

**Animal Advocates
Oral History Project**

Oral History Interview
with
JIM MASON

This edited transcript is the product of tape-recorded interviews conducted by Martin Rowe with Jim Mason in Johnstown, Pennsylvania on July 8, and in New

York, New York on November 16 and November 17, 1999, for Recording Animal Advocacy.

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This interview is printed on acid-free paper.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interview Time and Place:

July 8, 1999

Johnstown, Pennsylvania - North American Vegetarian Society's Summerfest
Session of 1-1/4 hour

November 16, 1999

New York, New York - office of Martin Rowe
Session of 1-1/2 hours

November 17, 1999

New York, New York - office of Martin Rowe
Session of 1-1/2 hours

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The draft transcript was edited by Mason, Rowe, and Lee. Lee checked the edited transcript and added footnotes.

Lee prepared the index and introductory material except the "Biographical sketch," which was written by Rowe.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jim Mason was born in Wisconsin in 1940 and moved with his family the following year to Mount Vernon, Missouri, where his mother and father decided to begin a farm. He enrolled as a pre-med student at Washington University, Missouri, but, disenchanted with medicine, he dropped out in his junior year. After two years in the army, he enrolled at the University of Missouri, Columbia, where he met his wife, Linda. After graduating with a law degree in 1970, Mason and his wife moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut, where Linda died of Hodgkin's Disease in 1971. Mason became involved in radical causes—championing racial equality, fair housing, and increasingly animal advocacy. He began to work part-time for Friends of Animals and attended ethicist Peter Singer's lectures on animal liberation at New York University in 1973. Mason attended the first major animal rights conference in Cambridge, England in 1977 and then spent the next two years assisting Singer with research on factory farms, the result of which was *Animal Factories*, published in 1980. Shortly before publication, Mason helped found *The Animals' Agenda* magazine, first as a quarterly and then as a monthly. Exhausted and disillusioned by his work on the magazine and in the animal advocacy movement, Mason left *The Animals' Agenda* in 1986 and moved back to Missouri. He then began research on the origins of animal abuse and agriculture, publishing *An Unnatural Order* in 1993. Mason is currently working for Two Mauds Inc.—a foundation that helps fund grassroots animal advocacy projects around the United States.

Jim Mason
Session #1
July 8, 1999
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

Martin Rowe, Interviewer

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

Rowe: Jim, you said that your family moved back from Wisconsin, where you were born, to your mother's home town or home county of Mount Vernon, Missouri. You were one year old, and that happened in 1941. Can you tell us your earliest memories of farm life and the countryside around you?

Mason: The very earliest memory I have—I have thought about this so much—is this very vague, very non-specific memory of just how the family scene and the atmosphere changed suddenly. It's the earliest memory I have. It's more of a memory of a feeling than it is of anything that was said or any specific events. I know it was when we moved from the city to the farm, because I know from years later my parents told me how hard it was those first few years because they had very little money. See, this was during the wartime. This was during World War II. We moved into a rural neighborhood that didn't have electricity yet. My mother [Lorene Shelton Mason] cooked on a wood stove.

So I know it was a great change for them to move from a city like Superior, Wisconsin—where, I'm sure, they had all the modern amenities—to moving into this drafty old farmhouse that had no central heating, no electricity yet, and cooking on a wood stove, and primitive farming implements. We didn't have a tractor yet because it was wartime. All the sugar and gasoline and things like that were being rationed, so times were tough. It was still—it was the tail end of the Depression, come to think of it. Nineteen-forty-one is not long after the Depression.

Rowe: Why did your father decide to move back there?

Mason: Well, both my parents were children of people with small town farm backgrounds, on both sides of the family. My mother's family were pioneers in that area. They came over in the late 1830s, 1840-something, her great-great-great grandfather. So it was an area that had been—she was like fifth generation of that family of farmers. They became moderately prosperous farmers for that time but not rich farmers, not like southern planters. But they all had nice homes and everything, got to the place where they were prosperous enough that they could send some of their kids to college. So she was one of the first women in the family to go to college and get a degree as a teacher.

But my parents still had the farm and the farm life, so the idea was to have their fields—their careers, like Mom taught school—and still live on a farm and still run a farm. So my dad [James Albert Mason] had the idea that that's what they should do. He didn't want to live in the city. He didn't want to live in the North where it was cold. They would move back to Missouri and live in my mom's—or near my mom's hometown and they would find a farm there. He picked out a farm that they liked real well. It was actually an historic farm. It was the first farm settled in the county in 1831, and there was a nice spring on the farm so they had a good water supply.

But it was just like—those years, I know, not only from some very primal memories but also from anecdotes that I learned later as I got older, that life was really hard for them financially and so forth for a few years because of the wartime.

Rowe: Was it particularly in that neighborhood at that time coming out of the Depression? Was it very difficult for farmers?

Mason: I think it was that, yes. And I think it was the combination of the tail end of the Depression where money was tight, credit was non-existent, I guess, and that the war was going on and there were shortages. You couldn't get gasoline. You couldn't get sugar. You couldn't get all these things. Not getting sugar doesn't sound like a big deal, but when women do canning, when you put up most of your food, and if you can't get sugar sometimes you can't put up food because some of it requires sugar for the canning process. But I do have that memory. It seemed like life got real hard suddenly, and I didn't know exactly why until later and realized that's when we moved.

Rowe: You were the third of three sons.

Mason: Three boys, yes.

Rowe: And how much older were the other two?

Mason: Oh, we're about two years and something apart. So my older brother [Richard Albert Mason] is between five and six years older than me, and then the next brother [David Ralph Mason] is in the middle there somewhere.

Rowe: So you were all too young to help out a long time.

Mason: At that age, yes.

Rowe: Did your parents have any help on the farm?

Mason: Well, I was raised in an extended family household. When my father and mom decided to buy the farm, they bought it in partnership with his sister and with the parents, the grandparents. So I was raised in a house with my father's mother and father, my paternal grandparents, and with his sister, and then our family of five. So it was an eight-member household.

Rowe: Was that common for the families in that area?

Mason: Yes. It helps to have a lot of hands around a farm, so there were three women to work on all the domestic chores, the household chores, which includes the garden. And the chickens were their responsibility, taking care of the chickens and collecting the eggs and selling the eggs, and then in the summertime all the canning, putting away food, preserving food. And then there was my dad and—well, he didn't have much help, did he? Sometimes relatives would come and help with farm chores so that he would have men who would help him with things.

And in those days—see, it was the last of the old-fashioned farming where most of the farmers in our neighborhood didn't have tractors yet. Like I said, it was wartime and you couldn't buy a tractor yet. Or if you did, you probably couldn't get gasoline for it because of rationing. They still farmed with horses. When I was a little kid, until about school age—well, until the war was over when we got a tractor—we had a team of horses. They were a white, dappled gray team. And their names were Dolly and Bess. I guess they were two mares or female horses. The other farmers used horses too.

They still did that old-fashioned harvest where the whole neighborhood would turn out and help put up a barn for somebody, or shuck the corn, or harvest the wheat or oats or whatever, and put up the hay. The whole community would—all the men would come over and work all day and do someone's harvest, and then they'd move to the next farm. So they still did things that way—shared labor.

Rowe: Was there a strong sense of community outside the shared labor?

Mason: Yes. The farm—you knew your neighbors well and you were always trading things back and forth. They'd bring over food from their garden. Whenever we'd go by their house we'd take things. Every few weeks one of the neighbors would have some kind of a lawn party. They'd have some watermelon or they'd make some ice cream or something, because people didn't go to town so much. Unlike today, even people who live in the country, they go to town two or three times a day and pick up things. But in those days, you went to town only one day a week. You went to town on a Saturday. You know, you do the morning chores and you do some work around the place, and by noon the family would be scrubbed up and they'd be ready to go to town and sell some things and buy some things and stay around for the band concert and have an ice cream cone and come home before dark because you had to milk. You had to milk the cows. So that's what people did in those days. They didn't spend a lot of time in town.

Rowe: Was there much consciousness of the world outside, or the war, apart from the rationing that had to take place? Or was the community very much involved with the day-to-day rituals of the farm?

Mason: Pretty much, yes, the community was definitely the focus. That was on everybody's on mind. The war was like a background. We didn't get daily newspapers there. It's not like living in San Francisco or New York where everyone reads the daily paper. At home then we had at best a weekly paper. Mostly what it had was church gossip and the deaths and the funerals and the courthouse news and things like that. It didn't really report on world events.

We listened to radio. It was just like today with television. Everyone had about five or six favorite radio programs—Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen and “The Inner Sanctum” and “Gangbusters.” There were a lot—“Stop the Music.” People lived by their radios. So that's where we got our information about what was going on in the world.

Rowe: And your mother had her schoolteacher's degree, and she did some part-time teaching after you were born and during your brothers' births as well.

Mason: Right.

Rowe: Did she put a primacy on education in your own life?

Mason: Yes. She wanted—like for example, my older brothers went to country school, which is—one of my big regrets of my childhood is that I didn't get to go to the country schoolhouse—you know, the picture book schoolhouse with the well pump in the backyard and the outdoor toilets and the bell in the tower. This place had all this. It was like a movie set—potbellied stove and the double desks with inkwells. I'm serious. My brothers went to a schoolhouse just like that where you have all eight grades in the same room, one teacher for all eight grades. In your grade there might be only two or three other pupils at your age level. The total number of students at one time in that room was probably twenty or thirty kids in all eight grades, boys and girls. And I missed that.

I didn't get to go there because by the time I was six years old and I was going to start school, they decided that Mom would start teaching again because we were all old enough and we were in school. So she would work in town and teach in the school in town and I would go to town school, because they thought that country school was okay but I'd probably get a better education in town. Because my mom's sister taught first grade, which is where they teach reading and the alphabet and such, and Mom taught second grade, so I went to first grade to my mom's sister, my aunt. I was the butt of all jokes in the family because I insisted on calling her Miss Shelton in class instead of Aunt Eula, because I thought that it would be improper to call her the family name in school.

Rowe: What was the expectation for your brothers and yourself from your parents in terms of not only the education[al] opportunities that would open up for you but the kinds of career opportunities that you would have?

Mason: Well, it was modest and limited. They were educated so they expected us to be more than farmers and working class folks. We were encouraged to take music lessons and to do our homework and to read the books and do the assignments. So they did have an emphasis on educating us. But I just didn't think beyond the big four professions—doctor, lawyer, teacher, dentist, or something like that. I didn't know about filmmaker, didn't know about architect, didn't know about all these far-out things because we didn't have them locally.

Somewhere along in grade school, along in my elementary education, I got fixed on the idea that I was going to become a doctor. I think it's because my dad played cards with a lot of doctors. Even though he was a farmer, he wore two hats. He was a professional man that farmed as well. He was working a farm and yet his friends in town—since he worked in a newspaper and Mom had an education, they socialized with educated people and some of them were doctors. Of course, with all those associations, I wanted to be a doctor.

Rowe: So your father definitely considered himself not “just a farmer.”

Mason: They weren't just dirt farmers, like other people in the area who made a living only by farming. In our case, we were like—I guess today you would call them farmers with off-farm income. That was a trend that was going to become pervasive. Farmers today—many of them have a wife who has a job, you know, for cash flow. But they were from farm backgrounds—they were children of farmers with farmers in the families on both sides, and ours was a working farm. A lot of these kinds of places where the parents have jobs, they have a pet pig and a bunch of dogs and cats and maybe the appearance of a farm—a horse to ride or something like that.

Rowe: Are you talking about today or you're talking about the situation when you were growing up?

Mason: Well, what people think of the kind of farm that's not really a farm. It's not really a working farm; it's a hobby farm. Ours was a working farm even though my parents had jobs. We milked cows and we slaughtered pigs. We kept chickens. We did all of those things too, so it wasn't just a show farm.

Rowe: So you would grow the feed for the animals or you would ship the feed in?

Mason: A little of both. We had a huge garden. I remember that. We grew food for ourselves, and we also grew all of the hay for the animals and sometimes corn. Not every year, but most years we'd raise our own corn. Then my brothers and I would then sack it up and carry it to town to the mill, and they'd shell the corn and grind it and mix it with stuff for the cows and we'd bring back sacks of feed.

But we had these huge gardens. We not only had the big vegetable garden, which is all the rows of carrots and the rows of peas and three or four rows of potatoes and corn and all that, but we also had separate gardens. Another garden was just strawberries. It was called the strawberry patch, because it took up too much room. If we'd have planted it in a regular garden there wouldn't have been any room for the garden. So we had not only the big garden with all the various vegetables, but then we had this separate strawberry patch. Then for a while we had a separate turnip and potato patch for the root vegetables. So it was incredible how many gardens we had. When I think today of the sheer square footage of gardens that we had. And my grandma and my mom and my aunt were out there much of the time—Mom before she went to school and in the summertime all the time because she didn't have to teach. But they put in a lot of time in those gardens then a lot of time in the afternoon cooking and canning all of this stuff.

Rowe: What would you say the acreage of the gardens was and the acreage of the whole farm?

Mason: Well, we had a 160-acre farm. I would say that all the gardens together would have been—had to be an acre at least. That's a lot of space.

Rowe: How sizable a farm was that for those days?

Mason: That was average. Some of our neighbors had 80 acres; some of them had 200 acres. So 160 was typical. It was a quarter of a section.

Rowe: Would that be the size of a successful farm? Was a farm with 160 acres deemed to be a cut above an average farm?

Mason: Yes. You could be around middle income—a family on 160 acres could make a pretty good living. A couple of our neighbors were pretty hard-working farmers. They had in the neighborhood of 160 acres. One had 120, one had 180 or 200. On that they were able to buy a tractor, a new tractor every few years. Some of them would buy a new car—not every year like we do now. But every four or five years they'd buy a brand new car and a nice car, not a cheap car. They were not well-to-do, but they were prosperous. They had money. That would begin to come apart along in the 50s.

Rowe: Now, how many animals did you have on the farm on a sort of average basis?

Mason: We had an average of about a dozen milk cows, from a low of eight or nine to a high of fifteen or sixteen. At any one time, most of those would be giving milk. If we had fourteen cows we'd be milking maybe ten of them, and the other four would be in that state of drying up and being pregnant and being ready to give a calf. Every month or two another one would freshen. They call it freshening. It means giving birth to a calf to start giving milk again. Then one would go out of production. So it was generally about—we'd milk ten or eleven cows by hand twice a day.

We'd get up at five or six o'clock in the morning and the first thing we'd do is have a quick bite to eat, something in your mouth, and go straight to the barn and milk cows. Then you'd have to come back and get cleaned up and get ready to go to school. Dad—we had to be at school at eight o'clock, and my dad had to be at work at eight o'clock in the morning, so you can imagine how much we did before eight o'clock in the morning. I mean, you go to the barn, you come back, you've got to clean up, clean up the kitchen and all that stuff. Then in the evening after work when my dad would get back at five, he'd come roaring into the driveway at twenty-five after five. We had to be ready. We had to be ready to go to the barn. We had to be in our dirty clothes or our work clothes, had to go to the barn. It would take about an hour or a little less depending on how many cows we had to milk.

In the wintertime it would take longer because we not only had to milk these cows by hand, but we had to put out hay for the beef cows. We would have—on that farm we probably would have had thirty or forty beef cows at any one time to feed. You don't have to feed them in the summer because they've got grass. In the winter you have to throw out hay. We put out hay for them twice a day. Then sometimes you'd have to give them some other kind of supplementary feed like some ground corn or something.

Sometimes we'd have pigs. My dad didn't like to raise pigs. He didn't have them every year. About every three or four years that hog prices were good, he'd get a dozen pigs and try to raise them.

Rowe: He didn't like the pigs because the prices were unstable?

Mason: Yes. They weren't steady. It was always a gamble. Your milk cows—if you milked cows, you got a milk check. Every morning the company would send—a truck would come by and pick up the cans of milk. They'd weigh everything and then every two weeks they'd send you a check for your milk.

Rowe: Now, the cows that you had when you said you threw out the hay, presumably during the winter months they would still be outside?

Mason: Right.

Rowe: Presumably you brought them in at certain times. Was this during bad weather or was there a particular period when you brought them in?

Mason: They were outside most of the time. The shelter that was up and available to them would be like—the barns and the sheds were built open on one side, usually facing the south. We had two big barns, and they would have access to shelter from the wind in those barns. Cattle actually like—seem to prefer to stay in the woods. They just like to get out of the wind.

So they'd seek out the brushiest most protected part of the woods and herd up there like deer do. They'd close in on each other for warmth.

Rowe: You mentioned that your father would roar in at 5:25. Now, where had he been?

Mason: Well, he—after years of trying to make a living farming and Mom teaching school, he finally took another job working for the milk company where all the farmers sold their milk. He became a field man—

Rowe: And this would have been—

Mason:—for the Carnation Milk Company in Mount Vernon, Missouri. Carnation Milk Company was famous for the condensed evaporated milk and other dairy products. So he worked for them for years as a field man, which means that his job was to be the go-between between the company and all the farmers in the area, all of the customers, I guess he called them, the people who sold milk to the company. So every day he'd go out and visit these farms and talk to these farmers if they had a problem with their milk check. He was supposed to inspect their barns to make sure that they were clean, and that they were cleaning their equipment properly, and that they had fly control and so on. So he worked with farmers in the area in two or three counties, knew all the farmers in the area.

Rowe: When did he begin working with the Carnation?

Mason: He would have been working there probably within a few years after the war was over, by the late 40s I imagine. I'm sure he started working there full-time by 1950.

Rowe: So he felt comfortable enough to be able to leave the farm because it was becoming more prosperous?

Mason: Well, he had three boys big enough. I started going to the barn to help when I was five years old. My brothers were milking cows when they were seven or eight years old, and as soon as I was—by the time I was in the first or second year of school they'd let me milk one cow. So within a few years I was milking my quota. Each of us had to milk maybe one, two, or three cows a piece. So my dad had help in us, in the form of three boys, so he had some help on the farm and he felt like, I guess, with the labor pool that we had there with an extended family with three boys and everything they could both afford to have jobs and still do the farm work too. So we did farm work before and after school during the school months.

And in the summertime we had plenty of time. Actually, farmers do a lot of the work in the summer, because that's when you cut hay and that's when you—you do as much as you can during the growing season which, fortunately, is in the summertime. So during the summer we were available to do farm work during the day. So they could do both—they could have jobs and do the farm work.

Rowe: Let's go back to your previous statement that you would get up early at five and then you'd be ready for school by eight. Presumably this was something that many other children in your school went through. Even though you were in the city, many of them would have been from farming families.

Mason: Right. About half. About half the kids I went to school with lived and worked on a farm. Some of them were really poor farmers. Our family was—they kind of teased me because we weren't really farmers because my parents had jobs. Some of the kids I went to school with—they were touchy about that. They were real farmers and we weren't. But we had more cows than they did and we had more chores than they did. We worked the farm harder than they did.

Rowe: The area where you grew up in is called the Ozarks.

Mason: The Ozark region, right.

Rowe: Could you describe the landscape of the Ozarks as it was in the early 1940s?

Mason: Well, it's where the Great Plains, the great prairie, begins to tumble into the Mississippi Valley. It's rugged there. It's mountainous but not like the Rocky Mountains, more like the Allegheny Mountains or the Appalachian Mountains. It's those kind of wooded hills. And it's really pretty country—a lot of water, lot of streams, lot of springs, lot of caves. So my county, Lawrence County, is the best of both sides. The western side of the county looks like Kansas. It's as flat as a pancake. There are big fields and row crop agriculture over there. Then in the middle of the county it starts getting hilly and wooded. There are parts of it that look like Arkansas. We have ravines and steep bluffs and springs coming out of the side of the hill and such things. So it's interesting. It's a mixed terrain.

And the farming there, because of the terrain, it doesn't lend itself to large-scale agriculture like you have in Iowa where they have 1,000-acre cornfields. Part of the county they could have that, but most of the county is just too steep and hilly. But it's good cattle country because there's a lot of grass and there's a lot of water. On our farm we had two spring-fed streams. The beauty of that is you have water year-round, which farmers don't have in a lot of areas. So it makes it good for cattle production.

Rowe: Just to shift gears a little. You had a psychosomatic nervous reaction to seeing your pig slaughtered when you were five years old. This was when you had just begun to work on the farm. Could you just describe that experience again—what you saw?

Mason: It probably would have been like in that last year or so of the war. It must have been '44 or '45. That's the last of the real old-fashioned farming, like I told you, when the neighbors used to show up and help with all the chores. This would have been in the fall, I guess, when they did the slaughtering, when it starts getting cold. I knew something strange was going to go

on that day because there were a lot of cars and people were coming over. All the farmers' wives were bringing in baskets of food and this and that the other thing. Of course, four or five years old, I had no idea what was going to happen. I walked out on the porch because I heard all the people out in the yard doing things, and they were slaughtering hogs. So I walked out there and walked down the steps. The first thing I see is a tree with these bodies hanging from this tree and blood dripping down. In the yard were two or three washtubs with pig's heads in them. It was a great shock. It was like shell shock.

Rowe: Had you heard the screams of the pigs?

Mason: I don't remember hearing the screams. Whether I heard the screams, I don't remember. I heard them later on other butchering days, and they were terrifying screams. But that day I don't so much remember the screams but just the sight of those pigs hanging from a tree and people scurrying around and tubs with heads in them. I don't remember so much about how I reacted as much as just that sight.

Then it kind of—the scene blinks off. It's like I don't remember after that. But my mother tells me that I went into a hysterical fit of some kind and they had to take me to town. They had to get me out of there because it was very upsetting to everybody. They had my aunt, her sister, take me to town and she kept me there and I didn't want to come home. And I wasn't able to sleep. I had nightmares. They say that this went on for days, and I don't remember any of that. It was probably one of those repressed memories. It was too uncomfortable to remember it, but they told me about it later. I got many accounts of it later. From then on when they slaughtered they would sneak me away a day or two before and wouldn't tell me what they were going to do.

Rowe: Your brothers never had this reaction?

Mason: Well, they might have and they just never did talk about it. I think probably more farm kids had it than would admit it. It would be embarrassing to admit it. You're not supposed to react this way. You're supposed to be tough.

Rowe: When you say farm kids you mean farm boys, boys on the farm.

Mason: Yes. Farm boys.

Rowe: There was never anything like this discussed at your school, for instance.

Mason: No, not that I recall.

Rowe: You mentioned earlier, before the interview began, the fact that your father, I think, told you to go inside with the girls.

Mason: When I was somewhat older—I must have been a young teenager because they deemed me large enough to help with the more strenuous chores of cattle-handling, because when you raise cattle, at least once year you're supposed to de-horn the calves and castrate the males and so on. So it came time for me to participate in this because I was deemed big enough. I knew about this. I had anticipated this because when I was younger and littler they at least let me go to watch. That was probably part of the conditioning. They'd make me stand up here on the fence and stay out of the way.

So I was being led out there now to take part in this work that I knew something about and I knew was very disturbing, distressful, and painful for the animals. And as we went out through the backyard to the barn lot and we're climbing over the corral fence, I was crying because I was anticipating the pain and the horror of roping these calves and holding them down and cutting their testicles out and everything without anesthesia, and seeing blood and things. I started crying because I was dreading it. That's when my uncle said, "If you don't straighten up and act like a man we'll send you back to the house with the girls." It was very—it was forceful. It was forcing me to go do this with this kind of browbeating or whatever you'd call it, shaming me into going along with it. So I had to go out there and do what they did.

Rowe: It was a particularly male activity. The men were all involved.

Mason: All the boys. It was boys and men out there. The women were in the house doing the canning and women's things.

Rowe: Now, between the age of five when you first saw the slaughter of the pigs and going out to geld in the early teenage years—

Mason: Probably twelve, thirteen.

Rowe:—did you have a feeling of a closeness to animals that grew out of that initial experience, or was it something you felt you always had, one that was shocked when you saw the slaughter?

Mason: I didn't connect anything. It was like my dealings with animals—the kind and affectionate dealings and cruel and disturbing dealings with animals were sort of compartmentalized. I could break down and cry at the sight of the pig slaughter, but within years I was chopping the heads off the chickens, and not enjoying it but not freaking out over it either. It's strange. It was like things were in compartments. I could have a favorite dog and would get very sad if my dog got shot or got hurt, because that happened a lot in those days. If you had a dog, you didn't expect it to live very long because somebody would kill it or somebody would poison it or it would be chasing chickens and the family would dispose of it or something. But I didn't connect anything. This incident with the pigs didn't seem to relate to the interactions with killing the chickens and the affection for the dog. It was just like I never really put them all together.

I had other episodes along in there too that were very disturbing. Somewhere between the pig slaughtering at the age of five and the calf castrating at the age of twelve, somewhere along in there I had to run—I was invited or solicited to run the trap line for my brother. He liked to trap muskrats and mink and other animals in the wintertime on the creeks around the farm. I didn't really have any interest in that, but he had to go away for one of his farm boy trips, probably to some fair or some cattle judging thing. I was elected to run the trap line. I remember dreading it because I didn't want to catch an animal in a trap. He had to do this early in the morning before we did the chores, so I was down there alone in the cold at five o'clock in the morning running the trap line, hoping that I wouldn't find an animal in the trap—really thinking that because I just didn't want to do it.

Lo and behold, one morning there was a poor miserable muskrat in a trap. And it was wounded so badly that I knew I couldn't just release it. I knew I was going to have to kill it, you know, because they taught you this stuff on a farm. If an animal's hurt or wounded, you put it out of its misery. So I had to kill this muskrat, club it with a boat paddle. And I had, again, a terrible reaction. I had some kind of a circulatory event. I just felt faint, and I felt hot, and I felt—it was some kind of a strange rush. I just felt really bad, I felt terrible, I felt guilty, and I felt ashamed that I had this reaction to it. I just remember a real strong feeling. It was almost like a religious experience, like, "Oh, my God, what have I done?" I just felt I can't do this anymore. And yet I didn't go to the house and tell them about it. It was a secret for years.

Rowe: I'll come back to that. What I'd like to do is go back to the fact that you had pets and then you had dogs. Did you have cats or was it mainly dogs?

Mason: We had barn cats. These were all outdoor animals. They never came in the house. The barn cats were supposed to just live off the mice in the barn, and we gave them just a little bit of milk each time we milked. And if we gave them too much my dad would start screaming at us, "Don't feed those cats!"

Rowe: So the cats and the dogs were essentially work animals.

Mason: Yes. Farm animals.

Rowe: Were the dogs also used for hunting purposes as well?

Mason: No. Just to be around the yard.

Rowe: Protection.

Mason: And hang out. They weren't hunting dogs.

Rowe: You mentioned the dogs could be shot or poisoned.

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: Presumably shot accidentally and poisoned accidentally. How did this happen?

Mason: It could be by neighbors, like if the dog was roaming. Farmers just—even though neighbors respected each other, if your dog gets over in their barnyard, it's the law. They'll shoot your dog and you have no recourse, at least in those days. Today they probably wouldn't do that. They'd probably call you up. Yes, we lost several dogs that way. We'd have a dog for a year or two and it would just disappear.

Rowe: You felt a certain amount of attachment to these animals, but you managed to distance yourself because you recognized that their lives were short. Did other members of the family express similar—well, deeper feelings towards the companion animals that they had?

Mason: Not much. Not really much. Everybody enjoyed the family dog. One was named Beezer, and we had a dog named Billy and we had a dog named Butch. You know, they had kind of mild interest in them, like when we'd be sitting in the yard and Fourth of July fireworks or something like that and the dog would do something funny or strange. But it wasn't like they were real close to them. My grandma didn't like to pet the dog when she was gardening. If the dog would come up to her she just kind of ignored it. They were still kind of detached from the dog. They'd take occasional amusement at something the animal would do, but they just didn't bond with them like we know people do with pets today. There was always that distance. And the animal really had to stay in their place. They had to stay in the yard. They had to stay away from the cows. They had to behave. And if they didn't, they'd be shot or poisoned or dumped somewhere. It was just really kind of a callous—they weren't really—

Rowe: Were they shot by one of the family or the owners?

Mason: Yes. We'd get a puppy every now and then from a neighbor or somebody. I remember one of them chased chickens and my brother shot it. It wasn't even full grown. It was still like half grown. Prince—he was just killed. Then another time some years later we did it again. We got a puppy and somebody ran over the dog, ran over the puppy right in the driveway. It was sleeping under the car and they started the car and backed out and ran over the puppy. Like every few years there would be a—it was a tragedy for me because I really grieved over that. When my brother shot that dog, I was like beside myself over that. I really felt horrible about that. I let my parents know about it. I would have been probably seven, eight, nine years old or something. But they said he was chasing chickens, got to kill him.

Rowe: Clearly, it seems self-evident to me and must have been to your parents, that you were a very sensitive child, that you were clearly out of step with your brothers and the other family members in feeling this way towards animals. Did your father and, more specifically, your mother and other female members of the family try and understand your feelings, analyze your feelings, talk about your feelings in some way?

Mason: No. It was never discussed. I don't think it was noticed as much as we notice it in talking about it. I don't know whether—I don't recall any—I don't have any memory of them talking about my special sensitivity or my fondness for animals or anything like that. I don't know whether they noticed it, or if they did notice it, they didn't talk about it. But it was never a thing in the family. I don't think they regarded me as any different than anyone else.

Rowe: So when you told your parents that you were upset about the dog being shot, what did your father and what did your mother say?

Mason: I don't recall it in much detail except the great grief I felt and the shock that they would just go ahead and kill this animal. It was just too sudden. It was just done within an hour or two.

Rowe: So your parents said the dog was messing around.

Mason: Yes. I think they might have jumped on my brother for being a little too hasty and a little too crude about it, but it wasn't like something that they really disapproved of. They said something like, "Well, we had to do it. He was chasing chickens. We can't have a dog like that on the farm," this kind of line, which is typical of farmers. If anything or anybody affects the commerce of the farm, the money-earning, like killing a chicken—I mean, chickens lay eggs and we sold eggs. You can't have a dog that does that. They couldn't think of any other solutions. They have a saying that we laugh about today, but it's true that farmers out there—I've heard members of the family say it—that the farmers' view of the world is, if you—I don't know how this is going to sound on tape, but I have to say the word that they use—if you can't fuck it or eat it or sell it, you kill it. But that's the joke out there. That's the way farmers see animals. If you can't have sex with it or eat it or sell it, it's worthless so kill it. They pretty much divide things into categories—the things that help us make money and the things that interfere with our making money, and everything else is sort of in between or ignored. It's a very callous view of the world, I'm telling you.

Rowe: When you were in your teens, did you go through a rebellious stage in order to separate yourself from the killing that went on? Was there an expression of that repressed feeling in some form?

Mason: No. I'm ashamed of it now, embarrassed about it, because I dealt with it in another way, which was—I think it got distorted and it got twisted into an interest in science. I became interested in medicine along in elementary school. By the sixth or seventh grade, I was beginning to think of myself as going to become a doctor. I began to be fascinated with biology. I studied the skeletons. I looked up books and I memorized the names of the bones. By the time I was a junior in high school I knew all the names of the bones in the body and most of the muscles. I was really getting ahead of myself in doing the anatomy study. I became almost a little doctor, you know, the little whiz kid science buff.

So that the fondness and the sensitivity I had for animals got, I think, sublimated or twisted or somehow deformed into this other interest or interest in them in another way. I wonder [if] maybe I wasn't just trying to callous myself or insulate myself. Instead of really discovering and enjoying my sensitivity and my regard for animals, I took it into this scientific realm.

I actually operated on—I mean, I was the butt of all jokes in the county and the town at the time because I successfully operated on a cat, something which appalls me today to even admit to this. But I spayed a cat myself. It was not crudely done. I knew about surgery and I knew about anesthetics. The cat was anesthetized. I had antibiotics. I used sutures. I worked in the hospital in the summertime in the laboratory. I was somewhat technically proficient, as weird as it may sound, for a junior in high school.

Rowe: Why do you feel ashamed about that?

Mason: Well, because now it strikes me as like abhorrent. This was really cruelty to animals. I wouldn't want any kid to do this. This really is not something you should do.

Rowe: Did you have a sense that maybe the cat's life would be better being spayed rather the life of the cats you had been brought up with who, being feral, were unspayed?

Mason: Yes. But, you know, I didn't spay the cat with the right motives. I didn't spay the cat with the motives that we have now to reduce suffering. I did it as an experiment. It was crude teenage vivisection, is what it was. In my case, I just happened to know enough about anatomy and medicine and anesthetics and so on that I was able to do it well. And the cat had no problems. She didn't get any infections or anything at all, so it was a well-done spaying operation. But I shouldn't have done it at fifteen or whatever I was.

Rowe: But you were more interested in being a doctor than being a vet. You didn't want to be a vet.

Mason: Yes. But word got out in town. Like my parents bragged about this. They thought this was wonderful. You know, I was the whiz kid. I made good grades. I got scholarships. For that community I was considered a real smart kid. So they were bragging about this to everybody, and the whole town knew that I had operated on this cat. So people back home—a few of them today, to this day, still tease me about that. It seems hypocritical to them today that—"oh, so, here you are, an animal rights vegetarian, and I remember back in school you were torturing cats."

Rowe: That's the way they phrased it.

Mason: Well, sort of, because some people then were appalled. "Well, he shouldn't do that. The poor little thing." Not the farm people. They wouldn't have cared if I had stomped it to

death. But people in town—my classmates that were town kids who were a little more sensitive about such things. So I worried about the question of what happened to my initial innocent sensitivity to animals. I wonder if I didn't get—I developed that sort of emotional blunting or that insulating effect maybe somehow by taking up biology. I entered science fairs. I did a horrible thing with a frog in a science fair one time. I did the kind of vivisection that we're opposed to today and didn't think anything about it. Well, I probably did but not as fully as I might have.

So again, I was compartmentalizing things. I had episode after episode—I told you two or three of them—about being horrified, shocked, stressed out by seeing some animal suffering, and yet—then my brothers and I—one brother and I every Saturday would chop the heads off the chickens so we would have chicken for Sunday dinner.

Rowe: Were you concerned about looking tough with your brothers?

Mason: Probably was. Probably wanted to fit in. I remember other times hunting became an issue, because my older brother—my oldest brother was a serious hunter. He liked to go hunting. And from time to time, my buddies from town would come out and want to go rabbit hunting or squirrel hunting or something on the farm. And I had never really enjoyed doing it, but I felt like, well, you know, they're my buddies and they want to go hunting. I have to go along with them. They'd shoot a few animals, and I remember being appalled because one group didn't even—a couple of guys didn't even want to clean the animals and take them back to the—

[End Tape 1, Side A; Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Mason: Hunting squirrels or hunting rabbits. I went along with it even though I wasn't really real gung-ho to go hunting with them. It was like your buddies come out to play baseball or whatever, you do it. In this case it was hunting, and I went along with it. We'd go out and we'd shoot a few animals and come back. Then there was this one time they didn't even bother to clean them. I thought that was terrible.

Rowe: By “cleaning” you mean skinning them.

Mason: Skinning them and gutting them and preparing them for food. So the thing that strikes me I still can't explain is how I could have had this real spotty sensitivity. It occurred at times. At times I was really appalled by some cruelty or inflicting some suffering on an animal, and then other times I wasn't. It was like it was okay, it was normal.

The last time I had one of these incidents I had already started college. I was seventeen years old when I started college. The first time I came home for vacation, I think it was a Thanksgiving holiday. And for some strange reason I went out and shot an animal. It was the thing to do back then on a nice weekend Saturday or Sunday afternoon. You'd just go out in the woods with your dog and a gun. It was just so normal. Maybe today you'd go for a walk. But

then, a farm boy such as I, would just have a few hours to kill, you'd just walk out in the woods and you—

Rowe: Literally a few hours to kill.

Mason: A few hours to kill. Take your gun with you and take your dog with you. I was out there sitting on a stump enjoying the woods, and I heard the yelping sounds and my dog—my dog then was Butch—come racing across the clearing chasing a fox. Again, whether it was conditioning or whatever, I just pulled up the gun and shot the fox, wounded it, didn't kill it. Then it went screaming away into the woods with the dog hot on its pursuit, and it went to a den. You know, I had enough ethics as a farm boy hunter that you didn't leave a wounded animal in the woods. You've got to track it down and kill it and get its fur, do whatever you can do.

So my dog and I located the den and dug it out. It took quite a while to dig the poor thing out because I didn't have a proper pick and a shovel. We were digging it out with roots and with rocks and what have you, working our way down in the den so we could get to this wounded animal. As we dug more and more, I could see the poor fox in there suffering and bleeding to death. And the look on its face—it was just another one of those moments when I just—I felt just like I did in those other incidents. I just felt horrible. I just felt absolutely ashamed to have done this. It was like I had committed a horrible mistake.

Rowe: On your previous hunting expeditions with your friends when you were younger—when you were mad at them not cleaning the squirrels—had you shot any animals then?

Mason: Yes. Yes. But again—

Rowe: But shooting was a rare occurrence for you generally.

Mason: Yes. It wasn't something I did a lot of. And in those cases, you know, you'd shoot the animal—and in that case it might have been that it was killed instantly or it was killed at some distance so that by the time you got to the animal it was just this lifeless mass of fur anyway and you didn't see its face and you didn't see it suffering. But this fox—it was like I was face to face with this dying animal, and it looked so pitiful. I remember its eyes. Its eyes looked like the light was going out in them, and it was. The light of life was going out in this fox. And I thought that and I felt that, and I knew that I had done a terrible, terrible thing. That's one of those times when I said to myself, "Well, I'm never going to do this again. I'm never going to shoot anything again."

Rowe: And did you?

Mason: No. I never did. And I never really talked about that much either, for another thing. I never did brag about that. I must have kept that a personal secret for years. When I told anybody about it it would have been maybe a non-family person.

Rowe: Now, you're seventeen years old. You went off to college. Was that in Missouri as well?

Mason: Yes. I went to St. Louis to Washington University as a gung-ho pre-med student to study biology, get to med school to be a surgeon.

Rowe: I'd just like to widen the context here. It's 1957, '58.

Mason: Fifty-eight.

Rowe: Your father has moved on. He's now still working for Carnation, right?

Mason: Actually, at that point in time he was in transition. He had left Carnation and he was in the process of moving to Florida to live.

Rowe: So the farm was still functioning as a farm? Had your brothers remained there?

Mason: No.

Rowe: They hadn't.

Mason: The farm was being phased out at this point.

Rowe: I'd like to ask you to reflect on that. Was this "phasing out" due to the economics of your farm, or of the particular area, or of a larger change occurring in American farming?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: And how did you see those changes over the 40s and the 50s taking place?

Mason: Obviously by 1958 the postwar affluent boom was well underway. Now we were at the point where people had not one but two new cars. They were building additions on their houses—you know, affluence. There was money moving after the war. You're too young to remember that, but by 1950-something America was prosperous. A chicken in every pot, new refrigerators, all that stuff. So the farm life, you know, had lost its luster for my parents. I mean, now at this point they had been through eighteen years of poverty and hardship and working overtime, and none of the kids were interested in the farm. Both brothers went off to college, and I was going to be a doctor. It was like they were thinking, "Why should we keep this up? This is the end of this dream." The neighbors around them were selling their farms. Their kids weren't staying home. One by one, each of the neighbors lost their kid. Their kid would go—whether they went to college or whether they got a job.

Rowe: Were these neighbors middle class like you?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: The kids you went to school with in junior school, fifty percent of whom were farmers' children and a percentage of those were poor farmers' children. What was happening to the poor farmers' children?

Mason: They were forced to stay behind. So it became almost like a status thing. If you stayed home and stayed on the farm, it was like you were a lowlife. It was like lower class. You're poor people. Because if you've got anything at all, it's to get out of here, to get out of this farm, to get out of this high school, to get out of this town and go to college somewhere and get a better job. That was my obsession the last year or so of school. I just couldn't wait to get out of there.

Rowe: There was an emptying of the landscape. Was depopulation taking place at that time?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: And this was because of people moving to the cities and moving away from the farm?

Mason: Yes. By the end of the 50s, the only people that were still farming were the elderly people, the people who were now in their sixties and seventies. They had no choice. Their kids weren't coming back. They had to do it all by themselves. And now they were—what had been prosperous farming for them in the previous decade was now beginning to look like—they were making less money now. They were not getting as much money for their milk. They couldn't sell eggs anymore. The pig prices were not any good.

Rowe: Do you have a general answer as to why? Was there a general trend of consolidation amongst farms and larger factory-type farming coming in, or had factory farming not really happened yet in your area?

Mason: I'm sure in that case, in the case of poultry, it was because factory farming was already pretty much taking away their markets. I didn't know it at the time. I had no idea there was such a thing as a chicken factory in 1958, but there surely were. They had been around at that point for probably twenty-five or thirty years. In fact, they were probably fairly well perfected then. That's why my grandmother was no longer selling eggs in town. I don't think she understood it either. It's just the price kept going down until it was not worth it. She was spending more money on feed and feeding those chickens than she was getting back on the eggs.

So little by little they would give up a crop here—a crop being chicken production, raising fryers, raising pigs, raising some corn, raising some wheat. Little by little a farmer would choose not—"Well, next year we're not going to—I'm going to sell the hogs. We're not going to"—and they'd sell their dairy cows. I harped at my parents for years when I was in high school

to sell the dairy cows. Both brothers were gone, and my dad and I were the only ones left to milk the cows twice a day. I kept reasoning with him. “Look, you’ve got a job. I’m going to be a doctor. What do we go out to the goddamned barn for twice a day milking three cows? What’s your milk check? Eighteen dollars a month?” [I was] trying to argue with him. You know what it was? I don’t think he wanted to sell. I think he was attached to them.

Rowe: Attached to the animal or attached to the way of life?

Mason: Yes. Attached to the animals and attached probably to the dream. He had come down there in 1941 to farm. I guess he just couldn’t admit defeat. And the cows had names. Although he never did talk about it to me, my dad’s a pretty sensitive guy too for somebody from that background. I believe he was attached to the old cows and just couldn’t stand to sell them, because to sell them meant to send them to the market to the slaughterhouse. He knew where they were going to go.

Rowe: How long a life did the milk cows have as milk cows?

Mason: We kept some of our milk cows until they were actually old age for milk cows. Some of them could have been ten, twelve, thirteen years old. You know, you’d keep them around even when they weren’t making as much milk as the younger ones. I think my dad got attached to them.

Rowe: Presumably he had no problem shipping off the male calves to slaughter.

Mason: Well, there again, see, there’s a different kind of relationship with them. They don’t all have names. You don’t sit under their bodies twice a day. Every cow has a face. The animals that they’re closest to on a farm are the ones that they spend the most time with on a daily basis. With the farmer neighbors it would have been the horses, a team of horses, because there’s only two of them and they have names. Most of the farmers would be walking behind a team of horses six or seven hours a day. Every bit of work on the farm was done with these horses, so they would get really quite closely attached to their horses. Probably the next animals in order, in terms of numbers of hours and closeness, would have been the milk cows. And the beef cows were all running around in a field there somewhere. They were fungible goods. They all looked alike and they didn’t have names and you weren’t that close to them, even on a daily basis.

Rowe: What happened to the horses that dragged your plow early on?

Mason: I don’t remember exactly what they did with the horses. I think they probably sold them to a neighboring farm family that didn’t have the money to get a tractor. But our next-door neighbors farmed with horses until the day they died; the Kirbys, they were a real older couple. They farmed until they were both well into their seventies. They died at the same time in a car accident, the poor old souls. There was a story that the neighbors told about when Dale Kirby’s team of horses were killed in a fire. His barn caught on fire. It would have been probably

sometime when I was in college or when I wasn't living around there anymore. The barn caught fire and the horses died. I remember my granny told me that he was so upset, that he was so sad by that, that he was very much grieving over the loss of his horses and the guilt that he felt because they died that way. And he didn't work for days. The poor old man was like—it was just really a big blow to him because he was already elderly by that time. They were becoming poor. Thirty years before they were well-to-do farmers and they had some money. I mean, not well-to-do but prosperous. And now, here he is seventy-something, farming forty acres, and not well off. No kids around to help. They'd all moved away.

So one by one those farmers were selling their farms and moving to town and living in apartments and things by the end of the 50s. By 1960-something one farm after another had gone on the sale block.

Rowe: And when they were sold, where did the land go? Parallel to that, was there increasing suburbanization, because the 1950s saw a period of massive increases in road-building during the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower administration. Did the landscape of Lawrence County change?

Mason: Yes. It suburbanized. That road that we lived on when I was a kid was a gravel road. The only traffic on the road were the farmers. But after the war, asphalt becomes available. They paved the road. And some of the farmers, desperate for money, began selling off little pieces of land like two acres here, five acres here, ten acres. The parcels keep getting broken up, mainly for residential sites only. But even those people sometimes would have enough acreage—like if you have five acres you can have a few cows. Some of them would have a couple of milk cows, five or six beef cows, maybe some pigs or something, even on that small acreage.

Rowe: So the people who were moving in there were—

Mason: Hobby farmers.

Rowe: They were the hobby farmers we talked about.

Mason: Part-time farmers. They were people who had jobs but figured they could make a little extra money, raise a few animals. They could do that too without too much extra investment. But most of the land was getting bought up by the more well-to-do farmers who were simply adding to their acreage. In our neighborhood, one well-to-do farmer made his money in the asphalt business. And for another rich one a neighborhood away, it was the gas business. So these guys were farm kids who got rich doing something else. Then they not only inherited the family farm but bought out their neighbors. So that where they might have been raised on a 160-acre farm like mine—like our neighbor today, Joe Dahlman, he probably owns, I would guess, I would say, thousands of acres, at least a thousand, maybe two or three thousand acres. He buys up farms all over, 200 acres here, 150 acres here, wherever he can find one. And he got bargains throughout the 50s and 60s. And he runs cattle on them and leaves them in grass, doesn't do any

crops, doesn't plow and do all that stuff. He just turns it into grass, puts the cattle on it, and raises beef cattle.

Rowe: Now to return the thing full circle, we're at the end of the 1950s. What was the sense of community like that your parents had known moving back into Mount Vernon, where farmers knew each other and help each other out?

Mason: Machinery was taking over. Almost all the farmers by now had tractors, and they didn't do threshing anymore. Threshing was a group activity. It took ten or fifteen men to run a threshing machine. Well, that was too cumbersome. So they had new kinds of machines that did the same work. They used combines. I know these are terms that don't mean anything. But what a threshing machine did was process the grain. When pitched in huge bundles of grains—stems, seeds, and all—and a threshing machine would beat it around and separate the kernels of grain from all the other stuff and the straw would get blown out into a big pile into a straw stack. Well, they invented machines that did that much more efficiently. They rolled through the field on wheels, and one farmer could guide his machine through the field and do the same work. So it didn't take ten men and it didn't take all day.

That's what a combine does. It's a big machine. They cost a lot of money. They've got a big rotor on the front of them and it mows the wheat or the oats or whatever, and the grain heads fall into this chute and it goes up and it threshes it and spits it out, spits out the grain into a truck and it spits out the straw back on the field. So, bingo, one guy can do it all. So every guy then was trying to raise—every farmer that was still farming was trying to raise money to buy a combine. Or if they couldn't buy their own combine, they'd rent their neighbor's. There would be sharecropping that way. The Smiths would own a combine so they would combine all of their stuff, and then they'd go out and do the combining for the neighbors for hire. So that broke up—and the pig slaughtering. They didn't do that anymore.

Rowe: Were they shipped to a specific slaughterhouse?

Mason: After the war when electricity became available, they put in one of these locker plants, they called them, which was a big freezer building. Everybody rented a locker in the locker plant where they kept all this frozen meat. And the locker plant a couple of times a year would hire a butcher. People would take in their animals and he would slaughter them and skin them and cut them up and put them in your locker. So that's the way you took care of that, so there wasn't community slaughter on the farm anymore.

The threshing was gone. Now they had hay balers instead of having teams of men and boys out shocking wheat in the field. Sometimes they'd have twelve or fifteen guys out there going down the field in rows pulling the grain together and stacking it up like they used to do. Ever see pictures of shocks of wheat? Well, baling took care of that. Instead of piling the bundles of grain in stacks to keep them waterproof, the baling machine would go through the field and it would grind all that stuff up and tie it up in a bale, and the bale would shoot out the

back. He'd throw it on a wagon and take it to the barn. So that was gone. So a lot of the work was changing because of machines.

Rowe: So what happened to the working poor?

Mason: And the school was closing too. The other thing—I told you about the one-room school. They were consolidating school districts because they figured it's better to have all these country kids come into town on buses and going to school in the great big new high school building than it is to have all of these little one-room school houses. So they closed most of those down. Then, instead of walking through the woods down a creek to go to the one-room schoolhouse with the double desks and the potbellied stove and all that romantic stuff, everybody got on the yellow school bus and we went to town to school.

So a lot of these community supporting activities, one by one they were withering away or they were being terminated so that the farm families didn't really need to work together anymore. There was—late in the 50s and the early 60s there was like this sudden loss of young men, school-aged young men in the area because they were getting other jobs. They were going to college. They were moving to the cities to get jobs. They were not staying back. So a whole segment of the population was missing. It was like more and more you had like elderly couples living on farms by themselves doing the best that they could do. So it was a very different neighborhood.

Rowe: So the poor who couldn't afford to go to college moved to the cities. The young men moved to the cities to take up jobs in what type of industries?

Mason: Yes. Working in the aircraft factories. A lot of them would go to California and get jobs in industries out there. I'm trying to think of some examples, some live examples of kids that I knew. Or they'd move to one of the nearby towns, like Springfield or Joplin, and get a job like working with, say, the large milk company, driving a truck for the milk company, those kind of jobs, not getting too far away from home.

Rowe: Okay. You're at college, you're a pre-med student.

Mason: St. Louis, Missouri.

Rowe: How long did you remain a pre-med student?

Mason: I began to be disillusioned with it early in my—somewhat in my second year. By the sophomore year I was beginning to wonder if this is the way to go. The junior year I changed schools. I can't explain it to this day. I just wanted to jump and run. I think I was confused about where I was going, so I thought if I changed schools—I mean, it's not logical. It doesn't make sense to me today. But I decided to leave Washington University in St. Louis and go to

Florida where my parents were now living. They had sold out and they moved to Florida. I thought, “Well, at least down there I’ll go to school and I’ll have some fun.”

I went to Florida, and my junior year was a critical year for pre-med because you take organic chemistry, comparative anatomy, some higher level zoology courses. And if you don’t do well on those, you’re screwed. You’re out because you have to have perfect grades to get into med school. And I was hating these courses, especially organic chemistry. I detested that course. I could barely go to class. I had never studied. I flunked the final exam. And when that happened I said, “Well, that’s it. This is the main”—everyone said, “This is the main course they look at when they choose students for med school.” They look at how well you did in organic chemistry. That’s a big indicator. And by then I knew I didn’t give a shit. I wasn’t going to go to med school anyway.

I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I thought rather than spend the money to go to college not knowing what you want to do I should just quit. So I left school. I flunked out of college in my junior year, abandoned the dream, probably a huge trauma for my parents, because all those years before I had such a great record. I went to college with two scholarships and went to science camp and got this honor and that honor and medals and awards. I was like the science whiz kid, and I was definitely going to be a doctor. [I] worked in the hospitals in the laboratory in the summer, the whole stuff, science fairs, the whole bit. So when I just gave it up, just abandoned this career, they must have been totally freaked out.

Rowe: Did they ever talk to you about it?

Mason: They were quite concerned about it. They were really disturbed by it. They thought that I had lost my mind or something. My mother was not one to weep and whine about things, but I remember one time when I was home she was crying rather bitterly about what I had done. “What have you done? You’re throwing away your life. We had such hopes for you, and you were going to do this, and you’re going to do that. What’s happened to you, son?” I didn’t understand it at the time. I really couldn’t tell them.

I became disillusioned with the medical field. I think I began to know something more about what it’s really like. Instead of studying the text books and the anatomy books and memorizing the bones and the muscles—all that was fun, but the further along I got the more I began to see the real picture of what doctors are like and how they live, what their lives are like, and it wasn’t really a very pretty sight. It didn’t look so attractive.

Rowe: Was it because the doctors were overworked?

Mason: Oh, gosh, you work long hours. I mean, medical school itself—it helped because I had a cousin that was exactly four years ahead of me, and he was going to medical school while I was going to undergrad school. He was telling me what he was going through and what life was like that way. It was like total dedication, absolutely focused on one thing to the exclusion of

everything else. I was looking at a situation where I would have virtually no life except as an intensive student until I was well into my thirties, for God's sake. I thought, "God, can I do that? Am I that dedicated? Am I that intent on being a doctor?" And I guess I wasn't. I'm really glad. I'm so glad I didn't pursue that. It wasn't well thought out. It was really rather immature and childish and whimsical choice I made at the time. But as things have turned out, it was the right one. Thank God I didn't end up a stupid doctor, for God's sake. Can you imagine?

Rowe: I'd like to ask you what your feelings were in regards to non-human live animals at that time.

Mason: You know, it came back to me a little bit in law school. It struck me as how unfair it was. I had all this biology background. I knew [Charles] Darwin's theory of evolution. I knew anatomy, zoology. I knew about animals in a scientific way. There I was in law school, realizing that the legal system only applies to human beings and animals are not even considered. They don't have standing. All these legal concepts begin to make—

Rowe: Did you go into law school straight after college?

Mason: No. I goofed around, spent two years in the army. I stayed out of school for about five years. I went back in '66, I think it was—'65, '66. [I] did college and law school, finished it all in '69, going to school summer and winter, all terms. But in law school I just had this weird thing that was never really very seriously considered and well worked out. It just was like a thing I thought about to myself, teased myself about, and joked about with others that animals should be extended some kinds of rights, because I knew all the science. I said it didn't make sense. It's archaic. It's Medieval. The legal system doesn't recognize what science has brought forth in the last two or three hundred years.

Rowe: Had you any information or theory to buttress your arguments? Had you read anything about animal rights?

Mason: Didn't know anything—there wasn't any animal rights ideas. This would have been in the late 60s at Columbia, Missouri. It was just a whim I had, just off-the-wall—I remember teasing my classmates about it. It was almost like I was half-serious, but not serious enough to take it further, to really study it and write a paper about it or a pamphlet or become active. It was just something—just a thought that I carried with me. I used to tease them, saying, "I want to extend the Bill of Rights to animals, at least to mammals, because they qualify for all of these protections biologically." And I was right. But I just didn't take it anywhere.

Rowe: You still ate them though.

Mason: Yes. It never occurred to me to become a vegetarian until I was thirty-one or thirty-two years old.

Rowe: At that point had you read anything about vegetarianism?

Mason: A year or two out of law school. I tell you, actually what began to get me socially conscious, because I really didn't—although when I left law school I went into legal services, legal aid, which is pretty socially conscious work. Usually you're very politically motivated, but I wasn't that socially conscious and that politically correct yet. I did it because it was an opportunity to get out of Missouri, to work back east, to be near New York, and get a job and have a paycheck. I got to where I liked it, being a legal services lawyer. I worked with the poorest people in the city, in Bridgeport, Connecticut—poor blacks, a lot of Puerto Rican population there, a lot of Hispanic people, a lot of really poor people. And I was exposed to all that and it had an effect on me. It made me more socially conscious, more politically aware, I think, than I had ever been before, almost an activist at that point.

Then my wife [Linda] died of cancer, only two years out of school and just starting out in life. She was twenty-five years old and I was thirty-one. She died of Hodgkin's Disease. In the wake of that tragedy and the kind of work I was doing, I became really socially conscious. I don't know why. Out of the grief? I don't know. I just began to think about things a lot more than I ever had before.

Within another year or two I was involved in the feminist movement and the animal movement at the same time. It was almost two different circles. I had all these really radical women friends whom I was meeting through NOW [National Organization for Women], and I started two men's rap groups in Westport. I think in my grief I felt driven to do something good for a change. I just felt like I had been an asshole. I had been not real conscious with my wife. Even though we endured a lot of stuff with her illness, that I had still been not very liberated in our relationship. I felt like a heightened sense of, I guess, ethics, morality.

All in the space of a few years, all these things happened and [I] met Peter Singer and started talking about Animal Liberation. I helped him find the factory farms that are in Animal Liberation. I started wrestling with vegetarianism, trying to give up my old ideas. I kept clinging to the idea that we can still eat animals if they're humanely killed and that's what farm animals are for—they're designed to be eaten. All these kind of bogus ideas kept hanging in there.

In the course of just very few years—by 1974, I suppose, I was on my way to becoming a vegetarian and becoming really more focused on animal activism and was already researching factory farming and farm animal issues. That was my first big field, I guess. Actually, I wrote a pamphlet about it for Friends of Animals even before I met Peter Singer. So I was looking into factory farming probably as early as '72 or '73, which was—my wife died in the spring of—Linda died in '71, in May of '71. Within a year I was probably doing animal work and starting men's rap groups and things. Then, of course, within a few short years I lost interest in my law practice. I couldn't see myself going to work and doing divorces all day everyday. I'm a very ill-disciplined person. Thank God I am, because if I had been disciplined I'd probably be a

stupid surgeon somewhere by now. I did things kind of half whimsically all throughout my life. It all worked out for the best.

Rowe: I'm going to stop you there.

[End of Session]

**Jim Mason
Session #2
November 16, 1999
New York, New York**

Martin Rowe, Interviewer

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Rowe: We will be recapping the period that Jim Mason talked about from about 1967, '68, onwards. You went to law school, Columbia, Missouri.

Mason: University of Missouri, Columbia.

Rowe: And it was there that he really first began to think about animal rights as such. You have suggested, however, that at that point your thinking wasn't really framed as animal rights as such. It was, instead, a sort of natural understanding of the rights of animals, which is slightly different. Could you elaborate on the background of that understanding and how you came to express it to your fellow students?

Mason: Yes. I remember at the time—as I recall it, I was half serious and half joking, because I had this background, this quite a bit of knowledge for a law student, quite a bit of knowledge about biology. I had been to biology summer camps. I had worked in hospitals. I had a tremendous—really an advanced knowledge of biology. I was ahead of myself going to medical school.

Anyway, the insight struck me how odd it is, how out of synch—the law is with science, with biological knowledge. So that struck me as very bad and I made a lot of comments on it when I was a law student, teasing with my friends, drinking beer, hanging around after class, the usual sort of stuff where you're bantering about concepts. And I said many times, "I think we should extend the Bill of Rights of the Constitution to animals because they have personhood—they have a concept of personhood as we know it here in the law school." They have self-awareness and some degree of consciousness, ability to communicate, all these things we know from science. And how odd it is that the law is maybe three or four hundred years behind this knowledge. So that was my budding little awareness of, you might say, animal rights—that they deserved rights as we know them in the legal sense; and yet culturally there's a great inertia. They're still considered property and they have no other status in our culture.

Rowe: The fact you mentioned the rights of animals jokingly and half-serious[ly] suggested that you were thinking about these issues quite extensively.

Mason: I think extensively but guardedly because I still hadn't looked at myself and my own involvement in it. I hadn't looked at the economics of the exploitation of animals. It was not extensive; it was shallow, I think, at that point. It was just a kind of a whimsical, semi-intellectual comment on the state of affairs in the world—is it irony or paradox or whatever?—in other words, the imbalance in knowledge of science and knowledge of law regarding animals. I didn't really take it any farther than that at that point. I just mentioned it and noticed it and laughed about it in passing. I didn't write any great pieces about it. I didn't launch any writing projects or any research projects. I just went right on by it.

Rowe: That remained underground until after you finished law school.

Mason: Right.

Rowe: At the time you were married. Your wife became sick with Hodgkin's Disease and died in 1971. You moved to Connecticut where you worked in Bridgeport with very poor people, offering them legal aid. You have said that during this time you became conscientized. You became aware of the issues surrounding their conditions as well as involved with the women's rights movements. One of the reasons you have offered for this is because you felt you hadn't been very fully responsive to your wife, Linda, when you had been married to her. Out of grief you became much more aware of the whole social dynamic. Can you describe in some ways what you felt were the connections? I should also add that you became a vegetarian at the age of thirty-one in 1971 or thereabouts.

Mason: It was a couple of years later that I got a little more conscious.

Rowe: Okay. Well, prior to that period, how did you become aware of the connections between these issues, and how did they impact upon your understanding of animals at that point before becoming a vegetarian, which led up to your becoming a vegetarian?

Mason: Right. Well, Linda actually—just to clear the history, the details of the history—Linda and I were married while we were students together in Missouri. And as soon I graduated and she graduated in 1969, we both left together to live in Connecticut in the New York area, primarily because we wanted to live near the city. I was a sailor; I wanted to be near salt water. We wanted her to be near a major treatment center because we had friends who were involved in cancer research at the time. We had an "in" at Sloan-Kettering Institute, which at that time in our lives was a very important connection to get her the state-of-the-art treatment. So anyway, we moved there together in '69, and she lived only a couple of years after that.

I guess what happened was, her death was a shock to my sensibilities and my whole life. It just literally shook me up upside-down when she died. It was just like the end of the world as I knew it. I felt as if a huge part of me had been torn away. So it just was a great disturbance in my life and lifestyle and outlook and everything. It was a great jolt. I think in a way that kind of shook me up and spun me around and made me look at things a lot differently.

The other big factor, I think, was the work I was involved in as a legal services lawyer, which was really highly political. And here I was this naïve farmboy from Missouri who had no apparent political leanings, left or right. I guess I was just a natural born progressive but hadn't really thought about left versus right and all that. I just came there to get a job. I didn't go there as an activist, as a politically-motivated lawyer. I went there as a guy looking for a job.

Anyway, in the course of that work, working with people of color for the first time in my life, I remember having to give talks about legal services work to exclusively black, African-American audiences—poor people in housing projects. If you can imagine the scene, here I am, this little skinny cracker with a southern accent, standing in front of all these black people, these very poor urban—black urban poor people—and talking to them in a southern accent. It must have been really a strange situation. I had no clue of the political and racial charging of the whole thing. But I did get conscious in working there. When I had a steady diet of the kind of racism and the kind of discrimination that's heaped on Spanish-speaking people and urban blacks and others, I got politically conscious. I became aware of the need to address these problems.

Rowe: You have said that you perhaps were a natural born progressive.

Mason: Might have been.

Rowe: Well, let's reflect on the past a bit and think about your natural sensitivity to animals. Was perhaps your awareness of the suffering of the unfortunate or innocent or those who are at the behest of the powerful filtering through? We've already ascertained that you were a very sensitive child. I'm just wondering whether your sensitivity to human deprivation wasn't only innate but whether exposure to the suffering of animals had in some way nurtured it and transmuted later into an awareness of the political problems of people of color.

Mason: Possibly. Yes. I thought about that earlier—that people sometimes are born with, you know, some trait or some talent that's sometimes more, sometimes less than average. Like my mathematical ability was less than average, my musical ability was a little greater than average. Maybe it's the same with color sensibility—or empathy, in my case. I just might have been more naturally more disposed towards empathy and compassion. And my parents, being the kind people they really were in the family, might have nurtured that more than they might have in another child. I might have had a little more of that, whether it was from birth or from nurturing, I'm not sure.

But I did have a lot of experiences in childhood where I had an instant, instinctive opposition to something that struck me as unfair, like racist talk or meanness or cruelty to somebody on account of their race or their sex or their gender. I remember when I was working in a factory in Boston when I was a college drop-out, like twenty-one or twenty-two, with no political formulation whatsoever, with none of the consciousness or the politicization of the straight-versus-gay issue we have today. And some coworkers invited my buddy and I to go out

one night and, as they put it, “to roll queers,” I think. They invited us to go with them to the park “to roll queers.” I didn’t know what the guy meant. I said, “What do you mean by that?” He said, “Well, you know, we let them come on to us and we beat them up and take their money.” I just thought that was awful. I didn’t have any negativity or bad attitude toward gay people even then. I mean, it just didn’t bother me. But it wasn’t even politically proper to do that then. Somehow I just—I don’t know—maybe I just had a good sense of fairness. Maybe it’s because I’m a Libra. I don’t know. [Laughter]. But stuff like that bothered me, and I just didn’t go along with it, and I’m proud of that.

Rowe: I presume that the population where you grew up was almost entirely white.

Mason: Yes. Almost exclusively white. I never met a Jewish person until I started college. I actually—and this will be unbelievable—but part of me believed that Jewish people were extinct from Biblical times. The Jews were, to me, an ancient race. I mean, I lived in an area that was so culturally isolated. We had a few people of color that were the leftovers of the black population that lived there and no other people of color—no Asians, no Jewish population, nothing at that time in the 50s. But I was very naïve about racial and cultural diversity.

So it’s kind of odd that I chose a job working in Bridgeport, Connecticut, which is one of the most ethnically and linguistically—or lingually—diverse cities outside of New York on the east coast. I mean, there are about fifty different nationalities and languages in Bridgeport. It’s truly an industrial—a poor, broken-down industrial town. It was really quite a culture shock for somebody from small town farm background with a University of Missouri law degree to go to a place like that and work. I must have been quite a novelty there.

Rowe: So it was a rapid learning curve.

Mason: Yes, it was.

Rowe: Now, tell me at what point a more coordinated or coherent animal rights consciousness came. I’d like to tie that also with a question regarding your awareness of the environmental movement. You recently gave a talk about the animal question, about how environmentalists have failed to take on board the issue of the non-human animals within nature. It would be interesting to me to know whether you were paying attention to the environmental movement as it emerged at Earth Day 1970 and beyond. Was that part of an animal rights awareness for you?

Mason: Yes. That was part of the awareness. The combination of the shock to my system from the death of my wife, the actual hands-on street level experiences I was having working in what was essentially a very progressive—in fact, rather radical—law practice. I mean, I used to drive the Black Panthers around to their meetings. Here I am, again, this cracker with a southern accent and I had the leadership of the Bridgeport Black Panthers in my little Volkswagen beetle on our way to the housing project to a meeting. The Young Lords, the Puerto Rican radical group—we worked with them on landlord/tenant issues in Bridgeport. We had streets barricaded

because of rent strikes we conducted. I mean, we were engaged in some pretty heavy duty stuff in 1969, '70, and '71.

And that tended to bring me to a higher state of consciousness and more formulated political consciousness—as well as, of course, the exposure and the relationships I was developing with people who were politically active. I mean, here I was spending most of my day working with people who were very political, and I was going to meetings with black activists and Hispanic activists who were very political as well. Many of them were Marxist and other progressives. So I was getting exposure to that in my life in my relationships with people and my work. So I was getting more politically aware of things, of all kinds of injustice and oppression.

A year—no, within months after Linda died, I started going out again and meeting people and dating and so forth. I had a girlfriend at the time who had a bumper sticker, a famous Friends of Animals bumper sticker, “I brake for animals.” You know, somehow that just said things to me. It said something about animals, I related to it, I said, “What’s that about? Is that a group?” I asked her about it and she told me all about this group. I said, “Well, it really sounds like something I’ve been wanting to do all my life. That’s always bothered me, and I’ve never lifted a finger. I want to find out more about it.” So she introduced me to Friends of Animals.

About a year later after that episode, about a year later after Linda died or something—sometime later—I was in New York with another friend who knew about the Friends of Animals office. I knew the address from the literature that I’d been getting, One Columbus Circle or whatever it was. Just on a whim I thought, “I want to drop in there and say hello.” I had become a member. I went up the elevator and I got off and I went in there and said, “I’m a lawyer from Connecticut. I’ve just joined and I thought maybe I’d come in and say hello and I’ll volunteer my services sometime,” and I did. And nothing happened except I said hello to a few people and they took my name, address, and phone number.

Then some time later—I don’t remember, it seemed like quite a while, several months—I got a call from Alice Herrington, who was the president. She said, “You’re an attorney up there in Connecticut. I’ve got a little something I want you to do. Why don’t you come in?” So it started. Then it started that I became active. She wanted me to do a little research project. She said, “Well, you’re a lawyer. You can read and write. Maybe you could write a little something.” So she put me to work. I think the first thing I did was a research project into state laws on cruelty. She wanted me to do a kind of survey of state cruelty laws, and I worked on that for several months.¹

Rowe: Cruelty to which type of animals?

Mason: Cruelty to animals.

¹ Model State Animal Protection Statutes, February 1973 (copy attached).

Rowe: Any animals.

Mason: Just the basic anti-cruelty statute. They're practically the same across the country. They're modeled after the British statute.² They started passing these laws in the—I don't remember details and dates. What was it? In the 1870s? Whenever Henry Bergh started the ASPCA [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals].³ Then within five or ten years, most of the states in the country passed essentially the same law. So I looked all of those up and essentially analyzed them, compared them, and discussed them and came up with a pamphlet or a booklet that explained why they're inadequate and why we needed a better system.

That just raised my consciousness way up, because I had to write a preamble. I had to write a little introduction, a page and a half, explaining this project. Of course, it forced me to think about the whole concept that had been incipient or in embryonic form in law school—the unfairness, the injustice in the way we treat animals. So I finally got a chance to think it out a little more fully, put it on paper, and circulate it.

Rowe: Was the Friends of Animals the first group that you'd ever been involved with?

Mason: Right.

Rowe: Okay. And was it at this time that you became a vegetarian?

Mason: No, not quite yet. So we're now—it'd be about 1972 something. I don't remember. I didn't keep a diary. But roughly a year and something after Linda died I had written this thing and I was getting really conscious.

I was already involved in and aware of the feminist ideas, because they were happening around me. I had friends who were members of the National Organization for Women [NOW] in Westport. At the same time I was learning about the animal issues I was also learning about that. And I was hearing about environmental issues at the same time, too. Then I was concerned about—at that time, you know, in the early 70s the Endangered Species Act was passed.⁴ Was it 1971? There was a lot of noise over fur and the killing of spotted cats for fur coats. So all of that was in the news. I was getting that. I was hearing it all. And that struck me as appalling, that these rare animals were being killed for fur coats. I heard all the discussion of the passage—the controversy surrounding the passage of the Endangered Species Act. So I was a beginner animal

² The British parliament passed “An Act to Prevent the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle” (known as Martin's Act) in 1822.

³ New York State passed a misdemeanor act in 1829, and Massachusetts passed a similar one in 1836. But these measures were hardly enforced until the formation of the ASPCA in 1866. Its charter permits its agents to arrest violators of the anti-cruelty statute.

⁴ Endangered Species Act, 1967.

rights activist, environmental activist, feminist activist. It was just all there in my life in the form of what I heard in the news, what my friends were talking about, because I was living then in Westport, Connecticut, which is a pretty aware and progressive community. There were people there who were involved in these things—my friends.

Rowe: Was anybody else with you, your friends, making a similar connection to animal advocacy, or were you really the only one who was reaching across all those different movements?

Mason: I had friends in different circles. I still had my friends in the lawyer circles, because I was a family lawyer. I still was working, even though I was phasing out my legal services work. I was working part-time at that, part-time for Friends of Animals. I had two or three jobs at the time. The feminism and the social injustice in the human realm was coming from the leftovers of my legal aid practice.

I was still involved with feminist lawyers. In fact, some of us were trying to raise the issue of battered women in the family law section. This would have been 1971, '72, as I was leaving legal services and starting my own practice. I was involved with what was the beginning of feminist lawyers in the Connecticut Bar Association. There were three or four women and me. I don't even remember their names now. I didn't stay in touch with them. But I was one of the few guys who worked with them to try to get our family law section to address the issue of battered women, because I had been dealing with it for three or four years as a legal service lawyer. We used to actually [make]—like gallows humor—a sick joke about it that every Monday morning we would find beaten-up women in our waiting room because they would get into fights with their lovers and boyfriends and husbands over the weekend. And sure enough, every Monday we'd have a waiting room with quite a few battered women. So we knew that this was not just an illusion; it was happening. We tried to bring this to the bar association, and they laughed at us. They said, "This isn't happening." They didn't even recognize battered women problems then. Of course, now it's a household word. So I was involved in that, which was like one of the first issues that feminists and feminist lawyers were bringing out. So that was one circle.

Then I was working part-time at Friends of Animals doing this research, so I was developing relationships with animal-conscious people, and they weren't always the same people. But then, as I went to NOW meetings—I started going to the National Organization for Women meetings there in Westport—I did meet a couple of people who seemed to be conscious of both issues. They were animal people who were also feminists. Actually, Priscilla Feral, who was then Priscilla Brockway, was one of those women, and she struck me as a woman who was both aware of women's oppression and animal rights. But we weren't calling it animal rights yet in those days.

Rowe: What were you calling it?

Mason: It was just animal work or animal protection.

Rowe: And what were the areas—

Mason: Animal rights didn't emerge until Peter Singer's book in '75 [Animal Liberation].

Rowe: I understand. What were the issues that you were concerned with?

Mason: Hunting, trapping, endangered species. It was almost like environmental issues, the wildlife issues. We hadn't gotten into pets and spaying and neutering yet. We were just beginners at this. So what was on our mind the most were the environmental and wildlife issues.

I had read René Dubos' book, A God Within, which I think must have come out in 1970 or '71. It's all about an environmental ethic and a kind of a spirituality where we respect nature and feel ourselves a part of the natural world. It's a great book, if anybody hasn't read it. That stimulated me. And I wanted to become a vegetarian, but I just didn't have enough conviction yet in, say, '73 or '74. I wasn't quite there.

Rowe: What do you mean by conviction?

Mason: Well, I knew that I should, but I just didn't want to take the plunge. I had friends who were vegetarians. I was already going to demonstrations against—I know because there was a demonstration against a horse meat shop in Connecticut, and I went to the demonstration because I thought it was horrible. And there were vegetarians there, and they were saying, "Well, are you still eating meat?" I said, "Well, yes." And they said, "Well, you know, you shouldn't do that." I said, "That's different." [Laughter].

Rowe: What was your image of vegetarians at that point?

Mason: That they were extreme, that this was going too far, that there was no need to give up meat because—as I remember arguing with Peter Singer when I finally met him (I still wasn't a vegetarian yet)—well, domestic animals, that's what they're for. They were created to be meat. I remember making this argument at the time. Peter just shook his head. I remember it didn't take him too many more sentences to convince me that this was a totally irrational thought, that I shouldn't even use this anymore.

Rowe: I presume you weren't worried about being associated with vegetarians because they were fringe kind of people, because you were in many ways yourself a fringe person.

Mason: Yes. I was getting to know them. I knew them by name. Because I was involved with Friends of Animals, I was going to meetings and things in New York when they'd have anti-fur

René J. Dubos, A God Within (New York: Scribner, [1972]).

protests. So I was getting to know some of the characters in the animal movement as we knew it, and it would have been '72 and '73—Connie Salamone, Suki Leeds, who else? People who are probably gone now—Max Schnapp—people who were the activists in New York City. So I knew some of them. It would have been people like that who came to these demonstrations. So I knew Priscilla Feral, who was then Brockway, and some of the feminists at our NOW chapter. Working with them I did feminist work, started two men's rap groups in Westport, and at the same time I was working for Friends of Animals part-time, learning more about animal issues and still had my couple of toes and fingers into the family law circles of the feminist lawyers who were working on feminist issues and law. So all of this was going on at the same time.

Every now and then, one of these people, like in Priscilla's case, would have two of these concerns or maybe three concerns all at once. So it was exposure to people who were advanced and progressive in various ways. It encouraged me and confirmed my ideas. I wanted to become a vegetarian, but I just didn't take that step.

Rowe: Tell me, how did you meet Peter Singer? Was it when he came to New York to teach at New York University?

Mason: Yes. He would have been in New York, I guess, in '73 or '74.

Rowe: I think '73.

Mason: I think he was still writing, working on and writing, what became Animal Liberation.

Rowe: Did you see his article in the New York Review of Books?^a

Mason: No. I didn't subscribe to that. But since I was working for Alice, she had seen it and that became one of her projects for me.

Rowe: Alice?

Mason: Herrington. Now, by this time, Alice had already given me another assignment. I should say that right after I did the model state laws book, within months she had me working on factory farming, she called it then. So I was starting to research factory farming as early as probably 1973 or '74, because I think—[Tape interruption].

So '73 or '74, somewhere along in there, I was working for Alice, sort of part-time, starting my own practice, phasing myself out of legal services work. But the second project that she arranged for me was to work on factory farming. I remember one day when I was going in for my two or three days a week, she said, "You did a good job on that laws book. You're not a bad writer. I'm going to have you do something else. Nobody is working on this factory farming stuff. They're working on it in Britain. The English are onto this, but we haven't done

^a Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation," New York Review of Books, 5 April 1973, 17-21.

anything over here. Why don't you look into it? You're a farm boy." So she assigned me to look into factory farming, and I wrote a little pamphlet.⁵ I think it was a sixteen-page pamphlet and it had photos in it. We got some photos from some agribusiness sources at the time that showed chickens in cages and sows in crates and veal calves in crates and these things. So I did research that.

Rowe: At that time, the agribusiness was not afraid of showing you the material because they were sending you material. Was there an unease or was it easy to get that material at that time?

Mason: I was able to get things at libraries and I spun off from the materials that we had gotten from England. Ruth Harrison had written Animal Machines, which came out in the 60s.⁶ So we took a lot of that material and just Americanized it. I think that pamphlet came out in May 1976.

Rowe: When you say Americanized it, you mean made it refer to American factories?

Mason: Well, we tried to find some American figures. Like we knew that they were raising chickens in basically the same systems, but we didn't have the numbers for America. So we just got the American numbers of how many chickens in the United States are in battery cages and that sort of thing.

Rowe: So this did not entail you going to these places?

Mason: Not yet. We didn't have the budget for that. This was a quick job to be done in a few months. One of the things I did in order to get this material was to subscribe to a lot of farming magazines, and that was my introduction. This is what put me on the road to vegetarianism, because here I am a farm boy encountering now—the shock of my life was to realize what had happened to farming since I had done it some—what would be now fifteen years earlier. Now I'm in my thirties; I'm thirty-two, thirty-three years old. I'm looking at how farming has changed so radically from what I remember. So it shocked me and it motivated me to look further.

And then about that time, I suppose '74, Peter Singer comes to town, and I am working on this pamphlet. Alice says, "You've got to meet this guy." She had read his essay in the New York Review of Books. She said, "You know, you're perfect. You've got to talk to this guy. You know about factory farming. He's writing about it. He's teaching a course down here. I'll get you together." So she invited him to lunch, and we all went to lunch and talked together.

He found out I was a lawyer and he asked me if I would do a couple of sessions with his course. I think I did two sessions on law and animals. And Henry Spira, of course, was part of the class, and a woman named Patty, Patricia Forkan, who is now executive vice president of the

⁵ Factory Farming, May 1976 (copy attached).

⁶ Ruth Harrison, Animal Machines: The New Factory Farming Industry (London: Vincent Stuart, 1964).

Humane Society of the United States [HSUS], and all of the other usual suspects in what was then the New York radical center, what would be called in a few years the animal rights group in the city. So I got to know yet another round of activists and influences.

Rowe: What was your impression of his course? Was his philosophy perhaps similar or dissimilar to your feelings?

Mason: It was perfect. I was ripe for it. And I spent some time with Peter because we became friends. He wanted me to help him not only do the sessions in his course, but since I was an American and had a car and lived in suburbia and he was researching this book, he asked me if I'd help him find some factory farms that were reasonably accessible. So we prowled around New York State and Connecticut and went to the factory farms where he took the pictures that went into Animal Liberation, pictures of the veal calves and some of the pictures—I guess would have been the first pictures taken of the insides of factory farms—for Animal Liberation. And he properly thanked me for that and acknowledged that in the book.

But that was—you can imagine, that association—I had already studied factory farming. I had another dose of it with Peter. For the first time in my life I actually went into factory farms. I remember the very first one we went into was a battery egg layer system in New York State. We were both just blown away. I mean, you talk about emotional shock. We walked in that place and it was just like—nothing can prepare you for such a squalid room. I'm going to say room—I mean something the size of an aircraft hangar or three high school gymnasiums—full of screaming chickens. The smell and the sound and the flies and just the whole—oh, my God, the whole sensory overload of it. Even if there weren't animal suffering involved, just the sight, smell, sound, aesthetics of it would knock you over. But it was also the biggest block of suffering I had ever seen in my life.

Rowe: What for you was the particular disconnect between seeing that and remembering your life on the farm? Was there one overriding sensation that made you think, gosh, how things have changed?

Mason: Well, if there was it wasn't something I could verbalize then or now. It was just total shock. It was just like being exposed to battle or something. It's something you can't put into words. It's an emotional upheaval. It's an emotional revolution of something. It's a very great change within you that I can't articulate. It's a great quantum shift in consciousness of some kind.

Rowe: Was there anger or amazement?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: There were all those emotions. But you weren't numbed by what you saw?

Mason: No, blown away. And don't forget that I'm riding in a car, in a Volkswagen beetle, a white 1968 Volkswagen beetle—Linda's and my car—with Peter Singer, hour after hour after hour talking about this stuff. And riding around with him—basically, he was unloading all the ideas in Animal Liberation on me, even though all of it hadn't been written yet. And without trying to argue with me or badger me, all his give and take led me to think about a vegetarian way of life and giving up meat because it was absolutely unnecessary and bad for me and bad for animals. But I didn't become a vegetarian right then in that car ride. I still agonized over it. I gave up red meat—like so many. I gave up beef and pork. It was a gradual approach; I didn't do it cold turkey.

Rowe: What were your particular worries?

Mason: The nutrition thing.

Rowe: By which you mean getting enough protein.

Mason: The need for meat, right. All the lies and the denials of the culture just wouldn't leave me immediately. I somehow thought there was still—I clung, as many meat-eaters do, to the idea that, well, there's something here you've got to have. So I gave up the red meat. Again, the environmental concerns were coming in here. I thought beef, you know, that's the worst. Red meat is terrible. It's inefficient. So I was using essentially environmentalist—

Rowe: Had you read Frances Moore Lappé's book, Diet for a Small Planet?⁷

Mason: I think I had, yes. Joyce Lambert, Alice's assistant, put me on that. It was 1971, wasn't it? She said, "Oh, you've got to read Diet for a Small Planet." That was a big influence, that you just don't need meat. That's what clicked. After talking to Peter and reading that book, I realized that you just absolutely do not need anything that's in meat period. There's just no excuse. It's strictly not necessary.

But what really brought it on—the total change to become totally vegetarian and not just a partial meat-eater—was my relationship with Priscilla Feral, who was then a divorcée and my friend at NOW, and we became a couple. We decided—you know, we were practically living together—and we decided to become vegetarians together. She had gotten more conscious in her work with feminist groups. She was president of the NOW chapter and getting more and more involved in animal rights. I think she started working for Friends of Animals part-time, too, along in there in her spare time. So we were both working there and getting more conscious and more committed. The more you do that work, the more you learn about what's going on, the more out of denial you become, and more aware of the cruelties and the details of the exploitation. The load of all that information became so overwhelming that I just could not in

⁷ Frances Moore Lappé, Diet for a Small Planet (New York: [Ballantine Books, 1971]).

any kind of mood could I justify eating meat, killing animals, and being involved in it any way. So we said, “Let’s become vegetarians together,” and we did.

Rowe: Let me just go back to the factory farms that you visited in upstate New York and elsewhere. What was their attitude towards you at that time?

Mason: Very casual. Didn’t seem to have any suspicion or hostility whatsoever. It was almost —

Rowe: Were they proud of their factories?

Mason: Almost a pride. You see, when Peter and I went out—it would have been ‘74 probably or whatever, just before Animal Liberation—we went to only a few. I think we went to one veal farm, one battery egg farm, and maybe one or two other places. I don’t remember. It was much later when we did Animal Factories that I did the extensive trip, which took months and months and ten thousand miles and went to dozens, maybe thirty, factory farms. But that would have been in the latter part of the 70s, ‘77 or ‘78.

Rowe: But at this point they were completely accepting of anybody coming to their establishment.

Mason: It was innocent. There was no protest yet. They had no clue that they were doing anything wrong or that anybody thought they were doing anything wrong. We were just two curious guys, that’s all.

Rowe: Did you tell them that you were a farm boy?

Mason: I don’t recall exactly how we posed ourselves to them then, except maybe—I’m only guessing. I don’t recall it clearly. I think we might have said something that we’re interested in the developments in farming. Peter might have said something about writing a book about the new farming, but I don’t remember on that first go round exactly how we positioned ourselves.

Although I do remember clearly how I did it in the second go round, which was the bigger go round in ‘77, ‘78. Then I used my farm boy—I used my “hickness,” my country boy accent and all that to the hilt, as well as using their language. I realized that they might be a little defensive about two guys coming in and photographing everything and being so nosy about everything. I was beginning to feel like an infiltrator, like, “God, what if they discover me?” So I used the approach: “Well, I’m writing a book about high-tech agriculture, the kind of agricultural systems that you have, raising your pigs or chickens or whatever, and I want to see them and see how they work.” And that was okay then.

Rowe: Now, with the publication of Animal Liberation in 1975, the research for which you had been involved, the animal rights movement now had a philosophy alongside calls for liberation.

Firstly, is that your understanding of the situation, and, number two, do you feel that the nature of activism at that point changed, not only within your circle but around the country as a whole? Was there a reconfiguring of the movement away from welfarist issues—that might have been involved in the early part of the 1970s—to a more rights-oriented, more sophisticated approach?

Mason: Yes, but it didn't happen as soon after the publication of Animal Liberation as people think now. It wasn't instant. I think it took about five years. I think it wasn't until almost 1980 that it began to—that the repercussions of the book and the waves of repercussions and the repercussions that followed the repercussions, that there was a sense of a movement, animal liberation, animal rights. Other books came out. Discussions came out. New kinds of activism came out. I think it took it several years after Peter's book came out. It didn't set in. It didn't gel right at that point. It took a few years.

Rowe: What was happening though at the time of publication? What were the key issues you were working on in the mid-1970s? Were you continuing to do more work on factory farming?

Mason: Fur. Fur protests. I remember a famous fur protest, one of the biggest that we had, one of the biggest early protests. And Peter Singer was there; he spoke. It was when he was still in New York. And Friends of Animals and—primarily, I think, Friends of Animals organized it. I think we had—everybody was blown away at how many people we assembled in front of the Waldorf-Astoria. It was like two hundred people turned out, and that was unheard of in New York. As far as I remember, the biggest demonstrations didn't even draw a hundred people yet. And there just weren't many. There wasn't much street protest going on. So it was that issue. And Peter was there and started to draw a crowd. I guess he was talking at—he was doing his course at New York and he knew quite a few people from that, and there were quite a few groups based in New York—Society for Animal Rights, Friends of Animals, Cleveland Amory's Fund for Animals, what was the antivivisection group, Elinor Seiling's group, United Action for Animals. So there was quite a constellation of groups headquartered in New York with their supporters. So we started drawing people out for these protests, and I know fur was a big one.

Rowe: Did you know Peter Singer at that time?

Mason: Yes. He used to go to meetings. As I say, working with Friends of Animals, Alice used me more and more, even though I was a part-time employees, as a mouthpiece as a lawyer. There were a series of meetings going on, once a month I think, at the World Trade Center of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on Animals. It was kind of a political thing. Representatives from all the groups were supposed to go there once a month and talk to Louis Lefkowitz, the Attorney General for the state of New York, and his aides about animal issues. Gretchen Wyler was a part of that, Cleveland Amory was a part of that, Helen Jones, head of the Society for Animal Rights. A lot of the leaders of the groups then went to that thing, and that's how I got to know some of them.

Then, of course, when they had events, when they had conferences or get-togethers, then I would be invited. I think it was along then I probably started going to the Argus Archives film shows that Dallas Pratt organized. So little by little I was getting to know more people in the animal movement, and it was becoming known as the animal rights or animal liberation movement by the end of the 70s. And there were more functions to go to, and it was like—they kept dividing and dividing like an amoeba—more opportunities to meet people, more demonstrations to go to, more groups to get to know—Cleveland Amory here. So I had more contacts and more connections, and it was just exploding and taking over my life.

Rowe: Now, it sounds like an exciting time period. What was the mood like, what was the temper of the protests in those early years?

Mason: They were getting exciting, but they still didn't have a sense of the scope of the movement. And that didn't come until about 1977. I think that was a big breakthrough for me when I went to the famous meeting at Cambridge in England. Alice by this time had worked with me for five or six years or whatever. She said, in effect—I had become a vice president of Friends of Animals by that time, and she had me working on all kinds of projects. She said, “You know, I'm going to give you a little reward now because you've been such a good boy and done this and that. I'm going to send you to England to this wonderful conference.” And that's the way Alice would do things. She'd just call you in and sit you down. She'd be chain-smoking Pall Mall cigarettes and she'd say, “You're going to do this now.” So she'd say, “You're going to go to England. You're going to go to this conference.”

That's where I met Tom and Nancy Regan, Michael Fox. Helen Jones was there. There were quite a few people from the American movement there. But that session—and I met Kim Stallwood at this thing. I met Ronnie Lee of the ALF [Animal Liberation Front] and the hunt saboteurs and all those wonderful English activists who had been a movement really for ten years by that time. I think it really begins with the ALF and the Band of Mercy and the hunt sabs and all that had begun in the 60s in England. So they were quite a bit ahead of us, so they had a bit more sophisticated activism—and especially the in-your-face protesting, radical protesting activism, getting away from the staid old do-nothing groups. They were already ahead of us there.

So when I went to that session at Cambridge—it was like three days or something, two or three days—meeting with these people, drinking beer with Ronnie Lee and the hunt sabs and—what is it?—the Lion's—what's the famous pub there? The Lion's Head or something like that.

Rowe: The Blue Boar?

Mason: One of those.

Rowe: This was the session—this was the place where they served meat on the meal. Is that right, or was it the conference at Oxford that did that?

Mason: I think they were still serving meat, yes. And there was quite a stink about that, and quite a few of the speakers called them on that. But that was a big, big change for me because that's when I realized we had an international movement. Whatever excitement there was from these street protests in New York—which weren't very many and they were few and far between, but they were getting a little more numbers, a little more exciting. Singer's book was getting out in '75, '76. But '77 when I went to that meeting over there, it was very clear that something international was happening here. I met Kim Stallwood and a bunch of other people.

The main thing that happened in the wake of that meeting was this furious correspondence with Kim. We used to write each other these three- and four-page letters. We didn't have computers yet in those days. We didn't have email. We were still writing letters on typewriters and sending paper in the mail. And we write these—

Rowe: Okay, I'm going to turn over the tape now and we'll begin side two.

[End Tape 2, Side A; Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Rowe: Okay, Jim, I'm really interested in the connections with the other animal movements. We've made clear that you were connected to the feminist movement and to a degree the civil rights movement. I'm very interested to know your understanding and feelings about the relationship between the animal welfare groups and the vegetarian movement such as it was in the early 70s—and the pure food movement, the back-to-the-land movement, as well as the environmental movement—and your understanding of how it was in the United States generally and how it intersected with people that you knew and worked with in the animal rights movement and in your own personal life. So let's start first with the vegetarian, back-to-the-land, pure food concerns. Where did these fit in? What was your understanding or awareness of those particular movements?

Mason: You know, I can't say that I knew much about them in their national manifestations, but I did go to vegetarian conferences very early. By the time I was becoming a vegetarian, I was doing this work on factory farming already. I was getting to know people around the area, and I would be invited to speak at the vegetarian get-together or whatever it was called then. There would be various little gatherings, always in the summer somewhere, some place in upstate New York.

Rowe: Was this a national gathering or was it just a local gathering?

Mason: Well, they would have been groups with national names, but they were pretty much east coast. They weren't very big then. And Alex Herschaft, who now has FARM [Farm Animal Reform Movement] in Washington, had an early one of these groups called Vegetarian Information Services, I think it was. So there was his, there was probably the National

Vegetarian Society or various names, the American Vegan Society. Every summer there would be maybe two or three or four of these things somewhere.

Rowe: And what was the average attendance of these?

Mason: Dozens. Anywhere from one dozen to three dozen. But I did see some people at some of those that are still active today, like the Schlueter sisters, Sherry and Shelley Schlueter. And Sherry, you know, is a famous law enforcement officer in Florida who's written all this about the unity of violence and abuse and cruelty. She's created a special unit in the police department in Broward County that deals with battered women, battered children, and cruelty to animals. She's trained the police force to look at all of these as manifestations of violence and cruelty. So she was there early on. Alex Herschaft, of course, and, of course, a lot of the people I knew from the New York scene would go to these things. But I remember those being small and very sectarian.

Rowe: Was there an awareness of the animal rights then? I presume people weren't just concerned with protein intake or food combination.

Mason: Right. It was. It was pretty much the ethical vegetarians. It wasn't just the health and fitness types that came in later. These were pretty pure ethical vegetarians that were against it because of the killing of animals—mostly, although we did have health conscious speakers that would come, yoga people and so forth. But that struck me as a kind of a small and insular and sectarian kind of group that didn't have much political vision, didn't have any kind of social marketing strategies. They were just content to go off every summer and have their little get-togethers and not much more.

I really don't know much about the back-to-the-land movement as a movement. I mean, at that point I'm living in suburbia and really was not in touch with a lot of that directly. I didn't have a lot of personal friends that were involved in that.

Rowe: The reason why I ask is that many people trace the emergence of vegetarianism to the impact of Helen and Scott Neering and various other people involved in the back-to-the-land movement, which called for caring for the soil and the environmental aspects of living a vegetarian life.

Mason: I would say they were one influence. There were a lot of influences on vegetarianism. I think that was a big influence. That was one sect of the sectarianism in it. Then later, the waves that came in because of the health—I think that the biggest influx people into vegetarianism would have come by the late 70s and the 80s.

Rowe: But you would say at that particular moment—and this is interesting because it goes against the ideas that it was health first and then animal welfare—that at an early stage, in the early to mid-1970s, ethical vegetarianism was the motivating force for people.

Mason: The ones I knew. It was the ones I knew. Jay Dinshah had the American Vegan Society. The people who were doing these vegetarian events, like Alex Herschaft and others—well, Alex, I think, would say that his first wasn't so much the killing of animals [but] it was something else. But it really quickly became—the killing of animals became the most forceful part of the reason to be a vegetarian. A lot of people might have come to it for other reasons, but that seemed to be the central reason for the people that I was hanging out with. It would have been in the mid-70s at these events.

Rowe: And what about the environmental movement? What was your connection with that movement? Did you find yourself more and more becoming involved in the kind of urban issues as well as the factory farming issue?

Mason: Not directly, not directly involved, mostly through the media and from what I was reading in the papers and hearing on television—like I say, the controversy over endangered species. I was very sympathetic to those kind of issues. They were very popular. Just about everybody was, you know. I probably got some magazines then that were—I don't remember which ones they were. The environmental movement, as I knew it then, just wasn't as big a part of my life and the books I read.

I think the biggest influence on my environmentalist thinking was those books by René Dubos. I think he wrote several. The one that really made a couple of clicks in the shifting of my consciousness was *A God Within*. I think that was the connection that I had. I didn't belong to many environmental groups, like the Sierra Club. I wasn't a member of those activist groups. I didn't go to environmentalist demonstrations. I guess I was getting it second-hand through the media and through the books.

Rowe: The animal rights movement emerged from a predominantly 19th century urban movement concerned with attempts to ameliorate child welfare. The environmental movement, in America, grew from the Aldo Leopold, John Muir⁸ wilderness-oriented, hunting-associated organizations in the United States. Were you aware of the disconnect? Did you have a consciousness of that, because that is part of your awareness of the natural order?

Mason: Yes. There was no synergy between them. They were separate camps, and they are still. They're totally different approaches, I think. That's probably the reason why they're still apart, because the approach is so different.

After I became more feminist conscious, I realized that the Gods, the godfathers, of the environmental movement are mostly male. It's a male approach. It's a pro-hunting, "let's get out there and commune with nature" male sort of approach, to me; whereas I think that the other

⁸ Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), American forester and conservationist, co-founder of the Wilderness Society, considered the father of wildlife ecology; John Muir (1838-1914), Scottish-born American naturalist considered the father of the modern environmental movement.

approach—look, the animal movement is eighty percent female. I mean, it's getting a little more gender diversity now, but gosh, in those days it was almost entirely women. I don't want to oversimplify this as strictly a gender thing, but it does strike me that there's the male approach to nature problem in one way in what the environmental movement has been, and it seems like women tend to approach it—probably getting to the same common ground today, but it seems like women come at it from a different direction. I see a lot more female involvement in the animal concern—more emotional concern and emphasis on compassion and justice for animals coming from women than from men.

Rowe: Let's get down to how a demonstration felt like in the mid-1970s. What was it like to stand on the street? I'd like to know not only what people around you were saying but what your fellow demonstrators were saying. What was it like to be a demonstrator for animal rights in the mid-1970s?

Mason: It felt—you felt crazy, and everyone going by felt you were crazy, for the most part, because there wasn't much protesting in the street. It wasn't done yet much. We were pretty much on two issues—the fur issue and hunting. I remember Luke Dommer, who had CASH, Committee to Abolish Sport Hunting. He had some rallies and protests in New York City. Usually at these things the same people would show up, quite a few dozen people. We'd have signs condemning hunting.

I remember one of the big things we did with Friends of Animals was a big protest at the Great Swamp in New Jersey where, for the first time in years, the powers that be, the feds over there, decided that they had to kill some deer because they were getting too numerous. This was covered in the New York Times and I remember having to appear in front of TV cameras and reporters for the first time. We were over there protesting to stop this hunt. We brought a suit in federal court. We did all this. And there was quite a number of people over there; I think we got a hundred more or maybe two hundred people at that protest. They came from New York and New Jersey. So we were considered radical crazies, I suppose.

Rowe: Were the people who came to the protest so relieved to find that somebody was expressing their concern? What did they say to you?

Mason: There was a feeling that something was happening, you know, because I remember the Great Swamp protest was right around the time Singer was here. I don't remember if he was still in this country or had just been in this country. But things were emerging. There was a sense that people were meeting each other and knowing—you had a sense that you weren't alone, that even though it was New York-based at the time that there were more people turning out for these things. There was more energy and more enthusiasm. Even though they were calling us crazy and what have you, it was confirming and reinforcing to know that there were many others like you. I got more comfortable with the protests and got more confident in going out there and sounding off and being in public protesting things, even though you knew that people going by thought you were nuts.

We protested furs in front of the Waldorf-Astoria! And one of the craziest protests we had was protesting the ASPCA at a fund-raiser in New York at some fancy restaurant. They actually had a fur fashion show event for the entertainment for this fund-raiser. And all these rich people were coming up in limousines, and the women were wearing fur coats. There was a handful of us out there. I don't think there was more than ten of us out there protesting this event. And actually we got quite a bit of sympathy from the passers-by on that one because they could see it. It was like—even a working class passerby could look at this and say, “Hey, you guys are right. They're in there preventing cruelty to animals and they're wearing fur coats and they're selling fur coats? This is crazy.”

One guy, I remember, came by and he stopped to talk to us. Actually, he was a young black guy. He had on a leather jacket with a fur collar on it. He stopped and talked to us for a minute or two and asked us what it was all about. We explained it to him, and he took his jacket off and ripped the collar off the thing. He says, “Well, I know it's leather, but I'm cold and I've got to wear this.” We said words to the effect, “Well, you've done enough. You've gotten that much consciousness and you're taking a step in the right direction.”

Rowe: Now, what's interesting to me is how things have changed and have not changed. What was the racial and sexual demographic and the age of the average protester who came to the protests in the mid-1970s.

Mason: Well, I was in my thirties, and everybody seemed to be like within a decade or so of my age, either twenty-somethings or thirty-somethings—all white, mostly female, some guys. I remember they loved it at the time that we had guy speakers. When I got more active—

Rowe: They being?

Mason: The women who had run these—started these groups and ran these groups. Like Alice started Friends of Animals, Helen started the Society for Animal Rights, Elinor started UAA. All the groups, big and small, were started by women. I was also involved in animal groups in the county where I lived in Connecticut and the local groups there—Betty Long, Joan Mutcher—they had little animal protest groups. Some of them were doing dog and cat rescue and things like that and protesting hunting. I remember at the time they were really like courting me, like really working me to appear for these.

Rowe: Because you had—

Mason: A male voice.

Rowe: Because you added credibility because you were a man.

Mason: Yes. I remember Joan giving me that argument so many times. She said, “You’ve got to do these radio shows because the audiences and these radio people are sick and tired of women’s voices. All they ever hear are women going in there protesting, they think, and they think it’s just crazy women that want to ban fur coats and hunting. So we want them to hear male voices,” because we were so rare at the time. So I got roped into a lot of these interviews.

Rowe: As a good feminist and NOW supporter, what did you feel about that?

Mason: [Laughter]. I agreed with them at the time because there were very few men speaking out about this. It was considered like—there were few guys at all involved in the movement, and very few of them really wanted to speak out very much. They wanted to work in the background. It took—like in the next decade when they began to jump in for the leadership positions and the jobs and the salaries. You’d get these situations where you’d go to a conference and there’d be an audience almost entirely of women and the speakers’ platform would be almost entirely men. [Laughter]. A sexist situation.

Rowe: But in those days it was considered to be an unmasculine thing, to get involved with animals rights?

Mason: Yes. I remember they’d set up these debates. I remember one time we set up a debate over hunting because upstate Connecticut somewhere they were having a hunt. The newspapers or the radio station would set these things up. They’d say, “We’d like to have a debate.” They’d pit me and some other animal person against a couple of hunters and somebody from the Fish and Game Department. We’d go up there, and there’d be two of us and two of them and there’d be a crowd. But they were always trying to get me to speak because I was a lawyer, and it’s a little easier for a lawyer to do those kind of things where you have to think on your feet and you have to take the heat. A lot of people are scared to take on an assignment like that because of the—I mean, you’re really like a target. But having appeared in court and having appeared in front of judges and fought lawyers in open court in front of a packed room full of people, it was like old hat to me. It didn’t bother me that much. I had thick skin by then.

Rowe: By this time were you earning a living as an animal rights activist?

Mason: I was doing both. I was trying to start a practice working out of my house in Westport.

Rowe: A practice in—

Mason: Law practice. It was family law primarily, which means bread and butter is divorces. At the same time, I was working part-time for Alice—sometimes two days a week, sometimes three days a week, kind of dividing my time between law practice and animal work for pay. She paid me. Then it got to the point—probably sometime after the mid-70s, probably in the late 70s—when she persuaded me that she needed me more. She said, “I can pay you enough to support

you.” She said, “Your law practice—you’ll have to decide what you want to do with that. But I think I can pay you enough.”

And I was getting so involved in animal work. By then Peter and I, at the instigation of Alice, had already started talking about doing Animal Factories. He left the States for Australia—it would have been ‘75, I think, when Animal Liberation came out. So by ‘75, ‘76, he was back in Australia and we were writing to each other. It was out of that that we hatched up the idea to do Animal Factories. So then I was again invested deeply in hog magazines, egg magazines, chicken magazines, studying factory farming and working more full-time for Alice Herrington. She supported the work on the book. She said, “It’s animal work. I’m paying you to work for me, but you work on the book too, and that’s fine.”

Rowe: You indicated in your first interview that you had really wanted to give up your law practice as well.

Mason: Yes. It was like I didn’t have time for it anymore. By the late 70s—well, what was a real turning point was that Cambridge conference again. I didn’t know what to do until I went to England to that conference and I met all these people and I realized the magnitude of what I had fallen into, stumbled into—this work that was bigger than Friends of Animals. It was bigger than a New York protest scene in front of the Waldorf. It was bigger than a vegetarian sectarian summer party thing upstate. It was a big deal, and I just met all these people. When I came back, it just grew on me and grew on me and grew on me. And I was corresponding with several of them, but Kim Stallwood was the main one. We wrote these real political letters to each other back and forth. By this time, I had had several years of political consciousness-raising through the legal services work, through the feminist work, and all of that, and I was really pretty politically—I guess I would have to say I was very radical, progressive political activist at this point.

Rowe: Let me just focus what for you you mean by bigger, that this was bigger than the demonstrations. What was the bigger issue you felt?

Mason: The size and scope of the movement.

Rowe: The size and scope of the international movement.

Mason: The international movement. This is when it dawned on me that, “My God, this is international. We have activists that are putting their asses on the line in Europe, England and European countries, and now in the States, and it’s just growing by leaps and bounds.” Singer’s book by then had been out two or three years, and word was getting around fast. These were really the formative years, the infancy of the animal rights liberation movement—’77, ‘78. And this conference just digested and distilled and fermented all of that stuff for me.

Rowe: How did you feel—

Mason: I came home highly charged. I didn't want to practice law anymore. I actually gave my law practice to a guy in the same week I met him—Doug Miller, my buddy. I was looking for a way to get out of my commitments in court to be away for a week or whatever to go to England, and I needed somebody to take care of my office because I was a one-man show. So I asked some lawyers friends, "Do you know anybody that's looking for a job? Some lawyer that doesn't have a job yet?" They said, "Yes, sure, there's this guy. You've got to call this guy." It turned out that he lived right across the street from my office. Odd thing, he was a graduate of Yale Divinity School who went to law school. The guy was a reverend in the church, an ordained minister, who went to law school and became a lawyer. He had just gotten his admission to the bar. I called him up and talked to him. I said, "Why don't you come over? I've got to get out of town for a week and you might want to work with me in my practice," whatever, and talked about it. I was so glad to find somebody who wanted to do that that I told him—in effect I told him, I said, "You can have it. I'm leaving." [Laughter].

Rowe: So when you say bigger, you meant that it was just something that you could really work within and find what you wanted to do, or you wanted to somehow coordinate the international activities?

Mason: No, I just meant that—I meant that it was bigger geographically and number-wise. I was used to working in New York City, and I thought—for a few years there I thought, "Well, this is a bunch of crazy New Yorkers, a bunch of vegetarians. This can't be happening in Iowa and this can't be happening all over the United States," and had no idea that it was happening in the rest of the world. Just very local, I thought. It was this New York/Connecticut thing. Then when I went to this conference I realized that it was really international.

Over there, of course, my eyes went like this because—over there I met Ronnie Lee and the ALF, the people who had been liberating animals and the hunt sabs, and they had been doing this, what, by then for ten or fifteen years.

Rowe: I would like to go back to the radicalization through direct action. That's what you were talking with Kim Stallwood about.

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: Was that really changing the way that you felt that the movement had to go?

Mason: Well, it was already going that way, and we were just feeling that we were a part of it. It was like we didn't force it on them. I guess the only thing I think I probably did contribute out of that meeting with Stallwood and that consciousness shifting experience at Cambridge was a sense of a movement that I knew that the Americans didn't have yet. I thought that I was probably unique in that respect, that I was the only one of the bunch who had had this experience, had been abroad, had seen the size of it. Well, Tom Regan was there. He had it too.

Of course, Helen Jones was there. But I wasn't really in constant touch with Tom at the time; I just met him there. I was more in touch with Peter Singer.

But what occurred to me was that there was a movement, and I was just finding out about it. Stallwood was just finding out about it. Yet I felt that the American people didn't have a sense of it yet. They were still like I was before I went over there. They still just thought there was just a bunch of local people. I felt that had to be one of my missions, along with working on factory farming and producing the book, because by '77 I was already committed to writing Animal Factories. I had already written part of it. I had already been to some factory farms. It was already a deal with Peter. We were producing a book. We didn't have the contract yet, but we were moving toward a proposal.

Anyway, the other main thing on my mind was this international movement—animal rights as an international movement. And that's really why I started Agenda, was to express myself and to convey this idea that, hey, there's a goddamned movement out here. This thing is a movement.

Rowe: Okay. Let's go back to your family and people you grew up with in the Ozarks. First of all, were you still in contact with your friends and your family, and what was their response to your emerging, one, political consciousness, two, animal rights consciousness?

Mason: They really didn't know much about it because of the geography. I didn't write them long letters telling them about all of the things I was involved in, my feminist meetings and stuff. I sensed that—my family is pretty conservative, not out of any ideology. My father wasn't a right-winger. He wasn't a Rush Limbaugh fan or anything like that. He was just conservative because that was the prevailing view in the community. He was sort of lazily conservative. The racism that they carried wasn't deliberate or calculated racism; it was just the inertia of where they were brought up.

As I was getting radicalized and politicized, I realized that a lot of this just wouldn't be enjoyed by them. And I didn't hide it from them; on the other hand, I didn't try to sell it to them. But I did go home from time to time telling them about things I was involved in. They knew something about legal services and what that was like and that my clients were not rich people but they were poor people. They thought it was a good thing, but at the same time they thought I was probably wasting my life, that I should have been doing more.

Rowe: Had they ever got over the fact that you didn't become a doctor?

Mason: They were still wondering what was happening to me. They were relieved and elated again when I got through law school and I got a job back east. They thought, "Oh, he's going to be something after all." But then I threw away my law practice and became this activist and they thought, "Oh, God, here he goes again. Is he ever going to grow up?" I'm sure they thought

that, because I didn't have that good old-fashioned middle class ambition to have a wife and kids and a house in the suburbs. I almost got close, but—

Rowe: You had a wife and you had a house in the suburbs.

Mason: Yes, yes. I got close, and then I threw it away.

Rowe: What about your brothers?

Mason: My brother—my eldest brother was in the air force in Vietnam, bombing villages, I suppose, during a lot of the time that I was—well, actually, I was in law school when that was going on. All of that would have been over by the 70s.

Rowe: And you had a younger brother.

Mason: Middle brother.

Rowe: Your middle brother. You were the youngest.

Mason: He was always working in aerospace. When all of this was going on, he was working on the Apollo mission sending a man to the moon and that stuff. They were both in very good old patriotic defense, aerospace, defense-related work.

Rowe: So had you drifted apart by that time? Did you not really converse about each others' lives at all?

Mason: Not much. I just—again, like I say, I don't think I really tried to hide all of this from them. I really sensed that they just probably wouldn't appreciate it, it wouldn't mean anything to them. I didn't go home telling them all these things I was involved in, all these protests I was going to. I just felt like they wouldn't understand any of it, probably wouldn't want to hear it.

Rowe: When you went home, what did you eat?

Mason: What did I eat? [Laughter]. Well, that was kind of a shock at first. They didn't know how to deal with the vegetarian thing. My mother was all right with it. I remember her in the early years when they were still coping with the fact that I was coming home a vegetarian. I think my dad and the rest of them just kind of smirked at it, thinking, "Oh, God, they guy's so crazy he'll do anything, but it will wear off." They just kind of shrugged it away like it wouldn't last. My mom told me that it was no problem. She said, "You know, I'd probably be a vegetarian myself if it wasn't for your dad." She was very good about it. She actually—

Rowe: What was your reaction when she said that to you?

Mason: I sensed that she, out of all the members of my family, probably would have been the one that would have been animal conscious if she'd had freedom as a woman—if she hadn't been an “owned” woman, if she could have had a life of her own. If she hadn't been brought up a country girl who devoted her life to serving my father, she probably would have been able to make decisions on her own. She might have made these—she seemed to always have the sensibility about animals. She was a great one to send me clippings of things. Every time I'd get a letter from her it'd be full of clippings about animal related things.

Rowe: This was when you were—

Mason: Living back east. She knew I was involved in animal work.

Rowe: So this was when you were in your late twenties and early thirties.

Mason: Yes. They got really proud of me when Animal Factories came out because I was the first one in the family ever to publish a book with a major publisher. They weren't so interested in or nervous about what it was about, it was the fact that I had published a book, you know. And they displayed prominently. I'll never forget my father had three books on the TV stand—that was the Bible, a book on steak, and my Animal Factories. I thought, “Well, that's quite a collection.” [Laughter].

Rowe: Did he feel in some ways some sympathy to this, because the way that he had farmed had been overridden by the very types of agribusiness and animal agriculture that you had talked about in the book?

Mason: I think he might have been, but my father was not a very intellectual guy. He was not one to sit down and discuss deep concepts and things like this. My mother was much more likely to talk about the content of the book with me than he was. He admired it, he was proud of me, and he displayed the book, but he never sat down and said, “You know, I've thought about that.” Just like what you said. He never—

Rowe: Did your mother talk about the contents of the book?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: And what did she say about them?

Mason: She said that she was shocked, that she had never—we didn't have factory farming back then in our area. So it was hard to believe.

Rowe: Now, it's interesting because you have said in your first interview that your mother hadn't said anything when you had been extremely distressed by the killing when you were five and ten or twelve. Neither she nor the other women in the family to whom you had been sent

because you weren't male enough to take it—hadn't said anything about it then. Yet you now say that she was perhaps more sensitive and that she herself said that if it hadn't been for your father she may have been a vegetarian herself.

Mason: I think that those early experiences were so episodic and so brief. In a couple of cases she didn't even know about them, for example when I reacted to the animal caught in the trap. Remember, I didn't even want to tell them. I was embarrassed. I felt like they'll think that I'm a "sissy" or that kind of thing. Then later I didn't get sent back to the house. I cried, and the men took me on over to the fence and I worked the calves and didn't go back to the house, and I don't think they ever told the women. I don't know if my mother and grandmother even knew, except for a couple of episodes, how sensitive I was, because some of them—in fact, the older I got the more I hid it from them. Like when I shot the fox and felt terrible, I didn't tell them about it. I didn't tell them about it for years. [Tape interruption].

Rowe: All right. We turned the tape off briefly then and here we are continuing with the issue of Jim Mason's mother's sensitivity in regard to animal issues.

Mason: The early incidents were just childhood aberrations, and my mother wasn't aware of all of them anyway because some of them I hid from her. But by the time I had written and published a book and I was coming home a vegetarian, it was just a lot more solidity there and the maturity and more conviction. So then she had to take notice and she had to have a position on it. It was like, "This guy is serious now." Then she expressed some mild-to-medium sympathy with it in a way that really an oppressed woman—as my mother was, like a not-liberated woman who wasn't supposed to speak up about things of importance to men at all. She'd tell me in her quiet way that she probably would have been a vegetarian herself.

Rowe: You were aware of your mother's status because of the feminist movement.

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: Was she at all aware of the women's movement?

Mason: Somewhat. But the way it was filtered down to them through the many layers and filters of the mass media in this country, you can imagine what came through to them—the crazy, bra-burning lesbians. I remember once, in my enthusiasm in those early days I wrote a letter to one of my aunts and I used "Ms." I was trying to be so politically correct, and that was not the thing to do. She was not pleased. I heard about that for about another fifteen years.

Rowe: She was Miss or Mrs.

Mason: She was a widow. She was a Mrs. Mrs. Oral McCubbin. She didn't even use her own name. So I wrote to her "Ms." Boy, was she pissed at me, as was everyone else in the family. This is not something you did in 1977 or '78 or whatever it was. My aunt Wilma.

Rowe: Okay. You are working on Animal Factories.

Mason: I had just been to the conference, met Kim Stallwood, getting a sense of the international movement. Animal Factories was in the works.

Rowe: Okay. This is 1978, '79.

Mason: The conference was '77, and '78 I was—yes. Those two years. In '77 and '78 I made the research trips to factory farms and wrote Animal Factories.

Rowe: And you began Animals' Agenda.

Mason: Right. Well, it was a one-year—you know how book publishing is. You hand in the manuscript and then you wait a year or more for the goddamned publisher to finish the thing and get it in book form. I mean, it's agonizing. So I handed in—oh, the manuscript was turned in by spring of '78. So I had from the spring of '78 until—it didn't come out until June 1980. Have I got my dates right? It would have been spring of '79. I worked '77 and '78, turned it in, wrote it through the winter of '78 to '79, turned it in the spring of '79 on time. So then it was a year before it was published and released as a book in June '80, June 1980. So that was the year I did Agenda.⁹

But I already had the idea since the conference. I remember in that correspondence with Kim, which would have been the rest of '77 and throughout '78 and when I was working on Animal Factories, talking up the idea of doing some kind of a movement publication that would convey the idea to all these activists that they belonged to this big effort that was bigger than whatever little thing was happening in their home town. It was happening all over. And to tell them about the developments in France and England and all these places. But everybody was busy. Kim was already doing something with his peers in England, so he didn't want to do it. And the activist friends that I had in New York were involved in other things, primarily Victor Schonfeld and Myriam Alaux who were doing "The Animals Film," which is now sort of a relic of history that no one knows about.¹⁰ But it was the film at the time. They did it in the late 70s. I tried to get them roped into doing a magazine. Everybody was tied up, but they thought it was a good idea.

Rowe: Was there anything even vaguely equivalent out there?

Mason: No. Two things that sparked the idea—one was the sense of the international movement, and the other spark was my sense of the parochialism and the institutional chauvinism in the movement over here from Friends of Animals. Friends of Animals experience

⁹ The Animals' Agenda, first issue, Winter 1979-80 [mailed in November 1979]. Copy attached.

¹⁰ "The Animals Film." Directed by Victor Schonfeld and Myriam Alaux, narrated by Julie Christie. A Slick Pics International Production, 1981. Color; 16mm.

taught me that Alice, bless her heart, for all of her radicalism and her vision, she didn't have a sense of animal work beyond the borders and the membership and the funding of Friends of Animals. Everyone else was a rival. She hated Cleveland Amory. She hated every other group practically. She had some mild sympathy for Helen Jones and Elinor Seiling. But the groups in those days were out for themselves. Of course, it hasn't changed that much, right? If someone starts a group they want their group to be the one that does it all. I'm sorry to say it hasn't changed that much.

But I had that experience at Friends of Animals, that everybody thought that their group was going to save all of the animals. After the political radicalism I had been through and the other causes I was involved in and this exposure to the international movement, I knew that was a very old-fashioned, small, parochial, stupid, immature, politically backward idea that you can change anything that way. You had to have a movement. You had to have all of these people seeing themselves as part of an effort. So that's the other influence—the Friends of Animals experience and the big thing at the Cambridge conference. It's ironic that Alice sent me to the conference and I came home thinking that it's bigger than Friends of Animals and I really didn't belong to her anymore.

Rowe: Did you leave the organization?

Mason: In time, yes. I still did work for her. I mean, it wasn't that I was against her. It's just that I realized that she, like so many of the other leaders of the American movement, just didn't have any sense beyond the nose on their face about the size of this movement. That was a radical idea for them, you know.

Rowe: So you started the Agenda as an international—as a magazine to tell people about international events and also to make people aware of the larger movement that was taking place around. Did you also see it as an activist magazine, a magazine that people could use to change things?

Mason: Yes. It was intended to be a magazine for activists so they would—I thought of it at the time as a bulletin board for activists, an ongoing monthly—or quarterly it was then—bulletin board. So every one of them could see what everyone else was doing and they could talk to each other and say, “We ought to do it this way. I tried this, and this worked.” That kind of a thing. It was a political rag for people who were active. And in those days, by '79 when it came out and '80, we were already getting a sense of ourselves and beginning to call ourselves the animal rights movement. Singer's book had been out for almost five years. Tom Regan's book had come out. There was a lot of talk about animal rights and animal liberation.

Rowe: Editor's note: I will be affixing Jim Mason's most recent article in the Animals' Agenda to this interview for any future reference.¹¹ You mentioned that Tom Regan's book—

¹¹ Copy attached.

Mason: Case for Animal Rights.

Rowe: That came out in 1983.

Mason: Oh, it came out that late?

Rowe: Yes.

Mason: All right.

Rowe: He was very much formulating the ideas presumably since 1977 and previously as a counterpoint to the utilitarian argument of Peter Singer. Did you feel a sense of intellectual ferment in the movement, or were you not really involved with that?

Mason: Some. Because I wasn't an academic with a chair at a major university, as so many of them were. That was the day of the philosophers, wasn't it? Everybody who had any kind of credentials as a philosopher was a star of the movement in those days. I knew that there was quite a bit of intellectual foment because all of those philosopher types were jumping on the bandwagon fast and furious and presenting the case for animals in lots of ways. There were all these battles among them, as intellectuals are wont to do—hairsplitting and ideological quibbling and questions and differences over approach and all this jazz. It still goes on today, I guess, doesn't it?

Rowe: So you had—

Mason: I knew that was in the air, but I wasn't really a part of it.

Rowe: You had little time for that. You didn't feel it was particularly important?

Mason: I was a lowly lawyer, for God's sake. I wasn't a Ph.D. at a big school and publishing in journals like they were. I was a nobody.

Rowe: But you were more interested in the grass roots and the direct action group people.

Mason: Right. Yes. I was going to protests, demonstrations, conferences, sit-ins, and things like that. I was involved in the strategies and the tactics of the activist groups—and people like George Cave and Dana Stuchell who had what was first called Trans-species Unlimited and finally became Animal Rights Mobilization, I think the groups that were doing really direct action, civil disobedience, getting arrested.

Rowe: We're still talking in the late 1970s.

Mason: I think we're talking around '80 now, in the early 80s. If you want to talk about the first early years of Agenda, Agenda started in November of '79 and then it was quarterly throughout 1980 and '81. I think at some point we went every two months and changed our format several times. But by the early 80s there was already animal rights movement activism, at first in quotes and then—

Rowe: During Agenda's early period and after your radicalization, as it were, and internationalization after the Cambridge meeting, what did you feel were the tactics that the animal rights movement should employ?

Mason: Well, you know, what I tried to do as editor of Agenda in those days was, I tried not to have—I may have had inadvertently, as anyone with convictions has—tried not to have strong positions on things—pro or con veganism, pro or con direct action, pro or con liberating animals. I guess the only thing I remember pushing very much was bridging to other movements, because I kept trying to sell this idea that we ought to be involving feminists in this. I remember writing about it in Agenda and getting nasty letters. [Laughter]. Like, “I'm in it for the animals. I don't want to hear about all this feminism stuff.” I used to get complaints. Of course, I also got a lot of support. I guess if I was trying to push anything I was trying to push other causes for justice and anti-cruelty and anti-violence and fairness.

Rowe: How did this manifest itself on the street, though?

Mason: There wasn't that much interest in it. People didn't actually—the argument even my closest activist friends would say, “Look, we don't have time to go over and join these demonstrations for civil rights and American Indians and feminist struggles. They handle their own issues, and we handle ours. We're sympathetic to their causes.” But at least I ranted and raved about it in the pages of Agenda. I'm proud of that. I did bring it up a lot. But I don't think I had a lot of editorial opinions on what kind of tactics, what kind of strategies. I might have on occasion launched into a diatribe against this or for that. I just pretty much let the activists bring that up and just offered them a place to post it.

Rowe: How did you see the internationalization and the radicalism that you had perceived in Britain occurring or emerging in the United States in terms of activism? Did you feel that if people knew about it they would be involved?

Mason: Yes. I think one of the things we did was begin to include news items about events across the pond a lot—the successes of the hunt saboteurs, the successes of the ALF, and the kinds of things they were doing. We published those. Probably the first place that American activists would have known about those events was in the pages of Agenda, because none of the animal groups, the mainstream groups—HSUS, The Fund [for Animals]—I mean, they weren't going to publish that stuff. They weren't going to consider those news events. My God, the only thing they printed in those publications was what their group was doing. They were strictly what we called house organs. They didn't cover anything that they didn't do. And they also took

credit for a lot of things that they didn't do either, as you know. That was the game back then. And the mainstream press hadn't gotten to the point where it was covering those kinds of events either.

So I think probably Agenda was the one that brought the news of things that were going on. I mean, I can't absolutely take all the credit for this. They may have heard about it in other ways, maybe through their own personal friendships. But I do think that we covered that before anyone else did, meaning the coverage of hunt sab work, animal liberation stuff, and the radicalism of England. We tried to bring that over here and say, "Look what they're doing over there."

Rowe: Okay. I'm going to end this tape now. This is the end of the first full one and a half hour recording for Jim Mason for Recording Animal Advocacy oral history project on the 16th of November 1999, and we have covered the 1970s and we'll be dealing with the 1980s in the second tape and the 1990s.

[End of Session].

Jim Mason
Interview #3
November 17, 1999
New York, New York

Martin Rowe, Interviewer

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

Rowe: Okay, Jim, we got to the end of the 70s and we were in the early 80s. You were the editor of the Animals' Agenda magazine. You had just published Animal Factories in June 1980. You really fully now engaged yourself in the animal advocacy movement. You had done some part-time work for Friends of Animals, and your law practice was being handed over to your partner. How did you see your life shaping up over the next decade? What was your real plan professionally, if nothing else?

Mason: I would say let's focus on the year 1980 when Animal Factories came out and Agenda had been launched. Agenda was now not quite a year old. I thought Animal Factories would create more of a wave. I thought there would be more of a reaction to it. It got pretty good publicity and pretty good reviews. I was on the "Today" show of all things, had a national audience. I was able to show slides, color slides, of factory farm scenes on NBC's "Today" show—powerful coverage and good reviews in some major publications.

Rowe: What was the response generally with the reviews?

Mason: Positive. They were positive.¹²

Rowe: In what way? What were they saying?

Mason: Shocking revelation, just everything you would expect with people that didn't know about this, had never seen it or heard of it and could not believe their eyes and ears when they heard about it. So I thought the sheer shock effect of it would create waves of publicity which would create a ground swell of public opinion, as Ruth Harrison's book did in England. So I was preparing for a year or two of dealing with the waves that were being made.

I must say that I was very disappointed because the initial waves were not sustained. After that summer of publicity—I think I was on the "Today" show it must have been July or August—and after a few good reviews, everything just died down. It was like it didn't—it did not sustain.

¹² Copies of reviews for first edition (1980) and revised edition (1990) attached.

Rowe: What was the response within the animal advocacy movement?

Mason: Zero. Zero. I mean, the silence was deafening. That was one of the biggest disappointments. I thought that activists and the major groups would seize upon the book and wave it about and do publicity, because it was practically handed to them on a silver platter. I always felt that the initial wave of publicity, which was in the mainstream press—you'd think on the strength of that that the animal movement would have taken this thing up and made a noise about it. But they're very slow to react, as they were with Animal Liberation. Animal Liberation almost went out of print in the late 70s. By a last ditch effort people managed to salvage the book and keep it in print. Then, of course, years later it sold hundreds of thousands of copies. I think Animal Factories, the same thing. I think the animal movement is slow—especially in the case of that book—was very slow to take up the flag and run with it.

Rowe: Now, why is that the case, do you think?

Mason: I just think it's ignorance, lack of sophistication about how the book world works and how to use books as tools. I just don't think the activist groups appreciate the importance of publicizing, especially a breakthrough book like that that was really the first and only real documentation of the realities of factory farms and pictures of them. I mean, it was like there was nothing like it before or since.

Rowe: Was it also to a certain extent because animal activism was involved with issues other than factory farming at that moment?

Mason: Yes, it was. But, you see, they were starting to get interested in factory farming because Singer devoted a whole chapter in Animal Liberation to factory farming. So it wasn't like it was an unknown subject. It was a very known subject because of his parts in Animal Liberation, and it was like activists were hungry to get involved in farm animal issues. Here was the material on a silver platter, and yet—I think it was just—they were just slow.

But, I must say, there was one exception, and that was Alex Herschaft, who now has FARM, and it was then, I think, Vegetarian Information Services. VIS was the name of his group. Alex arranged a whole week of interviews for me in Washington, DC. I was on National Public Radio, I was on "All Things Considered," I was on the big Washington, DC talk shows, I was on CNN, I was on all this big stuff thanks to Alex. But I think he was the only activist, the only group that really dropped what he was doing or they were doing to publicize this book and help with it.

Rowe: The media at the time—they were shocked. Was there a consistent question that they asked you or a consistent policy response that was evoked from the material that you presented to them?

Mason: Yes, and it had to do with alternatives. You know, the obvious question and the standard question for all of them was, “Well, what could we do instead?” Because I tried to always mention the vegetarian argument, which usually falls on deaf ears, at least in the mainstream, but they wanted to hear about other ways to raise animals, about alternative agriculture and sustainable agriculture and humane practices and drug-free agriculture. And fortunately, I did have some examples from the European front, because the protest—the issue had been raised earlier there.

Rowe: And did you bring up your own biography within this context?

Mason: Yes. I tried, yes. I must say, one of the basic rules of public relations is to gain sympathy, right? It’s what lawyers do in front of juries. It’s what advertising does with prospective customers. You want to get their attention and you want their sympathy. So, being a farm boy with a hick accent from Missouri, I had to play that to the hilt, didn’t I?

Rowe: But you were saying effectively that this is not the same kind of farming that we have been brought up to believe was taking place when I was a farm boy in the 30s.

Mason: Right. I always tried to interject, “Look at these images and then recall the images that you have from advertising and coloring books and all sorts of scenes of farming as you thought you knew it. What a contrast.” The dairy industry at that time was showing these ads on television of cows chewing their cuds, lolling in the shade in green fields. Even then cows were not producing milk under such conditions. I tried to use that just to contrast between fantasy farm and the reality of factory farming and tried to emphasize that this is not a small percentage of your animal product, the sources of your animal products. This is—the overwhelming majority of your meat, milk, and eggs comes from systems like these. Virtually all of your poultry products come from these kinds of systems. Jaws dropped and mouths were open. They could not believe it.

Rowe: Did you encounter any resistance from the corporate advertisers of these programs?

Mason: Oh, yes. Absolutely. NBC—the next day, NBC—the staff of NBC—got some nasty letters from agribusiness experts. They had contacted the producers of the “Today“ show and read them the riot act about having this scoundrel on there. So my agent—you know, they got—

Rowe: Was their complaint that your segment revealed biased reporting on the behalf of NBC?

Mason: Yes. Right. That this is untrue, that he gave a distorted account of modern agriculture, you know, the usual stuff. So the powers that be at the publishing house got a hold of me and said, “We’ve got to answer these.” So I wrote them a two-page letter and gave them references. It was a smear attack. They were trying to discredit me and intimidate the producers.

Rowe: You wrote to NBC.

Mason: Yes. I wrote to the producers of NBC and asked them to circulate it to all of the decision-makers there to be assured that this was not a distorted account at all. This was a very accurate picture.

Rowe: How would the agribusiness people account for the photographs, the slides?

Mason: Yes, right.

Rowe: Did they respond to that?

Mason: No. They didn't want to raise that issue, I guess. No, they didn't talk about that. They basically wrote the standard letter like, "This man is not an expert. He's not a professor. This is biased. This is distorted. Blah, blah, blah."

Rowe: The issue of your book, Animal Factories, and also on An Unnatural Order and other writings within the animal advocacy movement: Have you found in general that the animal advocacy movement isn't particularly interested in compiling important information, useful information, intellectual information about the reasons why they are animal activists?

Mason: I have noticed, yes. That was part of my campaign all those years. And, again, it was a carry-over from my experience at Friends of Animals and the knowledge that I had with similar groups. They simply didn't do a lot of homework. If someone, for example, on the staff of one of the groups was going to start an anti-fur campaign, you know, usually—maybe it's improved some since—but usually what they would do is just dig out the same old recycled material, the same outdated facts and figures, and write a few paragraphs and slap it to a printer and come up with a brochure. It was a very superficial account. They didn't do any in-depth studies of the fur industry and the trends. They didn't do things at that level. It was very shallow, very—poor homework, I thought, at the time.

Rowe: Is this a feature perhaps of every major social movement? I'm trying to wonder whether there was something in the fact that at some level the animal advocacy movement, despite the prevalence of philosophical ideas, is, as it were, a movement of the heart. It's not anti-intellectual so much as emotional. It's something that deals specifically with primal feelings towards other creatures, especially companion animals and seeing suffering, et cetera; that the movement lacks a real attempt to conceptualize it in a social justice framework.

Mason: I think that's true. I think there's a couple of factors. One is, as you said, it's—well, for a lot of us this is a gut reaction response. We don't have to think about it. We don't have to do a lot of homework. The cruelty of it is so apparent on its face. The conditions under which animals are kept, the way they're virtually tortured and slaughtered for food and used in laboratories—it doesn't—like a lot of activists said at the time, "We don't need a lot of further

research and investigation to show how bad this is.” So, that was one thinking, one reason for this lack of homework.

I think the other one was that we were always a drastically marginalized social effort, almost like a sect. We never had the pleasure and the success of really engaging the public. We were always almost like a fanatical fringe group. It was almost like we had a loser mentality, that we didn’t think we would ever even get the public’s attention, therefore we didn’t go to much trouble to research our case. I think that’s improved a lot.

Rowe: That’s a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mason: Yes. It’s like when you have a handful of activists in a population area as large as New York City, and all they’re going to do is go out and stand on a few street corners a couple of times in the winter and protest fur coats, they don’t really feel motivated to do a great deal of research to prove the wrongs of the fur industry because they don’t feel like they’re reaching anybody anyway.

Rowe: Well, to a certain extent though, that kind of level of lack of sophistication is something that the 1980s began to deal with as the movement became bigger and better organized.

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: When did you feel that things were beginning to change in favor of a more sophisticated, well-coordinated movement that would bring thousands of people to demonstrations and lead ultimately to the march on Washington in 1990? How did that begin to emerge in your perspective?

Mason: I think by 1980 and ‘81 and ‘82—along in there—the impact of Singer’s book had soaked in, whereas Animal Factories, it took it years to soak in. After five or six years, word was out on Singer’s book. It had been reviewed all over, it had been discussed all over. The expression now is it’s the Bible of animal rights [and] animal liberation, and rightly so because it’s a perfect argument. So by then, I think, the movement began to have a sense of itself as a movement. Of course, we were harping on that constantly in the pages of Agenda, and it was going out to really a core group of people.

Rowe: What were the subscriptions to the magazine at the time?

Mason: The first issue went out to less than a hundred people. After that, the second, third, and fourth issues, went out to several hundred. We got some mailing lists of key people. We sent it to all of the leaders and the staffs of the animal groups that we knew. People started sending us names and addresses. So we expanded our circulation to several hundred people in the first year. I think on the strength of that and the buzz about Peter’s book, by 1980-something—’81, ‘82—there was a sense of ourselves as a movement that had a sense of mission, had a sense of

purpose, had a sense of seriousness. We had something behind us for once. We knew we were international. We had this excellent philosophical approach that now you could just hand somebody this and say, “Look, read this and then I’ll take your questions.” So that was happening, and it was a wonderful sensation.

Then, of course, within a year or two, PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] began their campaigns. I don’t remember the exact dates, but wasn’t it ‘82 and ‘83 along in there when PETA began to start making big press with some of their campaigns? I think the first one would have been the Silver Spring monkey case.

Rowe: Right. I think that was probably 1985.

Mason: Was it that late? No, surely it was earlier.¹³

Rowe: Maybe it was early. When did you first hear about this case yourself? What were you working on at that time?

Mason: Agenda.

Rowe: So you were concentrating mainly on Agenda. That was your mission.

Mason: Yes. I did live in Missouri for a year and a half. In the depression that hit me in the year after Animal Factories came out—within the year, six [or] eight months later—I began to feel very cynical and disillusioned. I felt that even though all this good stuff was happening that the contribution that I just made and the work that I had just done was not being noticed. So I just about collapsed on that. I thought, “God.” At that point I had given up my law practice. I had quit the Friends of Animals job because the writing was taking everything then. I had no money. I went into a slump in late 1980 and I simply moved back to Missouri for peace and quiet and a place to live where I could really afford to live and have—basically just for security.

Rowe: How did you earn your living then?

Mason: Odd jobs. I did a column for Vegetarian Times magazine. I wrote in the monthly magazine—I think they paid me \$150 or something—and a couple of other jobs here and there. I did some freelance writing for magazines. I did odd jobs at home. I was living on a total income of maybe \$3000 or \$4000 a year. So it was the only place where I could live that cheaply and have that much—instead of selling all of my time by taking a job, I kept myself available. I was doing Agenda by remote from out there.

Rowe: Who was funding Agenda at that time?

¹³ The “Silver Spring monkeys” case started in 1981.

Mason: Doug Moss. Doug Moss had a printing business, my partner. And he pretty much bankrolled Agenda all along. What he couldn't pay for himself he would arrange to have the printing done for free through a friend. So we were doing it that way. It took a few years before we had a subscriber base and got into major fundraising. So I'm talking the early 80s—'81, '82, '83. So I lived in Missouri for a while and was really kind of basically just doing Agenda quarterly, doing some freelance writing.

But somewhere along in there—I can't remember the date, but it had to be in the early 80s—it had to be, yes, because we had an important conference at Ocean City, Maryland. I remember I had just decided to move away from Missouri, I think, when that conference occurred. So it had to be as early as '81 or '82, because that's when I left there. I moved out there in '80, a year later '81.

Anyway, maybe eighteen months later we had this conference in Ocean City, Maryland, and it was for that time a big event. It was attended by over 200 people. One of the issues of Agenda around that time would give the date of it.¹⁴ But quite a big turnout. People came from Europe. We had several people from England, including Stallwood. Activists came from all over for that thing. It was like a big planning and strategy conference. And the highlights of it were that PETA had just sprung the Silver Spring monkey case. The arrests had been made. It was breaking news at the time. Alex Pacheco had infiltrated that lab and had taken those pictures and had documented this cruelty and abuse. They had taken them to the prosecutors, and I think Roger Galvin and some other animal rights lawyers saw that it became the first cruelty case against a vivisector. It was very successful, and it put PETA on the map. They got publicity. It literally made that group. And that had to be as early as '82.

Rowe: What was the feeling once that case was discovered among the animal rights community and the animal rights organizations that knew you? Did you feel that something had changed?

Mason: Definitely. For one thing, there was massive coverage from coast to coast in the mainstream media, largely positive coverage. And it mentioned the animal rights movement. It put us on the map, so to speak. It affirmed us, it confirmed us, it verified us, it justified us, and everyone felt that when there was major television coverage and magazine and newspaper coverage of this event, that it was a turning point. And that PETA also represented a turning point in the new generation of activist groups. It wasn't the same old, out of date, out of touch, apathetic organization that had billions of dollars and was doing nothing. Here was PETA that was putting people at the site of animal abuse and documenting the abuses and taking it to the courts and taking it to the media. I mean, this was unprecedented. So it gave us quite a feeling of elation, and that feeling was palpable at that Ocean City conference for anyone that was there.

Rowe: What was the feeling? Was it a sense of radicalization?

¹⁴ Issue of The Animals' Agenda January / February 1982 attached.

Mason: We've arrived.

Rowe: We've arrived.

Mason: We've arrived. We're somebody. Our names are in the papers. They're noticing us. "Animal rights is in the air" was one of the slogans of the time.

Rowe: The attendees of the conference—did they reflect a change of constituency, or were they, as it were, the old guard being taken by surprise?

Mason: No. It was the younger generation that was the cutting edge.

Rowe: Who were some of the people that you met for the first time there?

Mason: Oh, gosh. There were so many people. So many people that are now prominent in the movement were there. Esther Mechler was there, Doug Moss, and all the people from PETA—[Alex] Pacheco, [Ingrid] Newkirk. Who came from England? Clive Hollands and Stallwood, of course. I can't remember the names there are so many of them. But just about anybody who was anybody was there. Some of the old guard group, some of the more radical old guard groups, sent people.

Rowe: Was this meeting after the Silver Spring event?

Mason: Yes. The Silver Spring event had occurred within weeks or a month or so of this event. It seemed like the Ocean City conference was in the fall, I think, it seems like.

Anyway, one of the big developments that came out of that—another big development that came out of that conference was that one of the organizers was a guy named Richard Morgan, who has now sort of faded into oblivion. But he started something at that conference that became the all-consuming passion and energy of the movement for the next several years, which was the Mobilization for Animals rallies. These occurred throughout the early to mid-80s.¹⁵ Year after year they had these things. Each year it was a different issue. Like, I think the first year it was lab animals or primates in labs, and they had rallies in, say, four major cities—Boston, New York, San Francisco, and Atlanta or someplace. Morgan's Mobilization for Animals—his idea was to assemble huge numbers of people, thousands of people, at these rallies which would then be covered by the press and, again, would show the flag and energy of animal rights movement, would put us on the map, and so forth and so on. And he did so for about the first year, and then maybe to some extent the second year. Then they sort of degenerated.

What it was doing was it was using all of this grassroots energy to create these rallies so that it seemed—I was critical of it at the time, you know, in the second year. I think we wrote

¹⁵ Copies of Animals' Agenda coverage attached.

about it in the pages of Agenda that what we were doing is that we were using a lot of money and energy just moving ourselves to a place to get together and scream for a couple of hours and hear speakers. There was a misplacing of resources, so to speak, and we could have spent our energy and money better if we had planned some action, some protest action or something like this. Because these were basically just—struck me at the time as just big parties where everybody got together and had a good time, like going to a conference. It didn't accomplish a hell of a lot. And a lot of other people felt the same way. I think Henry Spira felt the same way. But then the other—

Rowe: So you didn't have a problem with actually getting together in one big group and having an action. Or did you really want people to remain in their communities and get involved locally and stimulate grassroots activity then?

Mason: Yes, something like that.

Rowe: So you wanted the latter.

Mason: Yes, something like that that had a goal of some kind of change, to really focus all this energy and all this money on some achievable goal like Spira would have done and actually make something happen—pass a law, eliminate an abuse, something like that. Instead, activists from all over the country came out of the woodwork and just assembled themselves in great numbers.

The other side of the argument is—which I see now better than I did then—was that the movement needed this kind of get-together. It was like a psychological boost to us. Somebody said it allowed identity-building. It was part of building the movement. The solidarity element was present. Even if we accomplished nothing, we accomplished a great deal by simply getting together and getting to know each other and going back home and keeping in touch with each other. So it had that effect. It was like a family reunion, except it wasn't a reunion because we had never seen each other before. It was like the first time we saw each other.

So it did—my God, at one of those, it was a thrill. You go to these places and you'd see people carrying signs saying “Animal Rights, South Podunk, North Dakota,” or some ungodly place that we didn't think that anybody lived let alone that there are animal rights activists. They were coming out of the woodwork. They were coming out of the boondocks. So it showed the energy and the vitality of the grassroots movement. It showed that, and that was another big boost.

Rowe: But you mentioned solidarity. This is exactly the same time that Solidarity, the movement in Poland, was pushing forward there against the communist regime. I mean, was there even a facetious parallel to this kind of insurgent social movement against tyranny?

Mason: Probably not, because I think we might have been so naïve that we might not have even known of Solidarity, by and large. No. I think that animal rights people at that time were so giddy with excitement, so almost out of themselves with the enthusiasm. A lot of these people came from places where they were really activists in a closet for the longest time. I don't mean to take anything away from the gay and lesbian movement, but animal people had nearly the same problem. They were a very unpopular minority in Arkansas and rural Kansas and places like that. To be able to go somewhere—just like gay and lesbian people can in San Francisco—where you can just be yourself and you can be out there and rejoice in your differences and in your eccentricities—and in the case of the animal movement, to be among thousands of other activists where you practically had to live in hiding where you lived in the country. That was really pretty important for a lot of people to have that feeling.

Rowe: Now, let's go back to the demographic concerning the marches. Was it still overwhelmingly white, middle class women?

Mason: Yes. Young.

Rowe: Young? So you're talking teens, twenties, thirties?

Mason: Twenty to thirty, I'd say. Obviously, you know, it's a curve. There were some older people there, too. Couples came. But by and large—I used to write about it Agenda. You go to these things and you do a sample count in the audience, and there was usually eighty percent female. I did that deliberately at more than a couple of conferences and rallies to look at the gender ratio.

I used to get in trouble when I would speak about it. Alex Herschaft and others would invite me to their little conferences, and I always made a point of—before I said anything else I'd say, “Look at the audience. What's the gender ratio? Look at the speakers' platform. What's the gender ratio?” And it was just so obvious to everybody. Then Alex and some of them said, “You know, I think I won't have you speak anymore. You're always embarrassing me. I feel guilty but it's not my fault.” But I think more of us had to point that out to create some awareness there, because there was some feminist consciousness among some of the activists but not among all of the activists, especially among the men. Even though there are a lot of progressive people in animal rights, there are also a lot of people who had no political consciousness whatsoever. They were neither left nor right. They didn't know what they were. As I think I told you earlier, when I ranted about some of this stuff in the pages of Agenda I'd get nasty mail. “I don't want to hear about women's issues or gay and lesbian books.”

Rowe: Did you feel that you were fighting a really uphill battle, or did you see things were beginning to change? And have things changed at all even now twenty years later?

Mason: Well, some of my progressive friends reminded me that if you don't stick your neck out—when you do stick your neck out politically you're going to get that kind of response from a

certain element. But it's a small fraction of the total picture out there. The people who are positively influenced by those exhortations or those paragraphs or whatever, they don't always bother to write in. I think the position we took was: We are helping people change their mind, we're helping them improve their consciousness, get more progressive, and if we get a little hate mail once in a while, that's the price you pay, so to hell with it. We went ahead anyway.¹⁶

Rowe: What was your feeling in regard to the lack of diversity in color within the movement at that point? How did you feel that that would need to change? I mean, you were in a unique position having been aware of these issues a further ten years before the 1980s.

Mason: Yes. And the feminist movement went through the same discussions.

Rowe: The feminist movement had the same discussion?

Mason: Went through the same discussion. Yes. It was a problem. You're always trying to show diversity, and yet you couldn't. Really it required—eventually one had to come to the understanding that, you know, for a lot of people of color, many of them are just not in a position to come to our meetings and to put their personal time and energy into these rallies and these conferences. In many cases, they were struggling to make ends meet because of poverty and because of discrimination. So it wasn't that easy for them, and it certainly wasn't that easy for us to have a get-together where there was this wonderful rainbow spectrum of humanity. It simply was not going to happen. The few people of color that you would get—people from other ethnic backgrounds—would be actually not very typical of their folks. I mean, we'd have people with college educations, lawyers, people that had made it that could afford to come. You have to understand that for the feminist movement and the animal movement, by and large the great mass, the average people from those communities, from those minority communities, are not going to be able as a practical matter to attend these things.

Rowe: It's now been ten years since you went to the vegetarian meetings in the early 1980s and the 1970s and into the 1980s. Was the vegetarian movement becoming radicalized? You hinted earlier that the health issue became more important. Was there a commonality with the sort of Vegetarian Times, for instance, becoming more interested in animal rights per se?

Mason: Yes. I think they had me write a column there for a while because I think they felt that since animal rights was getting so much press—it was becoming sort of a cause célèbre of that period—that maybe we should give it more coverage, that there's interest here in this quadrant. So I wrote about issues, animal rights issues, for Vegetarian Times for several years there.

Rowe: Did you get a sense of the feedback of the readers? Were they receptive to this or don't you know?

¹⁶ Copies of Animal's Agenda attached.

Mason: For some percentage of the readers—you know, the vegetarian movement then and now, I think, is still—I do think that the great majority of vegetarians are sort of secondarily interested in animal issues. I think that the figures nationwide are that by and large most of them are vegetarians for health and environmental reasons—live lightly on the earth, take care of your body kind of stuff. Animal rights and ethical issues are still like some fraction of that. I sense this from going to all the conferences and talking to all the people, and then just recently going to a vegetarian conference. If you look at the subjects, the weight of the subjects covered and the kinds of speakers they have, most of the information is on health, diet, nutrition, things like that.

Rowe: Okay. Let's return to the mid-1980s. Many people see the next five years, 1985 to 1989, 1990, as the heyday of real animal rights consciousness, the emerging movement which is the media's darling, as it were. How did you see the media treating the animal rights movement in the mid- to late-1980s?

Mason: Well, it happened even earlier than that, Martin. Actually, what blew us away was—see, I left Agenda in '86, so I have very clear memories of the way things changed from the early 80s to '85 and '86. I place these memories with some detail because of where our offices were at the time. We went from running Agenda as a part-time thing coming out quarterly to running a full-time operation, with jobs for five or six people, with an office and tables and chairs, and phones and salaries and medical coverage and the whole bit. When I was editor of Agenda in the mid-80s, by '85 and '86 we had a budget of half a million dollars a year. This was something that five or six years earlier we were doing out of our pockets to a readership of a few hundred people. All of a sudden, Agenda had an international circulation of thirty-some thousand people and this big budget. We were getting grants from HSUS and from every major group. They were throwing money at us because animal rights was getting so famous that we, being the magazine, everybody wanted to be with us.

So what I'm getting to is that as early as '84 and '85, way before I left there and way before we had all these fancy offices and this big budget—I'm thinking it was '84, '83 to '84, we were getting major coverage in the press. Magazine after magazine, newspaper after newspaper, did a story on the new kid on the block, the animal rights movement. If you look into the archives of all the major daily papers—the New York Times, the San Francisco, the Chicago—usually what they would do is do a cover story on animal rights in the Sunday magazine. We would be the cover story in the Sunday magazine, because I was at Agenda at the time and people were sending us copies of these things from all over the country. I'll bet you if somebody did a study of that period—it would probably be a two-year period, say from '83 to '85—practically every major publication in the United States did a story about the “new animal rights movement.”

Rowe: And what was the general overall attitude towards it?

Mason: Very positive. Very balanced. They didn't make us out to be crazies, although they mentioned all the usual sort of inconsistencies of the thing. “They want you to be vegetarians.

They want you to stop eating meat.” But by and large, the coverage was pretty nice, pretty positive.

Rowe: Did they mention the “extremist” tactics of the Animal Liberation Front?

Mason: Some. It was mixed. But overall these were pretty good stories. It put us in pretty good light. Because the opposition—the research industry and agribusiness industry—hadn’t had time to react yet, and they were not working the phones the way they would come to do a few years later, and not yet setting up their own foundations, like the Foundation for—what is it?—Biomedical Progress and the agribusiness groups. I forget the names.¹⁷ Animal Industry Foundation is one I remember. It took them a few years to get their propaganda organs in place to fight animal rights advocacy and basically to get the press to swing the other way. I think the press didn’t swing the other way until later in the 80s. But I believe as early as ‘84, for sure, amazing coverage, and it was all very good. Of course, this, again, was our big boost. It was a big shot in the arm because it established us as a social force.

Rowe: So you left Agenda in 1986. Why did you leave?

Mason: Well, I don’t really want to get into the details of that, but the less said about it the better because all the bridges have been rebuilt and the conflicts have been resolved.

It was a power struggle. Agenda had growth pains. As I say, at that point we had a full-time staff, we had salaries, we had a big budget. We were like the center of power. Of course, with any kind of organization, once things begin to operate on that scale, people start scurrying about and jockeying for position. We didn’t have a board of directors. We outgrew ourselves so fast. It became a question of certain issues and direction of the magazine and the problem of taking money from all of these groups that we wanted to be independent of. It’s always a problem for somebody who’s trying to maintain an independent journalist periodical to not be influenced by the money. There were staff problems. There was certain cronyism on the staff, people that I thought weren’t working as hard as they should considering the money they were being paid and considering the kind of work that a lot of activists were doing for nothing.

Rowe: Did you feel the editorial content was being watered down in order to satisfy the organizations in some form or another?

Mason: Well, that was an issue. I was afraid that even if it in fact was not being influenced, there was the appearance that it was being influenced. I have this very strict sense of ethics and conflicts and interests from law practice where it is said that even if there is not any real influence, if there is the appearance of influence, that’s as bad. Claims can be made that you’re a tool of HSUS or something like that. So I was a bit worried about all this money pouring in from all these AV [anti-vivisection] groups and these old guard groups, that this was going to be—and,

¹⁷ Foundation for Biomedical Research.

of course, the staff, people who had salaries for the first time, they loved it. They didn't want to bite the hand that fed them. So I was afraid that over time it would hurt Agenda's reputation, that it would reflect negatively on our editorial integrity, and raising these issues created a power struggle. I realized that maybe it was time for me to go.

Rowe: So you didn't actually have a specific problem with the editorial direction of the magazine. You felt it was still fulfilling the functions that you had set the magazine up to do, which was to bring in the international perspective, to make people aware that they were involved with a worldwide movement?

Mason: Yes, we were, pretty much.

Rowe: Was it as radical as you wanted it to be?

Mason: No. We were now feeling called upon—whether by external voices or internal voices or thoughts in our own shifting political philosophy and maturity—that maybe we should tone down the radical rhetoric and that we should not be so critical of this group and that group, that we should have a positive influence on the movement and not be so critical and so negative.

Rowe: When you say this group and that group, you mean groups within the animal advocacy movement?

Mason: Yes. For example, when the Mobilization for Animals rallies came to be what I think was widely perceived as just another fundraising scam really—not an out-and-out criminal behavior but just sort of—it seemed after a while in this second and third and fourth year that just raising money was the only objective. And we criticized that. A lot of people didn't want us to criticize anything. And then we felt that the grassroots had been co-opted by this effort. Where there had been this tremendous grassroots energy in the early 80s, now it was being absorbed by these groups like PETA and Mobilization for Animals; we felt that they were co-opting the grassroots energy. We were critical of that, and a lot of people didn't see it that way. People with other political ideas thought, "Well, that's good. The grassroots people are finding a home. They're finding a national organization." Well, PETA went from a grassroots group that had chapters in every state and regional coordinators to a group that has your usual pyramidal hierarchical structure with somebody at the top. It wasn't that way at first. So there were a lot of political issues about that kind of organizational structure and how the movement should be organized that way.

Rowe: Was there ever a debate within the movement at all about how the movement should organize itself, or was it very ad hoc in the way it developed?

Mason: There was a debate and argument among some of us, some of the more, you know, ideological types, intellectual types that obsessed about such things and argued about such things

at conferences. But we were a small percentage. I suppose we were like your typical elitist intellectuals that thought we had all the answers.

Rowe: You weren't just an intellectual in that you had also been involved with coordinating rallies for poor people in Bridgeport. You had been involved with organizing and busing and all of that. You had been an organizer as well.

Mason: Yes. And I had organized rallies and protests myself when I was with Friends of Animals. I guess you'd say that the debate was confined to kind of like a clique of people and that the rank and file activists from across the country weren't really obsessed with these issues. They were just glad to be alive, glad that animal rights was getting in the mainstream press, glad to go to these rallies and conferences, glad that PETA was growing by leaps and bounds. Everyone was just glad that these things were happening.

Rowe: How did you feel about that then and how do you feel about that now?

Mason: [Laughter]. I feel that they were right.

Rowe: Glad to be alive?

Mason: Yes. I kind of wish I had been a little bit more in touch with that good feeling, but I was always such a political agitator that I was always—like a lot of the old lefty types—always critical of everything that developed, whether it was a good or a bad development. We just always were so critical of everything, had to discuss it to death. I think that was probably because of my own immaturity, personal immaturity, spiritual shortcomings, whatever, the things that you get with age, I suppose. Now that I'm older and wiser and a little more mellow I can see that I was trying to push things too fast, that the movement had to go through those phases, that people just—you can't just push them along. They can't just go from A to B overnight. It takes time for growth to develop. So I guess the approaches I took to things in those days were rather impatient and too brainy and too obsessed, wanting to do too much too fast and talk too much and analyze things to death. And I could have maybe sat back and relaxed a little bit and enjoyed life and realized that pace happens—change happens at a slower rate than you like, and there's no point in being frustrated about it all the time.

Rowe: Okay. We will end the first side of the second tape of the Jim Mason interview here, and we'll turn over to the next side.

[End Tape 3, Side A; Begin Tape 3, Side B]

Rowe: Now, it strikes me, Jim, that what was, as it were, a strength in the early 1970s—your link with the feminist movement and the racial consciousness movement—had turned into something of a liability in the mid-1980s to the extent that you were unable to change the way you saw social movements developing. The animal advocacy movement was developing in a

much more kind of mainstream, ad hoc, hierarchical way, whereas you wanted a more radical grassroots organization. Do you feel that that is a true reflection of the situation?

Mason: Yes. The way I felt at the time was the animal movement was just short on—although it seemed like it was overdoing itself on philosophy and philosophers. My God, it seems like everybody was a philosopher in those days and there were like umpteen gazillion versions of the argument for animal rights, which was good—but there wasn't equal amount of time being spent on discussing strategy, direction, mission, goals, like sitting down and having a political plan. But I wasn't able to deal with it then.

And now that I know more, I think, I realize that, hey, this is America. This is the United States. Americans don't have political plans and strategies. We're not a very political country. We just kind of do things haphazardly. The feminist movement did the same thing. We just aren't a very politically formulated bunch over here. We don't have a Left. We don't have a progressive movement in this country of any magnitude, of any stature. We might have had once, but it's been dead for years.

So the animal movement was really developing in all directions on all levels at all times. It was just out of control. It just had to—I guess it just had to go that way. I mean, no one could control it. No one could direct it. No one could provide leadership. It just seemed to be—but yet I was frustrated because I was trying to and other people were trying to, saying, “Look, we've got to discuss this trend, and we've got to discuss this idea.” We tried to do that in the pages of Agenda and it just wore a lot of people out. They didn't want to hear about it.

Rowe: Did it wear you out?

Mason: Yes, at some point. I think—you know, when you're an editor of a publication like that you have a very short useful life. You have a half-life like some radioactive material. You just can't do that for a long period of time. I thought, when power struggles and the conflicts arose, and considering that I had already been doing it for six or seven years, I thought, “Maybe I should just get out of this and let someone else deal with all of this stuff.” Because I was getting to the point where I was just getting burned out. I thought maybe I was getting too cynical to be able to deal with it.

Rowe: So you retired to Missouri in 1986.

Mason: Actually, I didn't go back to Missouri yet in '86. I left Agenda and I took a job working in construction. I just wanted to get away from it all. I just thought, “I don't want any more of this crap. I don't want any more of this mail. I don't want any more of these phone calls.” I took a job working as a carpenter working with a crew in construction building houses. For a while it was bliss. It was like peaceful silence, work with your hands, show up at the job every day, make some money, go home at night and you've done something. It was like the opposite of frustration and setback and all that. So it was therapeutic for me to do that kind of work for a

while. And I had to. I had to have a living. I couldn't go back and practice law. Everyone was saying, "Well, you're a lawyer. Why didn't you start a law practice?" Well, you don't just start a law practice like that. It takes years to start a law practice. And I wanted to remain an activist. I didn't want to just drop activism and start a law practice and get back into that rut again.

Rowe: How did you want to remain an activist? What did you want to do?

Mason: Well, I didn't know exactly at that time. In '86 when I was out of Agenda and working at this job, I thought, "Well, I just need a job. I just need a paycheck, get my act together and get my head together, pay off some debts, and in a few months I'll figure it out." What came out of that, fortunately, was getting back to work on writing my book, on writing what became An Unnatural Order. Because the ideas for that book emerged as early as 1980 when I finished Animal Factories.

I had finished—when I write a book, as I did Animal Factories, there's always at least one huge idea that comes out of the work on that book that you can't put in that book because you didn't know the idea when you were planning that book. And the big idea that came out of finishing up Animal Factories was: "What's this domestication of animals thing?" What happened there? How did that work? And what has it done to us? It was way beyond the scope of Animal Factories.

Rowe: Did you know how to research for that information? How did you know where to look?

Mason: I had already come across quite a bit of stuff on the domestication of animals in the course of my researching the industries—the pig breeders and the cattle breeders and all that. I had already touched on it, and it fascinated me. So there was this huge area that I was wanting to get into and study it to death. I was so curious about it. As early as '81 I started an outline that was to become the book.

The gist of the idea that early was, how did domestication occur, how did we do it, why did we do it, and what has it done to us, what has it done to our culture, what has it done to human beings' ways of living, what was the impact on us? I had this flimsy idea about it then. So with Agenda I got so busy in the first half of the 80s, all those ideas went on the shelf. I didn't even get to look at that stuff until '86 when I left Agenda. So it was a good opportunity, even though I was bummed out.

I quit Agenda voluntarily, but in effect I was forced out of it. I created conditions that forced me out. It was no longer tenable for me to work there. So by taking this job in construction and just having a paycheck and having some peace and quiet in my life for a change, I was able to get back to that research. So for a few years I pored into that and tried to develop the idea better, tried to do more research, more reading, more notes.

Then, bingo, in 1988, I think it was, Crown Publishers calls me up out of the blue literally one afternoon. I'm sitting there, phone rings, and they say, "Would you like to revise Animal Factories?" Here I was, about to write another book. The publisher says, "We'll pay you so much money, 3000 bucks, revise it, update it. We're going to release it for a 1990 reissue."

Rowe: How had the sales been? Had they been going up slowly?

Mason: They had picked up a bit. There was interest in the book. There were beginning to be some sales. The movement had finally noticed it. Some groups were beginning to sell it. The publisher felt that it was ahead of its time, that it really should have come out in 1990 because 1980 was too early. Throughout the 80s there was a lot of information about additives in food, about antibiotics in animal products, about the health consequences of factory farming, were coming out. So it was much more timely, so they wanted to reissue it. So I did it. I had to put my work on the new book on hold. I really dropped it for almost two years to work on the revision, and I didn't get to get back to An Unnatural Order until after 1990 when the revision of Animal Factories came out again, the '90 version of it.

Rowe: Okay. Let's go back to the 80s then, the late 80s. It's such a huge area to deal with, that period. What were your overriding feelings, as it were, looking from your almost Roman exile out there in the countryside upon the heat and flurry of the politics of the animal rights movement and also the consolidation of big groups and big marches and big fur rallies? What was your view of what was going on? Was it, "Great, but I can't be part of that right now"?

Mason: Yes. I was in a bad state in those days because I was out of the movement. I didn't have a platform. I wasn't speaking. I wasn't writing. I wasn't doing much. But I was in touch. So I felt castrated or something. It felt like I had been put out to pasture. I was no longer doing anything. I was no longer useful. I was beginning to have mixed feelings about having a job in construction that took up all my time, that I didn't have time for activism. And for a very short period of time I went to work with Friends of Animals. When Priscilla Feral and some other people took over Friends of Animals when Alice was removed from the presidency, I had an opportunity to work there. But it didn't last long. Again, some details—

Rowe: Personal problems.

Mason: Conflicts there. I wouldn't want to go into great detail. Needless to say, Priscilla and I could not see eye to eye on the leadership of the organization, and she was clearly in power and control and I wasn't. It became clear to me after several months that I was just an employee and I didn't have much to say about things. So I left again because I don't like to be in that kind of a dependent situation. So if I couldn't do what I wanted, why stay? I had a paycheck doing something else, so I went back to construction.

So I had these episodes where I would go back and forth into the movement. I would go to a meeting here or a conference there. I had one foot in and one foot out. I think it was along

in those years that PETA had the go-round with NEAVS [New England Anti-Vivisection Society] in Boston, and all those issues were raised about the control of NEAVS. I think they uncovered some corruption up there. So I was sort of on the fringes of things. I didn't really have—

Rowe: Did you like that? Did you resent it?

Mason: A little resentment, a little feeling that I had been kept out of the movement. I still felt kind of bitter in those days, felt like I had been thrown out of this and thrown out of that.

Rowe: What did you feel that you had to contribute that was missing?

Mason: I felt that Animal Factories was just being born again. I mean, here was this book that they had missed the first time around, and “Hey, folks, wake up. It's here again, the 1990 version.” Of course, you know how paperbacks are and revisions—they never get reviewed. They don't get noticed; they get lost. So it didn't get much attention again in 1990. It really didn't get as much publicity as it got in 1980. But at least the movement began to use it a little bit more.

I felt that I was on to something with—the book An Unnatural Order was coming to a point where I had a pretty substantial proposal.¹⁸ I had researched it enough by that time. By 1990 I had been working on it for almost ten years, and I really was able to refine my ideas quite a bit. So I was really getting motivated to not try to fight and fuss with the movement anymore, not try to recover my position.

One of the things that made it painful leaving Agenda was I stayed on the board. It was like the pain of being involved in a divorce or a nasty divorce and you still have to deal with your ex-spouse because of the kids. I was part of the board, and it was very painful to go to the meetings and not have much of a say, you know.

Rowe: Did you not like the direction the magazine was going?

Mason: Oh, not so much. At the time I did, but I think it was just personal.

Rowe: Sour grapes.

Mason: Sour grapes and jealousy and petty things like that. In retrospect, there weren't any great big issues that I can recall. I just felt that I was not included and felt like certain elements there were—not only was I not included, but I felt that there were sometimes indications that I was being deliberately minimized there. Maybe it was my overreaction, maybe not. Maybe they felt that they had to remove my shadow from the magazine so they could go on and take their own directions. So probably, in retrospect, I should have gotten out completely and it might

¹⁸ Copy attached.

have been a lot better. But I was half in and half out for a number of years, throughout the 80s and into the 90s. I was still on the board.

Rowe: What was your perspective on the big march on Washington in 1990?

Mason: I didn't go to either march. I felt they were a waste of money.

Rowe: "Either" being the one in 1996 as well.

Mason: The first one and the second one. Again—

Rowe: You thought they were just a rallying cry to make people feel good.

Mason: Yes. It was a feel-good thing. And I started calculating the expense of it and I realized how many people went there and what their travel costs were, what the lodging costs were, how much money the grassroots people spent going to that thing, and I came up with a figure—it was around \$5 million. I thought, "My God, if we could just put this \$5 million into a fund and buy full-page ads in the major papers we would have made a much bigger splash across this country than we did with that showy sort of self-aggrandizing [thing]." What I think it was, it was a platform for a lot of star types who wanted to speak to a large audience.

Rowe: Did you feel though that they were trying in some ways to model themselves on the civil rights march or that there was an attempt to sort of deal with Washington, deal with public policy?

Mason: Sure.

Rowe: Do you think the public policy aspects could have been dealt with in a more effective way?

Mason: I felt all of that. I heard all of those arguments, and I agreed with them. It's just that I thought that they denied the reality of the Washington protest scene. Even then, by 19—what was the first one? '91?

Rowe: 1990.

Mason: '90. I had spent time in Washington. I had lived in Washington for months at a time doing research. I knew from firsthand experience being in the Washington scene that you don't really get noticed in Washington, DC unless you can produce about 100,000 people. I mean, they have protests in that city of thousands of people all the time, and they never make the papers. Also, by 1990 that initial wave of media fascination and interest in animal rights had really turned. They weren't so crazy about us anymore. They were backing away from us already by 1990.

Rowe: This was part of the general backlash against social movements or was it specifically against the animal rights movement?

Mason: No, it was because they were tired of the animal rights movement. You know how news organizations are. They only cover a story for so many years and it's not news anymore. [Tape interruption].

Rowe: We just stopped the tape briefly, and now we're continuing.

Mason: The marches. We were talking about—

Rowe: Was there still that air—so you're suggesting there was still that air of political naïveté about the movement as a whole.

Mason: Yes. They weren't noticing the realities that the media had lost interest in us. We weren't news anymore. The anti-animal rights propaganda machines had kicked in by 1990. The agribusiness people and the laboratory people had already started attacking us. We were starting to get bad press. So I felt that to try to stage this thing and spend all of this money to get these people together to try to get favorable coverage was really not only naïve but actually kind of misguided. So I wasn't very supportive of the marches, and I was kind of an outcast at the time because I wasn't gung-ho about these marches and wasn't part of the clique that was putting them on. I just felt like we would have gotten more attention if we had bought pages in the New York Times, picked ten daily papers. Five million dollars would have bought full-page ads in ten daily papers for six months or whatever.

Rowe: So now let's go back to An Unnatural Order, which was finally published by Simon & Schuster in 1993. You're very influenced by the work of Paul Shepard.

Mason: Right. Especially.

Rowe: How did you find out about his material? How did you know about his material? And how did it make you rethink the ideas about animals?

Mason: Shepard's books. I'm trying to think of the one. I think it was because the book Thinking Animals and the Evolution of Human Intelligence,¹⁹ I believe it was—that title kept showing up over and over again in a lot of the stuff I was reading. And I can't remember which stuff I was reading. But once you research, once you get immersed into an area, say the origin of domestication, a lot of book titles keep coming up over and over again. That one came up. What you do is you detect those and you [say], "Now I've got to find out what this is all about." And I

¹⁹ Paul Shepard, Thinking Animals: Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence (New York: Viking, 1978).

read it—tried to read it. [Laughter]. That particular book of Shepard's—maybe I'm not very intelligent, but I had to read it about four or five times before those ideas began to sort of penetrate the inner parts of my brain. I think it's a very important book. Even his own community of the deep ecology movement—I think they still don't fully appreciate the profundity of his ideas. They're hard to take. He wasn't a great writer. He wasn't able to put things simply; he's not that articulate. The depth of his thinking processes are much greater than his verbal skills.

Rowe: Correct me if I'm wrong, but his idea is that animals are profoundly important in the actual psychological makeup of the human being, that they are intimately involved as exemplars and teachers and explicators of the natural world within which human beings evolved, that they are framers of our spiritual and psychological and mental apparatus. Now, I want you to comment on how that influenced your book and how it influenced your feelings about the animal advocacy movement: because you became really an anthropologist and a psychologist or one of those things. Then I want you to reflect back on how Shepard may have made you understand your early feelings about animals.

Mason: That's the meat of the matter, isn't it? Well, the basic idea of Shepard's is well-put as you described it—that animals have had an influence on our minds for so long, evolutionarily speaking, that they're in a way wired into our minds, which is to say our culture as well. And the evidence of that is all spelled out in that book, Thinking Animals. A couple of examples: One is the universality of the presence of animals in creation stories. Anybody who knows anything about anthropology knows that creation stories are very important stories for any culture, for any ethnic group, for any language group. They're the most important folk tale of all because they really set out the worldview of those people, whether they be Native Americans or Equatorial Africans or Asian nomads, whatever. But it's amazing, it's uncanny, that creation stories the world over, including our own—you know, the Genesis creation story of the Western culture—animals are very important from the beginning for us. When the world is created, animals are there. So this tells us a lot about the importance of animals in the human realm or they wouldn't be there at all.

Anyway, that's just an example of Shepard's point that animals are very important in the human mind and always have been, in the Ice Age as well as today. So there are many examples of it which I won't go into detail about. Just read the books, those who are curious.

So I thought if animals are that important to the human mind, if they're so wired into our existence and our culture, for God's sake, there had to be some tremendous impact on us when we domesticated them, when we enslaved them, when we completely changed the relationship that human beings had had prehistorically with animals. We went from a way of seeing animals as partners on the planet, as the essential other beings, fellow travelers, neighbors, whatever you want to call it. And you look at the importance of animals in totemism, the way Native American people and other tribal people saw animals as their ancestors. How all of that was damaged and how all of that was injured by the enslavement of animals and the reduction of them to property,

as things—I thought, “This is the most important thing there is. This is incredible, what we’ve done to ourselves by changing our relationship with animals, by taking the souls from animals and turning them into slaves.” I thought that none of us really have ever probed the significance of that change and how it’s affected culture ever since the domestication process began. Shepard himself touched on this some. He didn’t go into it quite as much ad nauseam as I did, but the impacts of domestication, he and others have probed some.

Rowe: Your argument also suggests that, in fact, enslavement may have begun culture.

Mason: Yes. It was the model.

Rowe: The model of culture.

Mason: There is some evidence that the enslavement of animals or the ways of keeping and breeding livestock were a model for the first slavery, which is the slavery of women—females who were war captives in the wars of—the imperialist wars between the city-states of the ancient Middle East. After these major battles, the victors would have a lot of survivors, the enemy survivors—men, women, and children. They usually killed the men and enslaved the women and children. Then after time, this became sort of a traditional practice. It became an acceptable practice. And they began to sell their captives, and commodity slavery began—the buying and selling of human beings.

Rowe: How did these views then impact upon your idea about animal advocacy as such? How did you see what you were writing about changing or informing the way people advocated for animals?

Mason: I thought that I had finally created and produced the great tool that would show the unity of oppression. We had always had this notion in the animal rights movement that—there’s a slogan that they used: Animal Rights is Human Rights. And those were the right statements, but they didn’t have any depth or analysis to them. It was easy to say that, but why? But I thought this would explain it. I wanted to write a book that you could hand to a feminist who wore a fur coat and made fun of animal rights crazies, or to a leftist, someone who’s working on social justice and anti-racist work or a gay activist who thinks we’re wasting our time, as so many of them do because we’re not addressing human causes. I thought I’d produce something that I could hand to them and say, “Here. Here’s why animals are important. This is important because this is basic. This is a source for the oppressions that you’re fighting.” Of course, the trick is to get them to read the book, isn’t it? Hardly anybody wants to read a book, especially one that penetrates their denials and their cultural biases. So that’s been the struggle ever since, is to get it noticed and get it read.

Rowe: Now, why don’t you reflect back to your own psychological underpinning, the way you were feeling about animals, because you were involved in agri-culture—as you frame it, agri with a hyphen culture—and yet you also were feeling very sensitive to animals at that point. So

there was a process of denial that was going on even as you were moving through the stages of youth into adulthood. Did writing a book make you reflect back on your early life?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: How?

Mason: It enabled me to understand a lot of things about why I had these reactions then. In writing the book I came to understand how embedded animals are—not only in my own personal life but in every human being’s life—and that these weren’t aberrant experiences. It was like when you were a child and you have weird sexual experiences, you feel crazy having them at the time, but as you mature and get older you come to understand them in context and you don’t feel so bad that you masturbated when you were six or something like that. It was the same way with what I had thought up until then were these odd experiences with animals and that I was out of synch or eccentric or something.

Rowe: Was it a psychological rite of passage for you?

Mason: Yes, it was. I came to understand my own sensitivities and compassions, that it wasn’t that my parents were bad. None of my family was inadequate or any of that. I didn’t blame anybody anymore. It was like, hey, it was par for the course. And I also thought that—I realized that these experiences couldn’t possibly be unique to me. There was nothing special about me having these reactions to this animal cruelty. They were probably universal experiences. Probably every other farm kid had some of this and they’re afraid to talk about it. Today I keep trying to search for farm kids who have become animal rights activists who will speak out about their own reactions to those things, because I’ve found out in passing that a lot of kids have strong reactions to the cruelties that they see and experience. Yet the peer group, the parents, the adults who are in denial, really don’t want them to have those reactions. They suppress that.

Rowe: Was the book a catharsis for you?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: It not only made you aware of things, but it somehow brought peace of mind to you?

Mason: Yes, it did, because I’ve felt a lot of confidence now about some ideas that five or ten years earlier I had felt were really flaky, like too far out. Like one of the most far out ones, which became confirmed when I wrote the book and I began to get mail from readers—people in anthropology—one of the most far out ideas, and I was almost afraid to write about it, was that the Western notion of God—the patriarchal God, Jehovah who is mentioned in the Bible in the Old and New Testaments—was a creation of shepherd folk. It would have been sheep and goat and cattle herding people who would invent such an all-powerful, angry, patriarchal father, a jealous god, a vindictive god. In other words, a great shepherd who ruled over their tribe like a

flock. I thought, “That’s going pretty far, Jim. You’d better be careful or they’ll think you don’t have any credibility.”

Well, I wrote it anyway. I thought, “Well, it’s a plausible theory.” And sure enough I get a letter from a reader who’s an anthropologist somewhere, and he sends me some photocopies, some Xeroxes, of quite a few pages from a textbook where this whole idea is set out.²⁰ It had been studied empirically. Anthropologists have actually done cross-cultural studies with nomadic peoples versus other types of cultures. There’s a high incidence of monotheism—and not only monotheism but patriarchal monotheism—there’s a high incidence of slavery and social injustice and all these things I talked about in the book in these herding cultures. So it was very confirming to hear that.

Rowe: So in 1993 then you had, again, thrown yourself onto the great and welcoming arms of readers around the world to hope that your book would be hugely success[ful]. Yet perhaps unsurprisingly, given it is such a complex and important but heady book, perhaps, it was not going to figure on the New York Times bestseller lists. Did you feel that people responded to this book differently than your previous versions of Animal Factories?

Mason: Yes, I think so. I think the way to describe the response to the book was it was small and vehement, or small and enthusiastic. There was a small fraction of readers who really were crazy about this book. I got some of the most amazing letters from readers. So it wasn’t widely read, but it had a zealous following but a very small following, which isn’t good enough to keep publishers happy, unfortunately.

Rowe: And the publisher basically made the book out of print within a year, I think.

Mason: A year to the day practically. And it sold almost 8,000 copies hardcover, but I guess that’s not enough for a big publisher like Simon & Schuster. So they lost interest in it.

Rowe: So what did you want to do when the book had been written? Where did you feel that your direction within the animal rights movement or maybe outside the animal rights movement would be heading?

Mason: Again, at the risk of sounding like a whiner—one of these sessions can turn into a whining session—but I guess for the record, the historical record, I need to point that again I lapsed into a horrible depression in the wake of that book, a kind of a postpartum depression that went on for a year or so, which I struggled against pretty effectively without resort to psychiatry and drugs and all the usual crap. I just made myself exercise and stay outdoors as much as possible and return to the bosom of my family again, because at this point in the mid-90s my parents were in their eighties. I knew they were entering the ends of their lives, and I wanted—

²⁰ Gerhard Lenski and Jean Lenski, Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, c.1982). Copies of pages from the book attached.

since it was obvious to me that I wasn't accomplishing a hell of a lot, I thought the least I can do is go home and take care of them, which I did in the mid-90s. I relocated myself to Missouri again.

I guess I got depressed again because of the frustration over the book, that it wasn't received so very well, it wasn't widely read, it didn't create a stink. My publisher thought—Simon & Schuster thought that because it was so controversial that the sheer shock value of it again, the controversy value of it, might kick up a stink. It got a great review in Publisher's Weekly the first week, and it was a starred review, which is a big deal in the publishing world.²¹ The editorial staff called me and they were all squealing over the phone, "My God, we got a starred review in Publisher's Weekly. This is going to launch reviews. This is going to launch coverage. It's going to be big." And it disappeared. There was nothing after that.

Rowe: Do you feel that the book disappeared because it was also about animals and because the mainstream press doesn't know how to talk about animals, let alone whether they're positive or negative towards the thing?

Mason: Yes. As a publisher yourself, you know what was wrong with that book. It was hard to describe in three words. Like they say in Hollywood: If you can't describe a film idea in five words, it won't sell. How do you describe An Unnatural Order? It covers everything. It's a feminist book, it's about animals, it's about nature, it's about culture, it's about religion, it's about sex. The average book salesman cannot go anywhere and describe this book effectively. I can't even myself.

Rowe: Let's go back to the mid-1990s then. The animal rights movement—had it, in your perspective, changed its focus? What did it look like in the mid-1990s from your perspective?

Mason: Well, I was sort of out of touch a lot because I was living in Missouri and, again, you know, when you're depressed and you're sort of disgusted you don't keep on the things. I didn't go to so many conferences. I had to take a full-time job so I wasn't free to travel about and schmooze and rub elbows with everybody. I didn't get to go to The Summit²² and I didn't get to go to the Genesis Awards. I didn't go to any of those things in those years. I was in touch a little bit through—

Rowe: Genesis Awards were the awards given out to media or good programs.

Mason: Right. In L.A., that showbiz thing. But I did stay in touch a bit, because through a network of activists I did get some really good speaking gigs. One of the positive things that came out of the book and the aftermath of the book—I don't want to whine about it being all

²¹ Copy attached.

²² The Summit, an annual meeting of the heads of U.S. animal rights organizations, is intended to promote cooperation within and direction for the movement.

bad. Some good friends of mine in various parts of the country—in the far east, the northeast, in the south and Virginia, and the midwest—set me up at colleges where I did lectures where the college came up with the money and made it possible to travel there and speak. I really had some good experiences doing that, because I was able to talk about the book in front of live audiences where you'd have academics and students and people there that were educated enough to understand the stuff. I had some very good interchanges with people.

I was scared to death at first that I would be going to the University of Virginia or the University of Iowa or one of these elite private schools somewhere in the midwest and be called on the carpet for some of my crazy ideas in that book. I was so delighted after five or six of these gigs to find out that there were anthropologists and people in the audiences and they loved it. They loved the discussion of it. They loved that somebody was getting into this meat. In fact, the book was adopted by one of the anthropologists and became used as a textbook in anthropology, I think at the University of Connecticut. So I was getting some good confirmation there.

Rowe: Did you feel that academics were transposing that into an awareness of how we should deal with animals today, or was it really more of an academic exercise, a kind of anthropological history which only had relevance to 10,000 years before the common era?

Mason: Yes. It was received intellectually with academics. They didn't really see the political significance of it.

But that was my little exposure and my remaining connection with the animal movement, such as it was, doing those lectures. There were activists at those lectures. I got to talk shop with activists. I got to find out what was going on in the movement through people like that. So I did keep in touch with the movement during those years, I just didn't go to movement functions very much. I felt: I'm off on my own, I'm doing my lectures, I'm reaching people at colleges and universities.

A good example of the success of the book there was that we were reaching people who were not animal activists. I was reaching people that were coming from the other progressive causes. Case in point—this is one of many. University of Virginia one night on a Friday night, the animal rights group and some other student groups sponsored the talk. We had over a hundred people there, maybe 125 people, and standing room only, a packed room. The activists that sponsored the thing, just a small little student group, they were like—their jaws were dropping, saying, “We can't believe it. We counted. We only knew thirteen people in that crowd.” It had drawn black people, feminist scholars, anthropologists. We had drawn people all over because of the publicity that had been given to the subjects that were going to be covered in the lecture. We're going to talk about racism; we're going to talk about women's oppression; we're going to talk about religion; all of these things. It drew a real broad spectrum crowd of progressive folks. So that was the beauty of it. I was feeling like, “Well, hell, I don't really need to keep in touch with the animal rights movement that much because I'm actually enjoying this

dialogue with all these other progressives. I'm actually able to talk about racism with black student activists.”

Rowe: Did you feel in some ways you were going back to your roots in the late-1960s, early 70s before you became involved with the animal rights movement?

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: Re-radicalizing yourself.

Mason: Yes. I felt that, wow, this is touching some nerves. We're getting a positive response here. We're getting a dialogue about the roots of racism and women's oppression. I'm able to talk with people who are active in these causes—campus activists and faculty people—about some of these roots. We seemed to have a real good discussion. So although I was depressed, by and large, because the book was not doing well, when I would go out around the country and do these talks, it opened my eyes that, yes, there is some very small interest in these issues and you just need to keep going out there and keep talking to them and keep pushing the book.

Rowe: Okay. The book went out of print and then republished by Continuum in 1996.

Mason: Yes, thanks to you. [Laughter].

Rowe: The last three years of the 20th century have seen you talking about the book and being invited to various places, et cetera, et cetera. It has now been thirty years since you became interested in animal advocacy and animals in particular. You have moved from jokingly formulated the idea that animals have rights to the very possibility that great apes in some part of the world will be afforded some kind of legal standing. Peter Singer is now at Princeton University, law schools are offering animal rights law in their law schools—clearly the movement has moved a long, long way. What's your overall idea about the way the movement has developed and matured and how your place in it, the ideas that you espoused in the movement?

Mason: I'm feeling much better about it, much more positive, because with the role I have now, it's a very good role. I never thought I'd have a position like this. I'm in touch again with a lot of grassroots groups in a very positive way. I'm able to give them money because I work for foundations. I'm able to take some of the wealth of the movement out to some of the poorest and the most backward areas where it's needed the most. I'm in touch with the energy and the vitality and the zeal of grassroots activists in a way that I haven't been really since the late 70s to early 80s. I'm seeing signs and a lot of signs in a lot of places—like Oklahoma and Arkansas—that people are just getting very pragmatic about the kind of change, the kind of advocacy that they're doing. They're willing to work with people in their community who are not there into animal rights, or even animal welfare for that matter. I'm seeing activists who are becoming

really good political activists now. They're dealing with reality. They're dealing with their communities.

Rowe: They're mature in that political way.

Mason: Yes.

Rowe: Do you feel that they arrived at that place because of all of the ins and outs of the animal rights movement?

Mason: Yes. I have a very strong sense—and this is from firsthand conversations with them—that many of them have become tired of the bickering and the infighting and the ideological squabbles and the emphasis on philosophy and all the crap that came down in the 70s and 80s that fascinated them at the time. But now it just seems irrelevant to them. Well, not irrelevant, but they're past it. Now the thing is to get to work and to rescue and rehabilitate and save as many animals as they can. It has a lot to do with companion animals, but there's also a lot of work with farm animals and exotics—the spin-offs, the castaways, the unwanted animals. And they're doing it not only single-handedly in some of the most impossible places, but in a few places some of these people have been successful in engaging the communities around them—not necessarily converting them to animal rights and vegetarianism but getting the civic groups involved, especially in things like spaying and neutering, and taking a bit more responsibility for the problems of pet ownership and the uncontrolled breeding of animals and taking care of strays and things like that, that some of these groups are able to do rather effectively in some impossible communities in rural Kansas and the backwoods of Arkansas.

Rowe: What about the young people in the movement? Do you see them as different from a generation before, the generation who have now become the heads of the organizations?

Mason: Well, there are a lot of different elements, I guess, in the young people. I guess there are some who still want to do strictly ALF [Animal Liberation Front], direct action-type stuff and thinking that that will bring about great change through that kind of radical action. I'm not in touch with those people as much, so I don't know about that wing of the efforts. But the young people that I'm in touch with, animal rights people, seem like they're more patient. I don't know that they're a lot more politically sophisticated than they were then, but they're working with people who are. They're working with people who have been around the block, so to speak. They've been through two decades of animal rights shenanigans, and now they're realizing that the best thing we can do is set an example, quit bickering over philosophy and ideology and rights versus welfare and all of those straw issues, and just show the community how they can do something—how we can reach their kids in the schools, how we can work the civic groups and actually change the relationships with animals and the regard that people have with animals, even if it's only in the companion animal area for a while, community by community in some of the most impossible areas, and have it done with a sense that it's a good thing to do, that it's not a bunch of whackos out there.

I think I see that happening slowly and quietly around the country, and it's a very nice development. It's a very good political development. It's a very substantial thing for us as activist animal rights people who had a cause that was vilified in the press ten years ago to now be working with the Kiwanis Club and the Lions Club getting animals spayed and neutered in rural Kansas. I wish I could say that this were happening in every county in every state in the country. Unfortunately, it's not. But the fact that it's happening in these spots tells me that it's going to be happening maybe in another decade maybe more widely and more uniformly than you might think, because there are some substantial developments in some areas. In West Virginia and Virginia there are several counties that have reduced the pet killing in the shelters. New Hampshire has a statewide program that brought the number of kills way down. I think there is some really demonstrably effective work on companion animal population issues—spaying and neutering, adoptions, no kill directions. Those things are happening now.

Rowe: Are there people coming into the fold, groups of people that you would have been surprised to see earlier on—and not just civic groups, but I'm also talking about organic farming, maybe people involved with environmental justice who are sitting downwind of hog farms. Do you see other people emerging or forming contacts there?

Mason: Yes, actually. I was thinking as you said that that the only action I see against factory farming now is coming—I mean, the real hands-on direct action activism is coming from two directions. It's coming from some family farm, small farm advocacy groups and environmentalists, not from the animal rights movement. Now, we have Gene and Lorri Bauston and others that have sanctuaries, putting out factory farming information on factory farming. But the real direct campaigns against corporate hog factories in Missouri and in Iowa and in Oklahoma and in places like that are coming from environmentalist and farm diversity groups. I think that's great. I think that—I kind of chuckled about it that those are the two groups I was trying to reach in the 80s when I was writing Animal Factories and they had nothing whatsoever to do with me then. I think that was because they were afraid of an animal rights angle. I really strongly feel that it scared them. I remember writing to Ralph Nader, for example, people like that, and I'd get no response. I think the fact that the book contained concern for animals and a very brief discussion of animal rights was the kiss of death.

Rowe: Do you think people are still scared of animal rights?

Mason: I think those advocacy groups realize that they probably had better not coalesce with animal rights groups, they had better not include animal rights groups in what they're doing, because it might ruin their chances of getting political support.

[End Tape 3, Side B; Begin Tape 4, Side A]

Rowe: Jim, we were talking about environmental activists and small farm activists who are the ones that are really protesting the pollution of factory farming as opposed to the animal rights

movement. We have mentioned that they are nervous about aligning themselves or affiliating themselves with the animal rights movement because they would not be as effective. Could you provide a brief example of that?

Mason: Well, I guess I'd have to say Karen Davis, of course, an animal rights activist, is campaigning on battery hens, so I shouldn't forget that there is an animal group that is making a direct challenge to factory farming there.

But on corporate hog farming and factory farming in the farm states, it's just coming from those two kinds of groups. I know a case in point from a personal relationship of mine of somebody who is involved with the Farm Bureau, which is the main pro-agribusiness, anti-animal rights farm organization. It has state and county level organizations all over the country. In one region of Missouri there was an element within the Farm Bureau that fought corporate hog factories in that area. There was a big company—Tyson Foods was going to bring in corporate farms, pig farms. They got together—"they" meaning this Farm Bureau bunch—got together a petition drive to keep them out of there. And in their petition: "We, the undersigned, want corporate hog factories out of Missouri because they pollute the environment, they create risk for human health with drugs," you know, all of the issues, including "they're cruel to animals" was in there. The petition went around and thousands of people signed it. The word got back to the Farm Bureau that the petition had this language in it, and they made the people take the "cruelty to animals" language out of the petition. Everything else was okay. It's okay to circulate a petition on pollution, drugs in meat, milk, and eggs, and destroying small farms. Those three issues are okay. But you can't raise cruelty to animals. That's a no-no. So they had to take that out of the petition.

Rowe: So in a way human beings are still in denial, still unable to cope with the primacy of animals within our consciousness that we've talked about in An Unnatural Order, still unable to deal with the feelings that you had when you were a young boy growing up on the farm. Do you foresee that time ever ending?

Mason: There is this strange combination of elements or factors that makes it so difficult for the animal rights movement, because here we are trying to engage the public, the rest of the citizenry, into recognizing something that their culture has very carefully put them into denial about. I mean, it starts in your childhood, as it did in mine. The culture, the peer pressure, the pressure from the adults—the whole society conspires to keep us in denial about what we're doing to animals because the system of exploitation can't function without that denial. It wouldn't last a week if everyone in the country knew about the realities of the details of suffering involved in the exploitation of animals. So the culture has to keep it under hat. And here we are—and animals are so important to everyone in that culture that the denial is—I think it's extra duty, heavy duty industrial strength denial. It's not an easy denial to penetrate.

Yet the animal rights movement here has the task of waking these people up and shaking them out of their denial about what they're doing to animals. As I say, it's a degree of denial

that's especially difficult because animals are so important to us. It's an irony of our makeup, of our composition, that the importance of animals itself makes it difficult for society to undo what it has done to itself.

Rowe: How can that schism be healed practically? What needs to happen?

Mason: I think it's important to get across the point—I mean, it's not just peddling my book, because I wrote the book to get this idea out. And if I can't get it out by myself, then others have to get out the same idea. It has to be made a strategy of animal rights activism to explain to the rest of the society how important animals are to us. This is beginning to happen a little bit and there are some spin-offs from the idea I set out in the book An Unnatural Order.

Some spin-offs, some other approaches to getting this idea across, are what a couple groups are doing now, is showing the links between animal cruelty and these other forms of violence, these murders, for example, and wife battering and so forth. These are some real live links that are being shown. I think a couple of groups had campaigns. HSUS has a campaign on that. PsyETA [Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] has a campaign on that. It's coming out in bits and pieces. I think Carol Adams has done some stuff on this—the actual documenting of the links between attitudes towards animals and oppression or brutality or cruelty to people. I think when we do that, when we show the rest of the society that this is not trivial stuff, this is not marginal stuff, this is not a frivolous pursuit here, that we're concerned about animals not only for their own sake but because our oppression of animals has repercussions for us as well. When we can get this across to decision-makers, people who are in positions of influence, people in the media, people in the courts, people in legislatures, I think they'll see the animal rights movement in a different light, in a more positive light.

We had an initial wave of success in media coverage in the early 80s. They loved us for a few years. Then when they tired of us and the anti-animal rights propaganda kicked in, they vilified us and gave us a bad name, which we're now still suffering under. The animal rights movement gets a lot of bad press from time to time because, I think, because our opponents are out there kicking up bad press. The fur industry is trying to defeat us. The agribusiness interests are trying to defeat us. So we've got a lot of that to overcome. And lately we've had this really bad press from these direct action campaigns, when people are freeing animals and busting up laboratories and getting arrested and doing these kinds of things—not that I totally disapprove of those tactics, it's just that I wonder if they're having the desired effect. I wonder if they're really effectively promoting animal rights or if the result of them, the unintended result of these actions, is that it just adds fuel to the fire of our enemies. It gives us ongoing bad press and basically prejudices the public against what we're doing.

Rowe: You feel that success will come about through these specific programs that you're seeing merging not only within local communities involved with spaying and neutering and other companion animal issues but also dealing with the violence against women and children and

violence against animals connection and the link between violent behavior later on in life and violent behavior towards animals as children, as is evidenced by these murders.

Mason: Yes. Getting across the idea that animals are important in human beings' lives, whether as pets or whether as otherwise. We need animals, like Paul Shepard says and as I tried to explain in An Unnatural Order. If we can get this across, then the animal rights movement will go through another phase of positive growth and improved public opinion.

[End of Session].

[End of Interview].

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