

Mike Gelfand
Narrator

Rob Hahn
Interviewer

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RH: Why don't you just introduce yourself real quickly.

MG: I'm Mike Gelfand. I'm a veteran journalist and broadcaster and worked for the Minneapolis Tribune. But actually, it started with the Minnesota Daily right here. Not, right here. We were over in the University campus then in Murphy Hall. I started at the Minnesota Daily and then I went to the Minneapolis Tribune, then I went to the—or sorry, I went to the Wall Street Journal in Chicago, and then Minneapolis Tribune. Then eventually, after the papers merged, as journalism was dying, I went into radio. Then when radio was dying, I retired.

RH: I'm Rob Hahn. I'll be asking the questions. It's April 4, 2019, and we are in the offices—the current offices of the Minnesota Daily at the University of Minnesota. First and foremost, I love personal stories and recollections like the one you are telling me about—Nick Coleman. It takes a theme but it adds personal color to it. The more of those—

MG: It's a vivid story and the whole—

RH: The more of those are the better.

MG: The whole Red Barn thing was—that was, I think for many of us, it was—it might have been the highlight of my whole career as a journalist. I was a journalist—if you count The Daily, which I do because after all, we were salaried and we were out there. It wasn't like this, you know. We were out there writing stories every single day and producing a pretty large newspaper. In terms of the news hole, probably five times the news hole of the St. Paul paper. It was a big thing. Then I worked for the Wall Street Journal and I worked for the Minneapolis Tribune. I think I probably had more vivid memories of the Red Barn bust that night—the night of May 5, 1970—then just about any story I've covered. I mean, I covered a lot of stories that made me laugh and cry. Some of the stories haunt me to this day. But in terms of sheer adrenalin and exhilaration, that was something that was bigger than us.

RH: So Dinkytown—maybe start chronologically. What are your first memories? When did you first come to Dinkytown and what stood out and still does when you think about it.

MG: I grew up in St. Paul on Cretin Avenue—what they call the Groveland/Mac neighborhood now. We didn't know from Mac in those days, but I guess they added a little class to it. Groveland Elementary was the school, which was taught by and run by old spinsters. I guess maybe that's not a politically correct term any more. But what would happen—it was all women and they were all—they were almost all elderly because they had just been there forever. After World War II, any men that had been in the school, of course, went out to war and never came back to the school. The women aged over the years and stayed there because if teachers got pregnant, then they couldn't teach any more. It was considered—I don't know—unacceptable, tawdry—I'm not sure what. These were strange times. So most of the teachers were pretty tired. My most vivid memory of going to Groveland Park Elementary was at the end of Sixth Grade, they would always come and give you a card saying you were promoted to the next grade. At that time, Groveland Park was a Kindergarten through Seventh Grade School. And Seventh

Grade was when the boys got to take Shop. So the loan male teacher in the school was the guy who taught Shop or hit you. It was two functions. If you messed up, you were called into his office and he would hit you. Usually, it was the hand on the radiator thing and slap you with the ruler. Corporal punishment was still a thing, but we didn't learn anything there. We were astonished when they passed out the promotion cards and one of the boys in the class—I'll call him George. It wasn't his real name. He was called into the cloak room and then we heard sort of an accelerating squabble going on there followed by a scream of despair from George who then threw his stocking cap—he wore it all year around—from the cloak into the classroom.

We were totally puzzled. Then my friend, Kent Allen, who was the smartest kid in the class said, "I think he failed." I said, "You can't fail; they didn't teach us anything. How could you fail?" But somehow, he did. That was Groveland Park Elementary. Then my parents decided that maybe I could learn something and sent me to University High School, which was Laboratory School on the University campus in Pike Hall. Then I went from learning nothing to this school of brilliance—all of these really smart kids. I kind of made—I didn't do well there, especially at the beginning of it. My escape was Dinkytown. I discovered this whole new world in Dinkytown. The first thing I discovered in Dinkytown happened to be what I thought of then and I think still do, because it still exists. It may be the only thing there that still exists. Al's Breakfast: I found a whole new world there. I started eating lunch there everyday.

We weren't supposed to go onto campus at that point. I think you had to be like maybe a senior or a junior. I would go into Al's Breakfast every day and get a stack of Blues and maybe a side of bacon—also a new thing for me. I didn't write the story. I didn't really use any of her notes, but what I did do is I had an entire paragraph devoted to the funny names of the society people, some of which I still remember. Topsy Ritz. There was Ford Crouch. There was, of course, the [Hefflefingers were there. I just did an entire paragraph and walked into the paper the next day. The first thing that happened was Wally Allin, the managing editor, who had devoted his entire life to making sure the paper was without offense. I mean, he wanted the dullest paper you could have. No one had actually seen him leave his office. No one knew what he did. When he called me into the office, everything stopped. Everyone was looking. What's going on there?

I walked in and his temple was kind of throbbing. He said, "I suppose you know why I called you in here." And I said, "Yeah. The Orchestra Hall story is a big, front-page story." He said, "That's right." And I said, "Yeah. That was a fine piece of work, wasn't it?" He went red. I thought he was going to have some sort of cerebral accident. He couldn't think of anything to say until he finally said, "No, it was not." Anyway, we had a nice discussion. I walked out and as I walked out I heard Margaret Morris. She was talking to Jimmy Parsons, the assistant city editor. Jimmy was a good old boy from Tennessee. The first thing I heard her saying was, "That son of a bitch." I hadn't heard that from her before—a little salty. I am walking by and Jimmy grabs my arm and he said, "Boy, I am going to chew your ass out. Come here." He takes me and we go into the conference room. He slams the door and he says, "That was one of the finest pieces we have ever run."

RH: Nice.

MG: It was a good story. So anyway, Dinkytown.

RH: Back to Al's Breakfast.

MG: Al's Breakfast: Al's Breakfast was the pulse of Dinkytown. Although I haven't been there in a few years now, I probably consumed at least a couple thousand of those blueberry pancakes

over the years. I used to take my kids there. It's the thread. It's the Dinkytown thread and that's still there. A lot of fascinating people, of course, that came and went in that place. You couldn't hang around too long, of course, because there were only 12 stools, as I recall. It was kind of one of those places where everyone knew your name. I met, that I can think of, the professors I met there. I would see my own professors there. I had an English professor—a Hungarian guy. He was actually a composition professor. He was a wonderful guy. I really enjoyed his class, but I never did get around to doing the final assignment. I actually attended the University of Minnesota for four years.

I think you needed something like 160 credits to graduate. I think I had 78 after four years. I was working at The Daily. I didn't have time to do that stuff. I just remember going in there and he said, "Mr. Gelfand. It's so nice to see you. I can't help but notice that you haven't completed your final assignment." I said, "Well, I know—it's been really busy." He said, "No, no. I apologize. I should not have mentioned it." That was the sort of warmth and comradely people had in those days, especially at Al's Breakfast. Naturally, it was just a place that I gravitated to. At first, I probably didn't speak for the first three years I went in there. After a while, I felt comfortable. Al, himself, was still there. Al was that classic diner chef whose cigarette would be dangling from his mouth. You might get an ash or two in your pancakes, but everybody loved Al.

It's still there after all these years. Obviously, Al's not there. Al died quite a while ago. So Al's Breakfast was the greatest place in the world. There were other places in Dinkytown that I remember and most of them I've probably forgotten. Bridgeman's was a hangout. Unfortunately, then McDonalds came in. I think the Red Barn strategy—they knew—McDonalds was touted to be one of the most lucrative McDonalds in the country, because it was such a great location on the University just off the campus. I'm sure that when Red Barn wanted to go in, they figured they were going to make a killing, too. I guess then I sort of said go into the Red Barn story.

RH: Let's do that.

MG: If you have any other questions, I will take them.

RH: I'll come back to other questions. Let's start with your recollection of the night when you first met Nick Coleman.

MG: It was winter, 1970. I didn't know it but the unrest in the Dinkytown neighborhood and the neighborhood there was just beginning. As I say, I knew nothing about it, but one night—it probably was February. We were just about getting ready to put the paper to bed. I looked in the doorway and there was kind of a lanky, slouching guy with blue jeans and the obligatory plaid shirt. He was handing this sheaf of yellow-lined notebook paper to the secretary and explaining, I guess, why he was there. Eventually, she came over to me and said this guy came in and he thinks that you might want to run this story. We didn't really take stories anymore than the Star Tribune would. If people would come in there and say hey, I think you might want to run this story, it just wasn't done that way. She typed it up because I couldn't read it and it was better than any story—better written and a better story than anything we had in The Daily that day.

Eventually, I asked him to come over and we talked and kind of hit it off. We had a lot in common. Nick Coleman, the son of course at that time, he was known as the son of the great politician Nicholas Coleman. Nick, himself, went onto a great career in journalism. Nick was one month exactly younger than me. We got to be good friends. But, at any rate, I saw this as a great story and could see the potential of the story building. I thought it would be good for the

community and good for The Daily. I said to him, “You know. I think I would like you to do one of these stories every day.” And he said, “Yeah. That’s no problem.” And he did it—every single day he came up with a new angle and a better story every day. And of course, as he did, the tensions built in Dinkytown—and built and built right up until the night of May 5th when everything exploded.

RH: Before we get to May 5th, what was it about the story that intrigued you so much? And what about it did you see as a catalyst to putting this story on the map through The Daily?

MG: The first thing that I noticed was that we had a reporter there—a journalist who could write, and who obviously had a passion for this story. He obviously was kind of locked in with the community. He obviously knew what was going on. In just that first story, he really made clear what an affront it was to the people of that community. And, of course, obviously you can’t ignore the backdrop. The backdrop—May of 1970—we had the, which I covered, the huge anti-war march in Washington. I think it was in the Fall of 1969—five hundred thousand people. The tensions were building on campus. The tensions were everywhere, exasperated by the Mayor of Minneapolis, Charles Stenvig, who was a law and order guy—more order than law as it turned out. He, himself, was a complete shock to the community because, even then, it was just sort of taken for granted that a Democrat and a Liberal become elected mayor.

But Democrats were kind of looking the other way and Charles Stenvig tapped into the backlash. So you had the backlash—people who were very angry about the students. You had the students who were very angry about the war. You had Red Barn, the tawdry Red Barn chain, which was going to be a complete culture shock and an affront to the community. Dinkytown was a place that celebrated individualism. What was happening there was the battle of corporations versus individualism wasn’t like today when the battle has been won. It was still being fought then. People thought individualism was still a thing. Those were all basically—almost all—boutique businesses there except for McDonalds. Most of these weren’t chain businesses there. They weren’t franchises and they were small businesses. So every one had a personality, and Al’s Breakfast maybe the most of all. There were all of these tectonic plates shifting there.

It was a reflection of what was going on in Washington, Vietnam, and Minneapolis. Everything coalesced around what maybe seemed by some to be a fairly trivial issue. But it wasn’t trivial because it was all connected to all those passions, so it was almost inevitable that in their own way they would explode.

RH: Describe your recollections of the night of May 5th.

MG: We were pretty sure the police were coming in. The word was out and there were various leaks coming in. There was an occupation that had gone on for some time in these buildings. The buildings had been condemned. The businesses had been rooted out, but no one knew exactly what to expect. It was almost like a war scene because the first notice you had of it was the sound of the helicopters overhead. There was a huge crowd gathering and there was a police presence. As the helicopters hovered overhead, then police came in from everywhere. There was a busload of riot police with batons and shields. It almost was like their presence almost guaranteed some kind of horrible disruption. From the alleys, police were pouring in. It was somewhat expected but it was still a shock. Then as night fell, the search lights from the helicopter and then police were shouting to people to get out of there.

People were being rousted. There was a huge bus—a paddy wagon essentially. I don’t know how many people were arrested that night. I think it was close to 100, one of which was Nick

Coleman. That's why I covered the story that night because Nick had gotten himself arrested. I use that phrase decidedly. I think Nick thought it would be a better story to be arrested than to be covering what was happening there. He was probably right. He got more than one good story out of it. It was probably three or four in the morning when the bulldozers came in. It didn't take long to destroy everything there. By 5:00 AM or so, we were back at The Daily office and our editor, Glen Hovemann, a wonderful editor, decided we were going to put out an extra. I had never been a part of that before or since. We were creating this newspaper, which had to be done in about—it was an eight-page wraparound, which we had to do in about two to three hours.

There was a sense of shock and dismay but also, of course, of exhilaration. Covering a story like that—that's what it was about. We were journalists first and foremost. We weren't really out there protesting. We were there just covering the story. That was pretty cool. One of the things I remember best about covering the story was about 5:00 or 5:30 AM, I called up the Red Barn's vice president in charge of this area, a guy with the name of Lafferty. I don't remember his first name. He didn't quite get it. He didn't quite realize that to actually build that thing was going to be a disaster. Of course, it never got built. We knew it would never get built but he didn't. He was home at 5:30 AM asleep. I called him up. What a wonderful time to be a journalist. You can call someone up at 5:30 AM and they would answer their phone. Now you wouldn't be able—there would be no way you would know their phone number. You wouldn't have their cell.

So I called him up and he was, of course, awakened and he was indignant. He said, "You woke me up. It's 5:30 in the morning." I said, being a typically snarky student and journalist, I said, "Well, you should feel very fortunate because the rest of us were up all night because of you."

RH: You mentioned the term—we'll move on from the Red Barn here—the term individualism. Tell me more how you think that applied to Dinkytown back in the day and how it does or does not apply to it today?

MG: Sure. Well, Dinkytown was not a strip mall. It was—I think when McDonalds came in, that was our first sniff of what a franchise looked like in our community. So there was a vision there that maybe this was what was going to become Dinkytown. I guess in some ways, it has happened. Not completely, of course, but it was—and I think in Minneapolis, in general. You know, you had a police chief turn mayor there, who was really there to serve the interests of the business community. The culture was so much different then. We now have—take Amazon, for example, today. On a good day, Amazon's market value is a trillion dollars, which means Amazon, on a good day, is worth more than about 60 percent of our population. This was sort of the gateway and we thought of, in that day, to that kind of a culture. A small piece of it maybe—just a whiff of it. But still, we saw that as a takeover of Dinkytown, which essentially it was.

I think when those businesses left, those were real people there. They weren't corporations. They were real people, and they were going away and they were never going to come back. On a side note, one of the things we lost in Dinkytown that day when the bulldozers came in was a phone booth. To me, that phone booth represented something. It was quaint and it was attached—it was actually in sort of an alleyway between the building that was raised and the building next to it. The guy who actually owned the phone booth was a guy named Lou, who owned Lou's Diner. Lou's Diner sort of served as the overflow diner for Al's. If the line was out the door at Al's, and there was no way you were going to get in, you walked around the corner to Lou's. Lou's was not—didn't quite have the class of Al's.

It didn't quite measure up to that. The food was not—I mean, Al's was like a gourmet diner. The omelets and the pancakes and the waffles—it was a classy place. It was also a place where ordinary people hovered and chatted and shared stories about their day and their classes and complained about their professors and professors complained about their students. There was a heartbeat there. It was where—in fact, after the buildings were raised, Al's was just coming in and a lot of people who had been in the crowd who hadn't been arrested or didn't have to work, went into Al's. After we put the paper to bed, that's the first place I went—was Al's. Everybody wanted to talk about it. I guess that's what I'm thinking about when I think about individualism versus—well, kind of the franchise USA.

RH: Let me run through some names. You may or may not know them. But if you do, I would love to hear your memories. Bill Tilton, the Vietnam protester.

MG: Bill was a member of the Minnesota 8. I covered that trial. Bill was not a friend of mine, but I knew Bill very well. I don't think Bill trusted me because I was a journalist. I can't blame him for that. I'm kind of proud he didn't trust me. I am left leaning but I tried to be fair in my stories. Maybe Bill didn't like them. I don't know. Maybe he did. I sat through the trial of the Minnesota 8. It was—that in itself was something that became a cultural marker. Eight protestors who had gotten busted protesting the war refused to, in some cases, refused to be enlisted. Bill, himself, as I recall was found guilty of draft evasion. But, was Miles Lord the judge?

RH: I can't remember.

MG: It might have been Miles. If it had been Miles, Miles would never have sent them off to prison or anything like that.

RH: Then it wasn't Miles, because I think Bill did a little time.

MG: Bill did a little time? You know, god, I don't remember who it was. There were so many trials in those days. Bill Turchick—remember him? He was a part of the Minnesota 8. Later, as a journalist, I played ping pong against him. I was doing a story and Bill Turchick was the greatest ping pong player in Minnesota, despite the fact that he was about 4 feet, 10 inches. I played with him and I beat him. The catch being that he was playing with a Pepsi can.

RH: How about Father Harry Bury? Did you ever cover him? He ran the Neuman Center for a while.

MG: He ran the Newman Center. He is still around as a matter of fact. In fact, my friend, Jeff Strate, just did a show with him. There is a show called "Democratic Visions." It's run out of Eden Prairie and Bloomington. He was just telling me the other day about talking to Father Bury and what a great guy he is and still passionate, but I didn't know him.

RH: Walking, talking Phil. A Black gentleman who would walk around.

MG: Walking Phil.

RH: Walking Phil.

MG: Walking Phil was actually a schizophrenic. You probably knew that. I lived—later on, I lived across the street from Cedar Lake. I would see Walking Phil walking in front of me in Cedar Lake when I got up in the morning. Later, I would see him walking past the Minneapolis Tribune building at 425 Portland when I was working there. He would send me hate letters as he sent many of us hate letters. In some of those letters, you would see he was so angry that the hole in the "O" of his typewriter would be punched out. That was Walking Phil as I recall. I may be

thinking of another guy who walked around all day, because there were two of them. Maybe I conflated the two.

RH: That's okay.

MG: Yeah. It's a better story that way anyway.

RH: Dylan had gone to New York before you got to the "U," but did he ever come back and did you have any interaction with him?

MG: Dylan had not gone to—he was still playing at The Scholar. He probably started playing at The Scholar when I was in junior high school, as I recall, at University High School. So we knew about him and older people in the school—when I was in seventh grade, we had great musicians like Dave Naftalin and Dave Rae, who went on to become celebrated musicians. Both, I am sure, knew Dylan very well. There was a buzz about Dylan when I was in junior high school. I never got to see him play. As I recall, he had for a short time worked at The Daily, too. There was a picture, in fact, at The Daily at the time of him at a desk there. I know he did work there—probably very briefly.

RH: Melvin McCosh on The Bookstore.

MG: I only knew him to see him in The Bookstore. You couldn't see much in The Bookstore because it was such a clutter there, but that was a great bookstore. That was also a deep imprint on the culture of Dinkytown, of course.

RH: What do you think it was about Dinkytown. What about the social and political fabric that lent itself to so many different backgrounds coming together to become so active, whether it is in protesting the Red Barn, the Vietnam War? What was it about that fabric? How would you describe it?

MG: Intense. People were passionate. Just like in journalism, stories take on a momentum of their own, too big to really perceive the future of those stories. That's the great thing about any good story is you don't know where it's going to end. You don't know what stories it's going to spawn. Dinkytown was like that. It was sort of like a cerebral petri dish is what it was like. Something was growing in there that was bigger than any one person. That is just the way it turned out.

RH: What change it in your opinion?

MG: Red Barn. Something died that day. I won't say that there was a sense of failure, but there might have been a sense of inevitability. And, of course, you have to remember that that same day that the bulldozers came in, those four days were killed at Kent State. I think that ushered us all into a new era. It wasn't fun and games anymore.

RH: You mentioned you'd take your kids to Dinkytown on occasion.

MG: I used to when they were young and they loved it. Five, six, seven years old. Every Saturday they would wake me up. We got to go to Al's.

RH: You've had, obviously, the ability, whether it's good fortune or not, to experience Dinkytown and what I would consider kind of the halcyon days, and then see it change. As you've gone back over the years, what do you miss the most that isn't there any more?

MG: Really, it's more just the culture there. It's more of the dynamic, the vibe—it's not there any more. All those people who were so passionate, they are not so passionate any more. The

people who were there, of course, they are like me—elderly now and dissipated. It's just—eras come and go. It's funny because of a lot of friends of mine from that era, kids I went to high school with and college with, became teachers. Actually my oldest son is a teacher. My oldest son complains about what those old guys who I went to high school with complain about. That is that their kids don't question authority. A teacher whose kids don't question authority—if the teacher is cognizant of a teacher's mission, feel like there is something empty in the classroom. Maybe they feel like they failed a little, because education is about the Socratic method. The Socratic method demands that everyone, teachers and students challenge convention. So when that dies as it seems to have, part of that culture—part of what makes education so great dies with it.

RH: What do you want to ask that I'm forgetting?

Unidentified Speaker: Do we need a new culture—counter-culture movement?

MG: Yeah. I guess the best word I can use would be yes. I talked about Amazon. The fact that on a good day they are worth a trillion dollars, which is more than 60 percent of our population. I don't know. I also talked about Charles Stenvig and how he was a law and order guy who emphasized, I guess, order over law. He was also, however, kind of a—he was an agitator is what he was. They called us agitators—my fellow students, agitators. But really, the true agitators are people who have power. Maybe Chuck Stenvig in those days was a very small version of what Donald Trump would become. If students are going to rise up today—if there is going to be a counter culture, it's going to be a reaction to what's happening in the country now. The fact that our two-party system has died.

When the two-party system dies, then that also affects the willingness of people to question authority. The emphasis now is on obedience to the President. That's half the country almost believes that we need to be obedient to the President. There's a culture there. There's a cult more than anything, and that is antithetical to the blossoming of truth and individualism. Truth and individualism, of course, are inextricably tied together. You can't have one without the other.

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**CLEAN
WATER
LAND &
LEGACY
AMENDMENT**

