I helped him a half a day, then I lugged laundry over [laughs] to the, from the hospital over to the laundry, the o-, the other half of the day. I got room and board and a, a place to stay until they came to pick me up.

00:23:07:00-00:24:49:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. Would you go back and talk about your trip to CPS camp?

Interviewer #2:

The train ride.

Interviewer #1:

Your train ride.

John Abbott:

Did I answer the question—

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

John Abbott:

—about being impotent?

Interviewer #1:

Yes, that was great, that was great. I think, yeah. Was that good enough, do you need? Actually, if you would do it again and say, they called it work of national importance, we called it—maybe put it together, I don't think you said both of them next to each other.

John Abbott:

[laughs] Well, I can repeat what you said.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah. [laughs] Go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

If you feel uncomfortable with it—

Interviewer #1:

If you feel more comfortable—

John Abbott:

Well, they called it, and had, written down and everything, as "work of national importance" well, what's important? And we always took whatever it was that they said and turned it around. But ultimately, even though I was kicked out, off of the work crew, Even though I ha-, I had time out on my own and so forth, I found something that I could do that I felt that was important. And that was fighting fires. We were sixty-five miles up in the mountains, away from anybody. It was a fire lookout station in Charlton Flats, about two and a half miles from camp, where they were looking for fires. When a fire came, we would get the call. And we would be told where to go. We would all jump in the, those that were there and ready could go, jump in the [unintelligible] and roll to the fire. And we'd go and fight fires, along with anybody and everybody else. We weren't discriminated against [laughs] when we were out there fighting fires. But I found that as being of national importance to me. It was not killing anybody, it was not making armaments, but it was helping by putting a fire out that would rage in Southern California is notorious [laughs] for their really good fires.

00:24:50:00-00:27:06:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm, mm hmm. Go back and tell the story about the train trip across the country.

John Abbott:

Oh my God. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

I love that story.

Interviewer #2:

And specifically about how the woman gives you the food and then takes it away from you.

John Abbott:

When I was in this camp in, in New Hampshire, I wa-, they were, it was announced that there'd be a meeting to ask for volunteers to go and fill up new camps being started in the West Coast. And anybody that wanted to come and sign up or hear about it could come. I went to the meeting and I found out that my name had, had already been put on the list, number one. Well, I, I just smiled because I knew that already I had, I had a reputation for being a person who was an individual, or was a person that did not always go along with the flow, and could be called a troublemaker if you wish, but I was always questioning or asking what if, or what about. So anyway, those from that camp and other camps in the East got together in Pennsylvania Station, New York City, on the day we're supposed to go, and we were gi-, the CO's there were enough of 'em to almost fill one chair car on the train. We also found out that there were two other chair cars to, that would be linked up to the one that we were on. And that you could walk through the doors and go into any one of those three cars. They would be, they were gonna be hauled, we found out, all the way from the East Coast to the West Coast. Who's in the other two cars? Marine recruits. No uniforms, young men just like us, in that car. So if the doors were open, they could come in our car, and we could go in their car. Until they found out who we were and what it wa-, what we were saying and then the powers that be for them had the doors locked shut, so there was no communication between us anymore. Unless we went out on the station platform. And that was to get out of the car and be someplace out in the open.

00:27:07:00-00:30:05:00

Well, we found Mother America waiting for us. Mother America were kind, sweet, lovely ladies who had a basket of fruit, bars of candy, all kinds of goodies, maybe even a magazine or something. And they were on the platforms in the United States, not just ours, but

everywhere. They were out, out there supporting the young men that were in the war. Of course, giving them, giving them fruit and candy and so forth away to whomever came by, nice looking young men without any uniforms on, they couldn't tell a CO from a Ma-, Marine recruit. Finally somebody told them. And all of a sudden, there was a loud war whoop from these ladies and they were screaming, running up and down the platform, snatching out, snatching back the, the goodies that they gave in support for their young men to make them feel better, maybe kill better, or fight better, or whatever better. And all hell broke loose. The Marine recruits were wondering what had hit them. Who, who told them what to get them stirred up like this, was like a bunch of hornets. But I'll remember that for the rest of my life about that experience because the, the trip across country took over a week, in, backing into and coming out of railroad stations, meeting the guards at every prain—train station because trains were a vital military tool, shipping goods, people, mi-, military personnel, the trains were full of war. We happened to be tied on to the end [laughs] of this three car, chair car train, shuttled from one train to another train, in and out of stations, when, even when we get to a, a place where there was a, Fred Myers? No it wasn't Fred Myers, anyway it's a restaurant chain who had facilities right near the tracks, and we'd get out of the train and go over there, both CO's and Marine recruits, file in there, sit down at tables, get fed and nobody raised any stink or whatever to us, but almost always, and rightly so, as far as we're, our protection is concerned, there were always guards at a railroad station. They were always asking us, let's see your identification. Let's see your power of authority to do what you're doing. You can't just wander around here. Any railroad station was being protected and we were glad to meet them. We were glad to tell them our side, of whatever our story was. And they were always interested. They never told us you can't do this, they were guarding the station.

00:30:06:00-00:32:11:00

Interviewer #1:

I don't think in the story before, that you actually said that the women, the way you told it before, you'd said that they called you yellow bellies and took the sandwiches away from you. I don't think you said that when you just told it.

John Abbott:

I don't, I don't think that was said. But if it was, if I said it—

Interviewer #1:

I thought you said that earlier today—

John Abbott:

Well.

Interviewer #1:

—when you told it, when you told me the story before, I thought you said, give back those sandwi-, give that back you're yellow bellied—

John Abbott:

Well, I, I don't remember saying that,

Interviewer #1:

Does that, does— I don't want to put words in your mouth, if you didn't, if that wasn't the story.

John Abbott:

I wouldn't say it. There were, there was lots of times when I was, when we were all called yellow bellies and worse.

Interviewer #1:

Tell us some of these things that happened to you.

John Abbott:

Well, if you have leave or time off from camp, which you earned from, for the time that you put in, just like the military were, you were given a time to be away from the camp, or m-, away from the military situation wherever you're in, you're very lucky to have it. For us, it was a very dangerous thing. If you got, if you left camp and went to a place like Los Angeles, which is the closest big to-, place for us, you were accosted by anybody and everybody, not military people were not accosting us, but people in civilian dress were saying, hey Mac, where the hell's your uniform? What's a matter, are you a Four F or a yellow belly or something? You want to come on outside. We'll, we'll settle and see what you're made of. So situations like that. If you didn't have any money to take a bus or a streetcar, you thumbed your way, you'd get in the car and the man would want to know, well, where's your uniform? It's always the question and it was always answered by me and others, I'm a conscientious objector which is done by law, just like anybody else, and my position is that I can't go and kill people. You can't huh? [makes screeching sound] On goes the breaks, open goes the door, get the hell out of here. So you were out in the road again.

00:32:12:00-00:32:34:00

Interviewer #1:

These guys weren't in uniform either, though.

John Abbott:

I'm sorry.

Interviewer #1:

The, the people who did this to you, weren't in uniform either, what was their excuse?

John Abbott:

No! It was their business to, the people that aren't [laughs] in uniform, are not fighting the war, they're, they are starting their own little campaign. And this is, this is something that—

Interviewer #1:

[sneezes] Excuse me.

John Abbott:

—people like to do

Interviewer #1:

[sneezes]

John Abbott:

—for some reason or other.

Interviewer #1:

Mmm.

John Abbott:

Cut. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Sorry. Thank you.

00:32:35:00-00:33:12:00

Interviewer #2:

So, so, John, I think it was you that was telling me about the habit of people getting up and doing readings every day in camp. Did you, did you tell me that story about Corbett Bishop?

Were you in camp with Corbett back east or was that George Yamada that told me the story?
When you were in camp in New Hampshire, where you in, was Corbett there with you?

Interviewer #1:

Did you know Corbett Bishop?

John Abbott:

I knew of him.

Interviewer #1:

But he wasn't in camp with you?

John Abbott:

I don't think so.

Interviewer #2:

No, somebody—

Interviewer #1:

—I think George Yamada—

Interviewer #2:

—maybe George told us this—

Interviewer #1:

—George Yamada told us that story, yeah.

John Abbott:

Yeah, George was in another one.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, he was in—

Interviewer #2:

So, but—

John Abbott:

George Yamada was—

Interviewer #2:

Backing off—

John Abbott:

—very close with—

Interviewer #2:

Backing off a step—

John Abbott:

—me and my family.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, you were friends with George Yamada?

John Abbott:

Oh yeah.

Interviewer #1:

That's right, OK, all right.

00:33:13:00-00:35:02:00

Interviewer #2:

Let's just move back to sort of the big picture stuff. When we look back now, the war is fifty-plus years gone, everyone looks back on that experience with nostalgia, nobody knows there were COs, we're gonna show this film to people all over the country on public television. And what do you think it's important that they know about the experience of people who were opposed to war? What do you think they, what is, what is the most important things

they have to learn about what happened?

John Abbott:

Well, I think his-, history is the very best thing for anybody to learn about where we are today. If you don't know where you were yesterday, you don't have much of a chance in knowing either where you are today, or where you're, you hope to go tomorrow, to work for. So on the basis of where were you before, I'm always going back to that dogwood circle in the woods and I'm always saying hey, what are the things that I really believe in, what is it that I want to do with my life. I'm not about to preach to anybody else and tell 'em what to do, but my position is, by the way I do, is what you can say what I will do—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—and that's the best you can do about anybody. See how they do. And as far as I'm concerned, pacifists were supposed to be a peaceful person. Well, I was not peaceful because I wouldn't fight or kill, I was a peaceful person because this is the way I, I brought myself up. That you don't get the world into a better place by killing a bird or a person.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. Talk about being

Camera Crew Member:

I need more—

[cut]

00:35:03:00-00:36:33:00

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

So, what were you saying about you don't mind driving—

Interviewer #1:

That's a good—

Interviewer #2:

—asking tough questions and disturbing people?

John Abbott:

I don't mind asking the t-, whatever questions, and if it upsets somebody then I know that it's got to be an important question. And if I don't know questions that will upset me, I start looking further. I've got to. [laughs] Because I don't know everything. I'm only 80 years old and I, if I don't learn something new every day as the story goes, you know, you missed one. Don't—

Interviewer #2:

So—

John Abbott:

—miss one. Keep—

Interviewer #2:

So—

John Abbott:

—keep on asking the questions. And keep—

Interviewer #2:

Just—

John Abbott:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

So what we're talking about is pacifists are not just people who don't make waves, pacifists stir things up, right?

John Abbott:

I hope so, 'cause things need to be s-, looked at from a different point of view. Are we all gonna be like the Germans got themselves into, a, a goose step or whatever they called it?

Are we all gonna be with blinders on and our ears shut and the monkeys, are we all gonna be that way, and what kind of a world is that? Are you gonna be happy in that world? Ooh, is the history of United States of people who didn't come over here with dif-, ni-, different ideas, and new ideas and strive to make a better world? What do you think America's all about? It's the hope of everybody in the world that wants to come over here. Why? It's because they got an opportunity to make things right, or different, or whatever you want to call it.

00:36:34:00-00:36:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

But to change—

John Abbott:

Hmm?

Interviewer #2:

—what? America is about the potential of changing, right? Not being—

John Abbott:

Sure.

Interviewer #2:

Not just getting locked in.

John Abbott:

Changes come from asking questions.

Camera Crew Member:

There's a phone ringing.

Interviewer #1:

Now the phone is ringing in—

Camera Crew Member:

It's been ringing for thirty seconds.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, I heard it, that's right.

Interviewer #2:

Well, too bad on it. Well, do you want to track it down?

[cut]

00:36:52:00-00:37:53:00

Interviewer #1:

Start again.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, go ahead.

John Abbott:

A pacifist isn't necessarily an activist. But an activist doesn't mean that you're a pacifist. It doesn't mean that you're a, an ogre, that you're gonna scream and holler, you're gonna upset people so that they can't stand anything. No, a pacifist ought to be able to control themselves to the point where they can get their point across and let it lay. Let the person handle it—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

[background hum]

John Abbott:

—so you don't need to be afraid of pacifists, or even people who ask a lot of questions. Unless you're afraid of questions, and that's where the problem is. You're af-, if you're afraid of questions, then you don't need to hear me. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

I, I think the question—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—you, you were getting at was, I think people think of pacifists as being passive.

John Abbott:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

What do you think about that?

John Abbott:

I certainly am not an example of that—

Interviewer #2:

We're gonna stop.

John Abbott:

—I'm an example of a person—

Interviewer #2:

This time, this time we are gonna stop. The plane has arrive—

[cut]

00:37:54:00-00:38:30:00

John Abbott:

—me.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah [unintelligible] you [laughs] [unintelligible]

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead. [pause] So, um—

John Abbott:

I never did like labels, pacifist, conscientious objector, whatever you want to call it. Why, why do I need a label?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

Why can't they just accept me as John, or my full name if you wish, or you can even call me my father's name [laughs] but labeling people is shutting the system down. It's preventing people from meeting each other and finding each other to work out with each other.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

So?

00:38:31:00-00:40:21:00

Interviewer #1:

So, what was it like being isolated with other people who had that label, conscientious objector? Was that, I mean, you said you liked being in the woods, you didn't like the system above you, but how did you feel about the other COs you met? Did you make friends? And—

John Abbott:

I was, I was amazed at the diversity and the intelligence and the, the guys that came from all over United States, and here I met them in this camp in New Hampshire, and another one in Southern California. They were people who I honored because of what they had become in their, their life mostly in colleges and schools, where they had, had brilliant records. I mean, these guys weren't dummies. And then I found out that they could find out about any subject, too. And that was great. To me, in my father and mother's house, we were, after a while my brother and I were not allowed to talk about religion or politics at the dinner table. Because we were stirring up too much trouble for them. Not us, but them. And when I found out that here was, were young men, my own age, talking about anything that they wanted to, and with ideas that I'd never heard of too. And I thought it was wonderful. I thought it was really great

that here were these young men. I didn't like the idea that we were there and not getting paid, I didn't like us being treated as, as yellow bellied skunks [laughs] as a big hair cutter said in town. I didn't like the way the public generally, some of the public, t-, treated us. But I knew that if I was gonna be as outlandishly different than most of the people in the United States, I was gonna have to pay some sort of a penalty or price. I knew that, that—

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

00:40:22:00-00:40:45:00

John Abbott:

—give us pay? Why don't you give us, you know—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah. What did they—

John Abbott:

—why can't we be human beings?

Interviewer #2:

So what did they say?

John Abbott:

Well, [grunts]. They'd never heard anybody talk to them like that. They were out there having their vacation outing, to climbing in the mountain. Which I was glad to see them doing that, but it gave me an opportunity to talk to them without any problems of being interfered with.

00:40:45:00

Interviewer #1:

There were some other questions you asked them. What else did you say before? You said, why didn't, why didn't we get paid? Why didn't we get work that was [pause] important?

John Abbott:

[sighs] I've forgotten what I said.

Interviewer #1:

I forgot too. You had a few other things.

Interviewer #2:

John, it's clear that you and a lot of people were very frustrated by the CPS camps, and talk about how that frust—

John Abbott:

There were a lot of people that really weren't.

Interviewer #2:

No, but in your case, in your case, you got more and more frustrated, until finally you said—

John Abbott:

Absolutely—

Interviewer #2:

—that's it. So, talk about how—

John Abbott:

—I, the main question I had right in the beginning was, do I want to go to prison or do I want to go to camp? Well, I took the, what I con-, consider the lesser of evils. But I wasn't gonna besmirch the good family name. Which later, when I got home, after serving my prison time, I went out walking with my father. And I says, Dad, I'm s-, I'm sorry, I besmirched the good family name. And he said [laughs] took about a half a minute and he chuckled and says, you should hear about what your grandparents did. I said, well, why did you wait so long, until now, to tell me? What is it? So he told me about his grandfather and others and what they had done, which in their day was as radical for them as for me. As far as I'm concerned my father's an old stick in the mud. He's a lovely man. He's a hell of an engineer and he certainly got the right job at the right time, because at the depth of the depression, he had the world's biggest job in engineering the second largest building in the world—

Interviewer #2:

So.

John Abbott:

—Hey, we went to private schools. We bought an estate. We had houses in Florida and New

York. Ho, ho, ho.

00:42:24:00-00:44:34:00

Interviewer #2:

But, but, just talk about how your frustration built up in camp 'til finally you said, this was the wrong decision, I can't do this, I have to go to jail.

John Abbott:

[sighs] Well, it mainly was about the fact that we were secluded in the woods and were not in touch with people. E-, Even if I had enough time on leave, I, I couldn't have gone home. Then what. Nobody, I, people would sit at our dining room table for Thanksgiving or Christmas, year after year, I grew up with them. I saw their fathers and mothers all those years. They wouldn't speak to me, they wouldn't answer the telephone. They wouldn't have their children come over to my house or mine being over there. So the door was slammed shut, for whatever. And so [laughs] I felt that this, if this is the way it is, I'm gonna have to put up with it. And if I'm in prison, what's gonna happen then? All I found then was, that I was, I transferred from a camp where there were no barbed wire and no officials with guns, and no official authority to do anything, except instruct us [laughs] in our work of national impotence. I was to another prison camp, but a federal one. And why should I cooperate with anything that they're doing? They're punishing me for not killing people. Do I have to want to kill people? Do I actually have to go kill people before they'd accept me again? What's going on? Until I found in, in the prison camp in Tuscon, Arizona, up in the mountains, that there were about a half a dozen or more Native Americans and they invited me to come and be in their hogan with them and call me brother. And I asked them, well how come you guys aren't fighting the war. Well, we don't fight white men's war. I said, well, then I guess I must be brother.

00:44:35:00-00:44:49:00

Interviewer:

Were they in prison with you?

John Abbott:

Sure.

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm. But they had a hogan at the prison?

John Abbott:

They were allowed to have a hogan right over the, to one side of the main buildings—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—they were allowed to do that—

Interviewer #2:

So—

John Abbott:

—and have their meetings.

00:44:50:00-00:47:04:00

Interviewer:

So, when you were in prison, your response to prison was that if you had a little reason to cooperate with CPS, when you were in a federal prison, you had no reason—

John Abbott:

I had none. We decided that on the train trip from Los Angeles to Tucson, Arizona, we got together on the train, John Hampton, John Haywooky and John Abbott. John Hampton was the originator and owner of the silent movie theater in Hollywood. And he was in court trying to become a CO and John Ham-, Haywooky from San Francisco is the same ting. He had violated the law, just like I had. OK the two of us got together. Now, John, let's see hear your story, let's hear your story, and let's hear your story. And we got through, what are we gonna do now? Is this the end? Is just going to prison the end? No. What we're gonna do is that we're not gonna do any-, anything that the people who are punishing us or holding us in captivity, or whatever you want to call it, we're not gonna do anything if they ask us to. And therefore, we're gonna stop the prison, particularly if other people will listen and they are all gonna say, I didn't do those things, I'm innocent. Well then, if you're innocent, why are you obeying the prison? Oh, OK, well, what do we do? Just do like we do, nothing. Just when you get an order, say, I'll see you, or goodbye, or thanks a lot [laughs] and what can they do to you? They can't hou-, there are not enough solitary confinement cells. There are not enough lock-ups anywhere. There are, how are you gonna run a prison if the p-, prisoners themselves, which are the people who run the prison, how, how are they gonna handle that? It's a total shutdown. It's a strike, if you wish. Whatever you want to call it, it was nonviolent action, action, nonviolent action, yes. Pacifist if you wish, I don't know. I call it pacifist. [laughs] Peaceful action to not join in the, cooperating for the prison.

00:47:05:00-00:50:56:00

But all through this who-, the whole time that I was in camp and in prison, and the war was going on, I could see the history being repeated over and over and over again, that I had learned about ever since I was a little kid. About when there's starvation, where there are no jobs, and people are out looking for a heaven or a dictator to tell them what to do, that just kept coming all the time. And who were these mad people that were coming at me and telling me, where's my uniform? I ju-, I wasn't, I wasn't part of one of them, or one of the things that they thought I ought to be, if I didn't have a uniform on? Would having a uniform make the difference? What would happen if I had the uniform, which I did in prison, I had the uniform in prison on, I was just like everybody else, until my big mouth started working. [laughs] And when other guys kept coming over to me and saying, well what do we do now? I says, well what do you want to do? I says, you said you're innocent. If you're innocent, then why are you obeying the orders? Why are you doing any work here? Well, I guess [mumbles]. So by example, I did what I had to do and what I had to do was to not cooperate with the prison system. And I was in three federal prisons, working my way back from the West Coast back to the East Coast, each time, Tucson, Arizona; La Tuna, Texas; El Reno, Oklahoma and then releasing me on, on parole? Never did see the parole officers. Never did see any committee, but the warden, a really neat guy, comes down and says you're going out in ten days, and I want you to go out every day, spend one hour out in the yard, by yourself, in the sunshine 'cause if I release you the way you look now, you'd, people will be as scared of you as a ghost. But then, I have a favor I want to ask you. And you don't have to do it if you don't want to. I says, what i-, what kind of favor can I do, do you? You already know that I'm not gonna do anything for the prison system. He says no, this will be for me, 'cause I'm in trouble. A warden? You're the most powerful person here. How can you be in trouble? He says, the Selective Service personnel that I had in that office have been drafted. And I have to have that covered. There's nobody in this prison that I can trust. Because in the Selective Service office, are all the records of every inmate here. That's the most powerful job, outside of mine, in this prison. With it, you could run this prison. I says, you're in bad trouble. He says, yep, why do you think I'm asking you? I know who you are. I've seen you in solitary. I've seen what you do and what you say. I know that you've been here from two other prisons and you're supposed to be in the worst one of all. Well, here's your chance to prove that they're wrong again. I says, how much time do I put in? He says, one hour a day with the doors locked and you don't do nothing except sit there. And that will give me credit. That will be my cover. By that time, the ten days you're in there, I will have somebody else. I'm covered. I, I received letters from him for a long time after I got out. He visited me quite often, to my embarrassment, when I was in solitary. [laughs]

00:50:58:00-00:52:26:00

Interviewer #1:

What was his name?

John Abbott:

I've got letters right in that metal box in there with his name on it. [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

John, when you look back at what you went through during the war years, was that, was that an important period? What, did you come out of that experience changed or stronger? What did that, what did that experience in camp or prison do to you?

John Abbott:

I'm glad you asked that question. I certainly felt a lot stronger in my beliefs in coming out. But I was not feeling so strong that I would go around and knock on people's doors or stand in a pulpit and say, Hey! This is the way to go! Cause it'd always been to me, an individual thing, and there's nothing that I can do about what other people do unless they want to listen or see what other people do. So, as far as I'm concerned, I just felt better about myself for having gone through that hell. Not only in, the camp hell and the position that you were in when you went out in public as a CO, but the thing about being in prison. That is no-, something you don't want to have one day of. That's enough, and it definitely is punishment. And you can lose your head a little, too. Anyway, yes, I felt, I felt stronger when I got out.

00:52:27:00-00:53:59:00

I felt like now I have, I'll have the opportunity to do what I've been pr-, preaching and saying all this time when it was under such high stress. Now I can have a job, go to work, get married, yeah, yeah, yeah, but I wasn't allowed to get married. You know that you're on parole, you're not allowed to get married until you get your parole officer's ap-, approval? Well, they kept writing me lect-, letters and telling me I'll have to come in for a visit to see the parole officer. Finally, after half a year or more, I went in and I says, this is the only time you're ever gonna see me, so whatever it is that you want to see me about, you gotta say it now. I says, I'm getting married next week, and so forth and so forth, and we, we live at such and such address. And we're working at the, at the job and I can't change jobs. You've already told me that. To get more money so we can live in a decent place. I said, I said, hey, if you have anything to say to me, say it now. If you want, if you think you're gonna send me back to prison, you better ask the warden, whatever that prison it is, and it's got to be a different one, because every one I've been in says, they never want to see me again. As a matter of fact, those were the instructions I got when I got out of the last prison and I was put on a train to go home. Don't ever come back. We don't want to ever see you again.

00:54:00:00-00:55:20:00

Interviewer #1:

Go back and talk, you told me a story before and I meant to get you to tell the story of how you got other people out of camp.

John Abbott:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] I like that.

John Abbott:

I figured that every man that was there that could be gotten out of camp was one more man that wasn't gonna be involved in this stupidity, of work of national importance, and whatever else it was for. I think it was mostly just to keep, I don't know, I really don't even know today why we were there, or what—I guess we were just caught up in the, in a system, signing the papers and obeying the orders to go. There were many of them that didn't, would, just took off and went to Canada or whoever, wherever else. But at Shalayo, I had the opportunity with a small group of men, not ever, never more than fifty, [audio problem] quite often less, to deal with them on a personal and a intimate basis, and I found out that I was in love with most of them. I was in love with what they were and the strivings and the problems that they've had and I says, why can't I do something to get these guys out? I remembered that—

Interviewer #1:

Wait, wait a second. Something, It's back there, it's a—

[cut]

00:55:21:00-00:57:18:00

Interviewer #1:

You can start again.

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead. OK, ready?

John Abbott:

There was this one guy who had a box of food and cl-, whatever, sent to him once a month by his mother. It was a shirt box. I says, OK, if you'll do what I tell you, we're gonna get you out of here in a month, or very soon. Just, just do what I tell you. I says, when the shirt box comes, don't open it. Don't do anything with it, but stick it under your bed. If you get more, keep sticking them under your bed. If it gets to stink too much, well, we'll take care of that later. Next thing you want to do is see those raggedy old clothes you got? Don't change 'em. Don't, don't, you can go take a shower, but you don't ch-, wash the clothes, you don't take 'em off. You have 'em. And if you got more raggedy clothes, put them on too. Look like the

worst bum you ever saw in your whole life. And if somebody stops you and wants to say hello to you and how are you feeling, you say, tell them about that you're on your way to Tegucigalpa and it's on a pilgrimage and you are alone and you're not gonna stop until you get there. Well, he got a, he got a, a 4F to leave camp within about a month, as soon as the papers could be filed. But it was people like that, who, who were back to camp two or three months after he got out, he come right back to camp to visit the guys and say hello, in a nice suit and pants and clothes, and he's coming to see how you all were and he's doing fine and he's under no problems. He's out of camp.

00:57:19:00-00:57:40:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you, what, was there something, I felt like we needed to pick up something.

Interviewer #2:

No.

Interviewer #1:

Was that, did we get the whole, Nick did we lose any of that whole story about how much he liked everyone in the camp?

Interviewer #2:

No, we have it.

Interviewer #1:

We got that, right? OK, I didn't know if we still had that. Go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

I want to switch gears a little bit to—

Camera Crew Member:

Whose chair is squeaking?

Interviewer #1:

My chair is squeaking a little bit.

Interviewer #2:

That's, that's—

Camera Crew Member:

Stop shifting around.

Interviewer #1:

OK, I'll stay still.

Interviewer #2:

I want to talk a little bit about—

John Abbott:

Stop wiggling in it then. It won't wiggle, it won't squeak.

00:57:41:00-

Interviewer #2:

When you picked up your life after the war, about how, what you were able to contribute to society, through activism and other ways, once, once the war was over, were you able to do anything else to, to keep those values and to put your, put those principles into action?

John Abbott:

Well, I had to get out of prison. I had to get, be on parole. I had to serve the rest of my time working in a hospital in New York, and I was being sent back to do work in a hospital. Just like when they picked me up in Pasadena. [background hum] I was working in a hospital. So here I was, back again, working in a hospital, and I couldn't even afford rent for a decent place to stay. And Irene came from Los Angeles to see me, stay with me, live with me, and have a baby with me, with us, the two of us [laughs] [pause] until I, until I get off parole.

00:58:41:00-00:58:59:00

Camera Crew Member:

There's a truck drove through the first part of that.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, we know that. It's all right.

Interviewer #2:

I know that, I know that. Yeah. All right, talk about—

John Abbott:

I heard, I—

Interviewer #2:

—after that period in terms of—

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead, I think he's just saying that—

Interviewer #1:

—other things that were happening—

John Abbott:

—I'm just about to get out of New York City—

Interviewer #2:

You're telling me that's an hour later?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

John Abbott:

—and off parole. A friend of mine I'd known for a long time [background chime] wanted to—

Camera Crew Member:

Stop.

Interviewer #2:

You're telling me that's an hour later?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

It's been about an hour.

[cut]

00:59:00-

Interviewer #2:

About the postwar—

Interviewer #1:

So you were on parole. What year did you get out of prison? What year are we talking about here.

John Abbott:

Don't ask me dates.

Interviewer #1:

Oh that's right.

Interviewer #2:

Forget about it.

Interviewer #1:

I'll look it up.

Interviewer #2:

We don't care.

John Abbott:

They're all in there.

Interviewer #2:

We don't care.

John Abbott:

They're, all the dates are written down in typed form.

[production discussion]

Interviewer #1:

Do you know how many years you were in prison?

John Abbott:

Huh?

Interviewer #1:

How many years you were in prison, do you know that?

John Abbott:

I was sentenced to two.

Interviewer #2:

We don't care, Judy, we don't care.

Interviewer #1:

Well I care.

John Abbott:

And you know what that made me?

Interviewer #1:

What.

John Abbott:

You hear this?! It made me a felon. A felon is a person who has committed a heinous crime. It's so serious that you lose all your civil rights. And when I found out that I couldn't vote, I, I couldn't choose the people that I wanted to represent me, I had to raise a little more hell. I went to the American Civil Liberties Union, and with Al Warren's help and Dick Petherbridge who was a CO too, and a lawyer. We went to, we went to court to get our

rights, my rights back and the rights of, of others. It took eight years. It took a lot of people coming to my house with their television cameras and their microphones, a lot of people trying to find out what's going on. Some guy was asking questions. And my question was, how come you got me in prison? How come you got me, in a country that believes in law and order, in jurisprudence, how come you got me without that, those rights. Where were my rights then? How did you take my rights away? Where was the jury? Where was the judge? You, is this automatic justice in the United States? Anyway, I s-, we—

01:00:50:00-01:02:42:00

Interviewer #1:

You're talking about your rights to vote—

John Abbott:

To vote, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—after—

John Abbott:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—your rights as—

John Abbott:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—an ex-felon—

John Abbott:

After you're—

Interviewer #1:

—or as a felon. Are you still considered a—

John Abbott:

Ex-felon?

Interviewer #1:

—felon? You're still a felon? Even after—

John Abbott:

As far as I'm concerned—

Interviewer #1:

—serving your time?

John Abbott:

—I'm an artist and I always will be. As far as having committed a felony, I'm proud of it. I'm boastful of it. [laughs] I'm ready anytime. I wouldn't like to go back, but you know, if this is what the experience is gonna be, it's not that horrible. It's not the end of the world. It's not like lighting it up the way Hitler does or the German people do, or whatever. Anyway, I g-, I finished my parole. Irene and I got married. We had our first child. We went to Florida with this friend of mine and we started an advertising agency and we had a half a day, or one day a week girl in the office and August did the writing and getting the clients and I did the artwork. We had a, a house not too far away, and the upper floor, and Robin, the ba-, the child, one year old was sitting out on the lawn and the landlady was screaming her head off. And we wanted to know what for. She says, you don't sit a baby of one year underneath a palm tree with big bombs like that to drop on her. Anyway, that was my getting back into the world [background noise] and providing an income for the family. [cat meows] Louise, I mean, Robin, strike that—

Camera Crew Member:

[coughs]

Interviewer #1:

Start again. Irene, my—

John Abbott:

[laughs] I, Irene—

Camera Crew Member:

[coughs]

John Abbott:

—couldn't stand not seeing all of her friends, 'cause, she'd lived in Los Angeles for her entire life. So that's how we got to Los Angeles—

01:02:43:00-01:04:33:00

Interviewer #2:

But talk about—

John Abbott:

—and when we got here, I got involved with peace action in [cat meows] taking care of discrimination in hotels, in the city of Los Angeles. [cat meows] A group of us a, multi, multi-ethnic, [unidentified background noise] got together on Sundays, talked about what we could do, [cat meows] decided that if we take the area around, within walking distance of the train station [unidentified background noise] and the bus station, to get a room. If you were black, could you get a room? If you were whatever, could you get a room. So we went as a group like we were, whites, blacks and whoever. The whites would stand up and ask about the rooms available. When they s-, were told they had plenty of rooms, they said, well no thanks, we're not gonna have a room today, and stepped back and the black would step up. And that's when you'd find discrimination. And when we did, we would tell them [cat meows] that we were here to get them to change their policy, based on the fact that for seventy-five years the state of California had laws—

Camera Crew Member:

[clears throat]

[cat meows]

John Abbott:

—prohibiting it. Why were they still practicing it? And we've got the evidence that you are. Oh, it's not our fault, it's the, the owners that come down. Well, whoever that is, you tell 'em we want to see 'em. So whatever it was, and on our time we, we took to change the law in the state of California and Los Angeles about housing for ne-, negroes. We did many other things, but we, we went out to Rockwell International and we walked down Owens, Owensmouth Avenue and we picketed and we picketed and we dressed up as Death and as, as this, that, and the other, and I've got pictures of that—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

01:04:34:00-01:06:02:00

John Abbott:

—and today, there are people here suing because of the, the leakage from their chemistry and sh-, off the mountain up here. Harming people and their lives,—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—so we were active about that. But the, the main thing was, that I, that I got together with six other families. We bought acreage on the side of Mt. Washington and agreed to work together in building a community that was based on pacifism, or peaceful action, pe-, peaceful cooperation, working together, bringing up my kids, and their kids, and living in this community where there were no bars, there were no walls, there were no barriers. You could walk anywhere you wanted to, 'cause we had easements, if you wanted to get real technical about it. And we all helped and worked each, with each other to build homes and build a family.

Interviewer #1:

How long did that go on?

John Abbott:

Well, if you went to Kemper's house—

Camera Crew Member:

[coughs]

John Abbott:

—he didn't have a house there when, when I moved in, in that, there is a, a boo-, a folder over there that shows you the plot plan where all the lots were and what the dates were and shows the pictures of the, of the building of my house. How long did it take? How long does it take for anything?

01:06:03:00-01:06:17:00

Interviewer #1:

Longer than you think. [laughs] I get—

Interviewer #2:

John—

Interviewer #1:

Why didn't, why didn't, just qui-, just quickly, did you, why did—

Interviewer #2:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #1:

—you leave there?

John Abbott:

Why did I live th-, leave there?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, did you stay there a long time?

John Abbott:

Did you ever hear of divorce?

Interviewer #1:

Oh.

Interviewer #2:

Hm, well that'll do it.

Interviewer #1:

That's why you came, OK—

Interviewer #2:

John—

Interviewer #1:

It's such a great spot.

John Abbott:

That'll drop a rock.

[cut]

01:06:18:00-01:06:41:00

Interviewer #1:

Oh sorry, yeah.

Camera Crew Member:

Everybody's stepping—

Interviewer #2:

Back to World War Two—

Camera Crew Member:

—on his lines.

Interviewer #2:

—you know, it ended with—

Interviewer #1:

Everybody what?

Camera Crew Member:

Everybody's stepping on his lines.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

Yes, well, that's because we're trying to change the subject.

Interviewer #1:

[stammers] No that wasn't, it wasn't for the—

Interviewer #2:

—We're done. We're done.—

Interviewer #1:

—I just—

Interviewer #2:

—We're done.

Interviewer #1:

—it was just for my own—

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—curiosity.

Interviewer #2:

You learned some lessons from, from World War Two, but, but you were a really small minority then. And since, and then we had the Korean War and we had—

John Abbott:

Doesn't bother me a bit.

01:06:42:00-01:09:00:00

Interviewer #2:

But the question is, is it possible to teach other people those lessons? Is it possible that, that people can learn from your experience?

John Abbott:

All I got to say is look around you. And if you're can't find any, I'll introduce you to my four daughters. [pause] They don't say Dad is right. They just say, this is the way I do. One's a Buddhist, one's a, a, a health nut [laughs] another lady was a, a chef in San Francisco, and she w-, started out aroun-, around the world with her husband, on a boat. They're all people that know what Dad went through and they're proud of him, and still are. And that's a really wonderful thing to have. No wonder I like girls. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

John Abbott:

Yeah, four of them will say they love their dad and he just did fine.

Interviewer #2:

That matters.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. Say what you—

John Abbott:

I don't know, you know another way to go? If you do, let me know where, where and how to do it because I'm not perfect at all, you know. And I don't think any of us are. But if there's a way to do it, you better find out yourself about it and how you're doing. And keep a check on yourself all the time and enjoy what you're doing. And if you're not enjoying it, maybe something's wrong. Because even when it gets really tough, you should be enjoying the quote "fight" and, and, people that say, you didn't fight, did you? I says, well, you come and stand in my shoes for a little while and tell me I didn't fight. I fought for the things that I believe in, the way of life that I have—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—that's fighting.—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—I didn't kill anybody, but it's fighting.

Interviewer #1:

Go back and say in a s—

Interviewer #2:

I like that.

Interviewer #1:

—we interrupted, [chair squeaks] yeah that was really nice—

Camera Crew Member:

[clears throat]

Interviewer #1:

—we interrupted you, Rick said something about you, you being in a minority and how did you respond? Would you say, [chair squeaks] respond to that again?

John Abbott:

Oh well, I've forgotten what I was saying.

Interviewer #1:

You just said you didn't care—

Interviewer #2:

You were just saying, you were saying—

Interviewer #1:

—that you didn't care about the—

01:09:01:00-01:10:29:00

Interviewer #2:

—you were such a small group. You know, there were—

John Abbott:

Oh.

Interviewer #2:

—there were 35,000 COs in World War Two, out of the millions who fought in the Army—

John Abbott:

Yeah? But—

Interviewer #2:

It doesn't matter?

John Abbott:

Number, numbers really, I mean, look at Jesus Christ, or look Mahama [sic] Gan-, Mahatma Gandhi, or Martin Luther King. Did those guys ever stop because they were only one? [chair squeaks] They did not. And I'm, I'm not up on a pulpit [laughs] and I, it sounds like a poor excuse, but I don't know a better how to influence others than by do-, by doing. And you certainly don't do it by preaching. When you're preaching, you're talking down to. You're trying to help people? That aren't even asking for help? Hey, if you, if you go out and do, like we did in this community, which I called "the blessed community," if you do the way you want to do and things are working out, what do you need anybody else for?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

You need to communicate with other people, you need to be in touch with other people, you need to be wi-, not out of the world but in it. Oh.

Interviewer #1:

Say, but, you know, we, and I like that, but I, I would like you to say—

Camera Crew Member:

We need to change tapes.

Interviewer #1:

—you didn't care about being—

Interviewer #1:

Judy we have to change, we have to tapes.

Interviewer #1:

—in a minority. You didn't care. I heard that. You didn't—

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

01:10:30:00-

Camera Crew Member:

OK, so we are all artists.

John Abbott:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, I'm—

John Abbott:

Look at that.

Interviewer #2:

OK, so—

John Abbott:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

He says, he says—

Interviewer #2:

We were talking about being sensitive to other forms of discrimination.

Interviewer #1:

But you said, would you start by saying, we were discriminated against.

John Abbott:

We were, we were discriminated against. So? [pause] Instead of black or other colors or other races or other, whatever it is, here we were, we had a disease, it was called pacifism, we had a disease, it was called I won't kill. When, when people say, What did you do during World War Two? I says, I didn't kill people. What's that? Well nobody knows. There were so few of us, there were so few that there wasn't any noise being made. We were hidden away. I mean, the Ja-, Japanese were sent to a camp. We were sent to a camp. It was always as far away from [laughs] everybody as you could get. But anyway, none of us were out to go preaching. None of us were out to run up and down the main street of any town screaming and hollering about, we have come, or we're here. Most of us recognized and honored the discrimination that has gone on in the United States against Black from the time one. And if you can't see it, you're blind. If you don't know about it, try it out some time. W-, wear a black face.

01:12:07:00-01:13:07:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

So—

Interviewer #1:

And did, did being discriminated against make, make you more aware? Or were, you already had a—

John Abbott:

It made me angrier.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

And I get angry [laughs]

Camera Crew Member:

Fill the question in.

Interviewer #1

What?

Camera Crew Member:

He just answered you, he didn't—

Interviewer #1:

Oh, OK, I'm sorry, I didn't know who you were talking to, me or to John. OK. Did, maybe, yeah, you didn't, I said that and you didn't, about discrimination. What made you angry?

John Abbott:

Discrimination makes me angry. It makes me angry that people are, do this to others—

Interviewer #1:

I'm trying to—

John Abbott:

—it separates people. It makes them weaker. It gets them to the place where they can't handle anything, and then the other people have to take care of 'em, they have to raise their taxes, they have to build the [stammers]. It goes on endlessly. If you'd just behave yourself and do what's right, wouldn't have the problems that we got.

01:13:08:00-01:13:52:00

Interviewer #1:

But you don't like behaving [background click] yourself, do you?

John Abbott:

[laughs] When I see things aren't running, doing right, yes, I don't behave myself. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Is there an innate connection between—

John Abbott:

And I, I, I enjoy it, I really do, I really enjoy being an activist, if you wish, about discrimination, and I see nothing wrong with it. And I don't see anything un-, wrong in not enjoying it. If you've gotta be grim and hard-faced and [grunts] to, to be somebody? I think [laughs] you don't need that extra burden. You don't need that extra baggage.

01:13:53:00-01:15:12:00

Interviewer #1:

Was it OK to be a CO and to enjoy being a CO? Did you enjoy parts of it?

John Abbott:

[pause] Well, let's see. Can I pick it apart—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

John Abbott:

—and say, I enjoyed, I just loved being out in the woods. You couldn't take that away from me. I've been back to camp many times, or the area, and I knew it, I knew the area better than the forest service knows it, because I was given every day to go out there. I've been up there in the mountains, like it's a place of heaven or a place to worship. I've got, there are fire roads that I go on, up there that you rarely ever see a person. There are places that I take, that I've taken Louise to, that we've seen three deer running up the side of the mountain while we're sitting still. Anyway, there's so much beauty in it. In that part of it, but there's so many other things that I don't like about the system and what it does to people that I don't like at all.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

And I try, I try to change them.

01:15:13:00-01:17:13:00

Interviewer #2:

I'm curious about one thing. Fifty some-odd years ago you were quite perplexed about the notion of a supreme being.

John Abbott:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

And over the years have you, do, have you made your peace with that concept?

John Abbott:

Oh yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Or are you still just puzzled by it?

John Abbott:

As a matt-, no I'm not puzzled by it, as a matter of fact, I've always used a smart ass expression which is, that I don't believe in God and I still don't, and who is God? It's a man made i-, image, it's something that man has created in his own mind for whatever reason, I don't know, because it's the same business of their relying on some other power outside of themselves to make the world what they want it, and you can't do it by putting up a Hitler, or putting up a, a god. An image of God? Or a god itself, whoever that is. You can pray, but who are you praying to? Or what are you praying for? What is all that activity for? I think you should put it into finding your own self, rather than praying to some god. And what is a god gonna do for you? Well, it makes them feel good. Does it? Where? How? [laughs] Does it pay the rent? [laughs] I mean the Catholics, excuse the expression, I don't want to pick on any one religion, but the Catholics have been starved to death for years by giving away whatever they are to their God and their min-, ministers for it.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. There's something you said—

John Abbott:

To which pro-, prohibits them from doing a lot of things that they ought to be able to do.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

Be women. Have children.

01:17:14:00-01:18:18:00

Interviewer #1:

You said, in, in the interview you do with Studs that after the Vietnam War, people were a lot more sympathetic to noncompliance. Could you kind of draw a picture of the difference you feel that it was the dif-, what it was being a CO in World War Two versus being a conscientious objector to Vietnam and how much mo-, more difficult it was. Did you feel the difference?

John Abbott:

I immediately felt how bad it was for those who were different, I, you know, I can't get away from that. And, but then again, I also saw a, the difference mainly in that a lot of people were not willing to go, not wanting to go. Including my, my children, you know, or their husbands. So there was a lot more awareness because we've had too many wars and seen too much of that, just recently. So, it wasn't hard for them, I think, and I was pleased about that, to recognize that they shouldn't.

01:18:19:00-01:19:39:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you think we're on a trajectory that makes it more, easier for people to refuse to fight? Or do you feel like we're on a trajectory from, starting from World War Two to the present, is it becoming easier for people to refuse to fight?

John Abbott:

I don't think so. It doesn't, [laughs] I mean, with our present president having so many military actions going on all the time, it's just like fire, you know, you can start it up and it can burn the field down, and all of a sudden the fire has eaten it's fill but then there's a field over here that needs burning. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Just [unintelligible].

John Abbott:

Man's lust to obtain things, through violence is in, in all of us. I mean, the gu-, the use of guns on our streets, the use of violence towards each other, men and women, children. We don't, we need to learn about peace and how the benefits of living at peace will give you some positive results, whereas violence will just keep on the same s-, dumb system [laughs] that we've had since the beginning of time, and we need to stop somewhere.

01:19:40:00-01:22:03:00

Interviewer #1:

How do we do that?

John Abbott:

Well, [cat meows] each one of us has to do that.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

That's how I do.

Interviewer #1:

Do you—

John Abbott:

Do you?

Interviewer #1:

I do my best. [laughs]

John Abbott:

Well, that's how you do it then.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] Right. I try to do—

John Abbott:

You don't need an answer—

Interviewer #1:

—my best, you know?

John Abbott:

—from me.

Interviewer #1:

Well, I mean, the film needs an answer, right? [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

But, but, but, what you said about Vietnam was, was very good, except you didn't mention the word Vietnam once—

Interviewer #1:

Oh, I missed that one. OK.

Interviewer #2:

—so the audience doesn't know what it is. Tell me how you felt when people, when people, when so many people were opposed to war during Vietnam. How did that make you feel when you'd been a minority?

John Abbott:

That, that did make me feel good that people were beginning to realize, what, how terrible war was and that it didn't get you anywhere. And yeah, that made me feel good. I wasn't, wasn't out there [claps] cheering and clapping, but in here, my gut, I felt good.

Interviewer #1:

You still didn't say Vietnam.

Interviewer #1:

You won't say Vietnam.

Interviewer #1:

You won't say Vietnam. [laughs]

John Abbott:

Oh.

Interviewer #1:

Say Vietnam for us, please.

John Abbott:

It's, it's, [laughter] the war in Vietnam was real hell. [laughs] And it was a disgrace.

Interviewer #2:

Start over again, we were laughing, say the war in Vietnam—

John Abbott:

The war in Vietnam was a disgrace it was really a, awful thing. I mean, because of the new technology that we've got today, it brought the war into our homes, it brought us right out there on the battlefield, it brought us out there where the blood was being s-, flown. And it wasn't just our sons and daughters, it was them as well as us, both.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

So, [sigh] I hope and pray, or whatever you do, that someday [laughs] there'll be more and more and more people that will find out that they can stop wars, 'cause it's all within our power, power. It's just like I was telling the inmates in every prison I was in, are you guilty of what you did, or, why you're here? No I didn't do those things. I said, well then why do you assist the people who are punish-, punishing you? It's the same thing. Why do we keep punishing ourselves with something that we know is wrong? We, but we don't know it's wrong yet, 'cause we're still living in a violent wo-, world at home.

01:22:04:00-01:23:22:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. It sounds so simple—

John Abbott:

[laughs] Nothing—

Interviewer #1:

—the whole idea—

John Abbott:

—nothing in this world is simple, neither us nor the world.

Interviewer #1:

It makes so much sense.

Interviewer #2:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

I, I, just have one more question.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Why do you think that, I mean, we, I came to this—

John Abbott:

Does that sound like a cop-out?

Interviewer #2:

No. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

No. Not at all, it's totally true. I mean, I want it to be simple but it's not. I ca-, I learned about CPS camp from someone, actually, I think he may have been in your camp, Brown. I'm just losing his last, first name—

Interviewer #2:

It doesn't matter.

Interviewer #1:

Luis, anyway, somebody told me, I had been on the board at the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors for six years—

John Abbott:

Congratulations.

Interviewer #1:

—and I had never heard about CPS camp.

John Abbott:

Oh. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

I didn't know about it—

Interviewer #2:

So what's the question?

Interviewer #1:

—when I found out, I was shocked, I thought if I don't know, nobody knows. How come this story has been so submerged? Why don't people know about conscientious objectors to World War Two?

John Abbott:

You tell me, you're out in the world. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Do you have any idea?

John Abbott:

I never heard of, of, the organization that you were in until I went to camp—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—I didn't even, I, I've already told you, I didn't know what a pacifist was, I didn't know what a CO was until I was sent to camp. I didn't know there were others until I got to camp. And I didn't know there were others in California until I went there.

01:23:23:00-01:24:18:00

Interviewer #1:

It's such a mystery, it's such a secret. Isn't it, in some way? Is it, is that part of the—

John Abbott:

Well, I said, well, if you'd been shipped off, seventy-five— sixty-five, seventy-five mi-, miles away into some forest somewhere. You'd think that somebody would know, wouldn't you? Today, when somebody gets lost on the highway or the roads and you don't see 'em, everybody wants to know where they are. If, if, there were camps for conscientious objectors, up at Shalayo, or Tambar today, do you think you'd know about it?

Interviewer #1:

There'd be features—

John Abbott:

Huh?

Interviewer #1:

—in the LA Times every Sunday, wouldn't there? [laughs] I don't know, do you think there would, you would?

John Abbott:

[pause] I would certainly hope so. I hope that the world that I live in today can talk about things like that and they'll get into the press—

Interviewer #2:

Well—

John Abbott:

—get into TV.

01:24:19:00-01:27:28:00

Interviewer #2:

—but, but that brings up an interesting point that, now maybe it's just that there's more media, but, but do you think America's more willing to look at itself realistically now? I mean in the 1940s we had a problem, we'd put it in the camp. Now, can we confront things better or are we still denying that there are problems?

John Abbott:

I don't think that United States has a mindset any closer to being at peace than they were then, or have been. They, they've never up, upped themselves to face up to what's the next step if I don't.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

What, what is it in the world that's being created where people can be herded [laughs] and shot and bludgeoned to death in their own country or the one next to it? What, what's going on in a world like that? And why is this any different than it's been forever? Do I think that things are changing? Not really. I hope they would, but, but I don't know how it will change. I don't know how more people will get the idea that you don't have to go and kill people to make things change. But you do have to do that. You do have to get to the say, to, to the place where you can feel that I may be the maj-, minority tomorrow. I may be in a camp. I may be in a prison. I may be shot or bludgeoned or whatever it is. It may happen to me, if I live long enough, 'cause the wheel does turn. But in my little short life, in the time that I have to see things, even though I know what happened, when, when we were living in caves, I still don't see people changing their ways about basic questions of how do we live at peace? We've got United Nations, we've got peace organizations we've got yayayayaya. But, you looking for hope? Start at home. [laughs] Start with yourself. Start at home. One of the won-, most wonderful things that has happened to me is meeting Louise Ronne and when I was asked to say something in, in LAX the other day, before we were gonna get on our airplane and go to Spain, by, by the reporters there, I was asked, how come you're not jumping up and down and screaming and hollering like all these other people over here that are barricaded off there and they can't get in here 'cause they can't get on their plane, how come you're not like that? I says, well Louise and I have been travelling together for fifteen years and we know how to travel, and we know how to take it easy and just because the plane doesn't take off, or

it does this that and the other, it doesn't matter. We'll, we'll get there, we'll find a way. And we do.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

01:27:28:00-01:29:49:00

John Abbott:

So, travelling with Louise has made my life wonderful and a lot easier.

Interviewer #2:

But is that a metaphor? Will we as a society get there? Will we find a way?

John Abbott:

[laughs] Each one has to take their own step. Each one, I mean, Mahatma Gandhi got right back to the spinning wheel, or the this that and the other, using them, their own simple way of life—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—depending upon the things that were important.

Interviewer #1:

Did you ever think—

John Abbott:

In other words, I, excuse me for interrupting you—

Interviewer #1:

No, no, I interrupted you.

John Abbott:

—I don't see any mass movement taking place, which is the usual thing that we're looking

for, you know, let's march on Washington. [laughs] That's giving your power to the idiots that don't need the power, meaning if you march on Washington, you oughtta get there and say, we're turning the world over to you, we're leaving the, your world and now we're gonna go off and start our own. But I don't see any mass movement taking place, and, it's too hard. Hey, I was scared to death, about it—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

I still am. I would probably do the same things over today, or like, like things, if I was in a position that I was in before. I'd probably do it a lot quicker. A lot faster and a lot, we, I've been on this trip before, I know how to go. [laughs] But my intent would be the same. I used to look at older people, when I was a kid and say, is this what I'm gonna be like when I get to be old, is it an automatic thing, does everybody turn bigoted and, and irrational, and you know, is that what old age is about? I've been watching myself, and I tell you, [laughs] it ain't happening. At my, if I'm irreverent, if I'm a little raucous, if I'm disruptive, I'm still that way and I'm still alive and we're still taking trips.

01:29:50:00-01:31:58:00

Interviewer #1:

Can I ask one more question?

Interviewer #2:

Yes one more and don't ask for more.

Interviewer #1:

Not two more. I guess, you were, you just nudged me and I was thinking about, OK, I'll ask the question, which is, did you ever for a moment think that being a pacifist, being an objector to World War Two was going to make any difference and did you care for a moment whether it did or not?

John Abbott:

Lady I never knew what a pacifist was. I—

Interviewer #2:

But once you found out?

John Abbott:

Once I found out?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

John Abbott:

Then what?

Interviewer #1:

Did you, did you think that pacifism would make any difference?

John Abbott:

I was trying to find out what a pacifist was, by seeing what other pacifists were doing.

Interviewer #1:

And they influenced you in some way, right? You said your—

John Abbott:

Of course.

Interviewer #1:

—yeah, and did you think that there was a, was there ever a moment when you thought that, that, that the world could change because of enough people like that? That that was a, gonna grow and get bigger and—

John Abbott:

[sighs]

Interviewer #1:

—change the world somehow?

John Abbott:

I think it does change the world, somehow. But, do you see it written up in the headlines, somewhere? No. But it's going on, it does go on.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

There are people out there I've never met be-, before, who I know are peaceful people—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—lovely, wonderful people. I don't know how much they change the world, but I feel better, I feel better about being in this world—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—not because we don't have wars, because we keep on having wars.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

That's awful and I, I can't get over that. I can't not cry about it.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

When I was working in Long Beach on a job and I heard that Mahatma Gandhi had been killed—

Interviewer #1:

Mmm.

John Abbott:

—I walked out of my office, I walked out of the building. I walked down the street. I could see people in front of me, but I bawled. I bawled my head off, I can still feel the tears coming in my eyes today when I think about how we lost that important person.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

01:31:59:00-01:32:06:00

Interviewer #2:

We're done.

Camera Crew Member:

We need some room tone.

Interviewer #2:

Can we just all sit silent? We have to do a recording of silence, it's very Zen.

John Abbott:

Of what?

Interviewer #2:

Silence. We have to record—

[cut]

01:32:07:00-01:35:05:00

Interviewer #2:

—go ahead, say what you're saying again?

John Abbott:

They thought that by shutting my mouth, they were gonna keep me and my influence away from the other inmates in that prison. There's nothing that could shut the noise off or the word off to get out. I found out that I could stand on my bed and I could get my mouth close

to the vent in the ceiling, and that that, I could talk to anybody in that cell block. I found out that anything I wanted to let anybody know could ge-, be gotten out, anytime. I felt like they were the ones that were afraid of me. I found out that a cockroach making a noise in my cell was a delightful, wonderful noise. And you could not get it on your tape. You wouldn't disrupt your tape, but you know, I learned dancing from Arthur Murray, and what I did, was I practiced dancing in my cell, the way Arthur Murray and his wife Madeline would teach it. I also knew a, a little yoga and I would stand on my head o-, in the corner and the guard would come to the door. [alters voice] You all right in there? Everything OK? I wouldn't answer him. Finally he'd have to unlock the door. And he'd have to come in. He'd have to help me down. He'd have to get me back up where, the way I was supposed to be. But feeling the, the windowpane to find out whether it was daytime or nighttime, feeling the windowpane to find out what part of the year it was, whether it was cold or warm, knowing that time was going on, time was passing and I shouldn't be where I was, was hard to take. It was hard to not be active outside with other people. They kept tightening down the notch, they, they kept trying to put a halt to it and the three Johns did a tr-, wonderful job in the prisons that we were all in, after we got moved from move to move, which is a typical practice in the prison system, moving people out that are troublemakers to another prison which they claim is going to be much worse than this one, which is a lie, but it's their way of trying to get rid of a problem is to pass it off on somebody else.

01:35:06:00-01:35:29:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

But anyway, don't ever spend a day in prison.

Interviewer #1:

Unless it's for a good cause.

John Abbott:

Any more?

Interviewer #1:

Unless it's for a good cause.

Interviewer #1:

In prison.

John Abbott:

Any more?

Interviewer #2:

No!

Interviewer #1:

I'm just thinking, 'bout this—

Interviewer #2:

You said two, Judy—

Interviewer #1:

—one more. Are you sure? No? It's so good.

Camera Crew Member:

I don't think we want any more.

Interviewer #2:

I think we have more than, more than we can use.

Interviewer #1:

OK. [sighs] It's all fabulous—

[cut]

01:35:30:00-01:36:54:00

Interviewer #1:

So, what do you think about patriotism?

John Abbott:

I just want to refer, refer to my brother, Donald, worked in Los Alamos, he was developing a device which would shorten the war and save lives. You ever heard a lie told in your life? That's one, a big one. That's one to let the public know that we shouldn't get too upset about a few people killed—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

—with one bomb. And it's a small one compared to what we got today. [sighs] [cat meows]

Interviewer #1:

Didn't your brother—

Interviewer #2:

So is that, is that patriotism? Is that what patriotism represents to you?

John Abbott:

[sighs] I have heard people say, over and over and over again, but it's my country and I've got to stand up for it, right or wrong, I've got to stand up, for my country. And if that's patriotism? I think patriotism is standing up and objecting, say, saying, I can't do that, that's patriotism. I, I would have liked to've been able to been left alone and let me do things that would benefit the country rather than all the money they spent which we, they could've put into bombs and bullets, in taking care of me. In three federal prisons, all the way across the United States.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

01:36:55:00-01:38:53:00

John Abbott:

Does it make sense? Did it do any good to anybody? What good did it do?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

Were they punishing me? If they weren't, what good did it do?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

[laughs] Is there some reason why we can't have people go through an experience, all the thousands and thousands and thousands of prison, people that are prisoners, when they're released, why don't they go out with a, if they've served their time, why don't they go out with a clean slate why do they have to carry that burden with them the rest of their life? Why do we have a society that's being built, built up with the, the rejects that come out of prison?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

John Abbott:

I got questions. [laughs] And I know the right questions for me to ask. If you're gonna take someone's rights away from them because they refuse to kill, other people that they've never even seen before, can't even get up a good hate on, what kind of a place are we living in? What kind of rules are we living by, and why should you punish somebody for doing something that they believe is what they have been taught by their mother, their father, their minister, the police chief, the President of the United States, all say, [mocking squeaky voice] you're gonna get punished if you kill people, we're gonna maybe kill you. [laughs] What kind of a system is this? I keep on asking questions. But at, but at eighty years I begin to not ask too many questions, not too often and not too loud, but just enjoy my life as best I can with Louise.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. OK—

Interviewer #2:

That's it.

Interviewer #1:

—I think we're finally done.

[cut]

01:38:54:00-01:39:10:00

Interviewer #1:

—it's gonna be really hard. We'll have to do another little film on the side.

Interviewer #2:

Meet them all.

John Abbott:

You can do a hell of a lot in an hour on TV.

Interviewer #1:

You can. We know that.

John Abbott:

Woo!

Interviewer #1:

That's the only thing that consoles me. Whenever I think we can't possibly do this, I realize—

[cut]

[end interview]

01:39:10:00