**\*\*\*\* BEGINNING OF BILL POTVIN INTERVIEW PART I \*\*\*\***

Andy: Well my name’s Andy-

Bill: Hi Andy

Andy: and I’m from CCSU and uh-

Jacob: I’m Jacob! Nice to meet you.

Bill: Okay hi

Andy: That’s Jacob he’s going to take notes-

Bill: Yup

Andy: And uh uh you’re from Willimantic?

Bill: Yes

Andy: That’s a nice, nice place, and uh –

Bill: I’m a business owner in Willimantic

Andy: Oh! Are you?

Bill: Yeah

Jacob: Excellent

Bill: You ever hear of Hosmer Mountain Soda?

Jacob: Yeah! I love Hosmer.

Bill: We’ve been in the business for 110 years so… That’s just, on the side.

Andy: Okay

Bill: I’m uh um and activist I’m uh a very progressive businessman.

Jacob: Awesome

Andy: I see

Bill: Small business people should all be progressive cause y’know the corporate world is the problem

Jacob and Andy: mhm mhm

Bill: That’s the way we see it so… We work with our help everyday. We make one and a half times what our help makes ha ha ha instead of… what is it now? 300? [percent]

Andy: 3000-

Bill: Ridiculous

Jacob: Yeah

Andy: And uh what is your name please?

Bill: Bill

Andy: Bill

Bill: Potvin

Andy: How do you spell that?

Bill: P-O-T-V-I-N

Andy: French…

Bill: It means jug of wine. Pot de Vin. It’s French Canadian.

Andy: I see

Jacob: Awesome

Andy: Okay and uh… let’s see it’s uh… 4/23…

Bill: What is the Heritage Fiesta?

Andy: This is it

Bill: Oh this-that’s the name of this event?

Andy: Yeah that’s the name of this event

Bill: Okay. Have you done it before?

Andy: I mean it’s been done before by other uh classes of this, of this class…

Bill: Okay

Andy: but uh yeah I guess the last one-

Jacob: It was before COVID. They stopped doing it because of the COVID

Andy: Yeah I guess the last one was like twenty eighteen or something

Bill: Oh okay yeah that’s been a blip on everything huh?

Jacob: yeah

Bill: This this piece of stuff that’s just tossed out and hopefully we can get back to regular.

Andy and Jacob: yes

Jacob: Fingers crossed

Andy: Well uh well someday… Every time you think it’s getting back to normal-

Bill: I know

Andy: - They have another uh variation that comes along

Bill: I know. Frustrating.

Andy: And uh or China it’s really uh-

Bill: I got through the first ones and could no problem then this one just hit me

Andy: Yeah

Bill: y’know because it’s more contagious than the old ones even

Andy: You had symptoms or?

Bill: Uh yeah all I had was uh I had some fatigue and some coughing

Andy: Yeah

Bill: And a runny nose that was it. It was like a cold

Andy: right

Bill: It was just had a, I just had a cold that’s all so

Andy: Okay. Would you mind giving me your date of birth?

Bill: Yeah! 3-28-46

Andy: Three- Twenty Eight- Forty Six…. Alright the end of World War II

Bill: Yep I’m a Baby Boomer

Andy: yeah and uh how’d you find out about the Heritage Festival[sic.]?

Bill: Uh the professor came to an event that the Veterans For Peace had somewhere and I met him and uh y’know we like him. We like his message and uh y’know we’re… our message is constantly anti-war and anti-violence and all that an then… His book that he’s written is uh, y’know, another big slug of injustice. I mean, y’know when you see that level of injustice we want to pull it in and uh hopefully we put all the pieces together there’ll be enough people to go ‘yeah those guys are right’.

Jacob: mhm

Bill: It’s ridiculous what we do to other countries, and what to our people who volun… these guys who have served in Vietnam, I’m a Vietnam veteran myself. How could you serve in ‘Nam not being a citizen, wind up a prisoner, and then you come back and you get deported. I mean at some point .. ha… it’s a headshaker. Like what. Are we exceptional?

Andy: Yeah well uh

Bill: Exceptional shitheads is what is amounts to.

Jacob: yeah

Bill: I hate to use that term but that’s uh

Andy: Well it’s uh…

**\*\*\*\* END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART I - BEGINNING OF PART II \*\*\*\***

Andy:… it’s always been like that y’know. When, when the wars over then they are done with the soldiers y’know and then they’re just a problem.

Bill: I know it

Andy: Going back to ancient times-

Bill: yeah

Andy: it’s always been like that

Bill: But you’d uh hopefully uh uh we want to be able to learn a little from history. Unfortunately the Veterans for Peace are probably one half of one percent of veterans. There’s a little sliver of people who see it that way and a lot of other veterans they tend to be warmongers. Believe it or not.

Andy: So, so the, so the group that, that you belong to, is it Veterans for Peace?

Bill: Yes

Andy: Okay

Bill: Yup

Andy: And uh is that like a national organization?

Bill: yeah, yeah it’s actually uh international

Andy: Okay

Bill: Yup

Andy: How long have you been a member?

Bill: Probably for twenty five years

Andy: So it’s been around for a while

Bill: Yup. It started in the late ‘80s I think it was. I forget the uh thing.

Andy: Okay and um what, what does heritage mean to you? Does it have any meaning for you?

Bill: Well… Heritage would be the, the history of somethin’

Andy: mhm

Bill: y’know just like we – I have a company that’s a hundred – so our, our company has a heritage. Y’know it started before World War One so

Andy: So this is a company started by somebody else in your family?

Bill: No, nope it was started by a certain family, went to another family, and another, we’re the fourth family. We-Our family has now owned it from the late ‘50s through today, which is a longer period than the other three families.

Andy: Oh I see

Bill: Yup

Andy: Let’s see, and um, y’know, what um, what was the name of the company again?

Bill: Hosmer. H-O-S-M-E-R Mountain

Andy: Hosmer Mountain uh soda company?

Bill: Yeah

Andy: And you’re uh an owner?…

Bill: Yeah, I’m one of the owners

Andy: Alright and uh… what’s your cultural identity? You said French Canadian?

Bill: Yeah

Andy: And uh, do you have any uh-uh, strong uh, connection to that uh heritage?

Bill: No, not really, no, it’s just uh, y’know…

Andy: How, how long ago did uh-

Bill: Willimantic has had a wave of different ethnic groups over the years because they had the biggest thread mill in the world.

Andy: right, yeah

Bill: So they would, y’know, the French Canadians came down, y’know, in the late 1800s and then there was uh another wave of uh displaced persons-

Andy: right

Bill: …after World War II.

Andy: right

Bill: And then the Puerto Rican community too. So that when you got that type of a big business it, it draws uh people looking for work.

Andy: Right

Bill: There was five thousand people in one company.

Andy: Right so um so your family came down from Canada in the late 19th century?

Bill: Yeah

Andy: Okay uh… do you? uh… and they came right to Willimantic?

Bill: Yes

Andy: And is this uh both sides of your family?

Bill: Uh no, that's my fathers side, the Potvins. My mother is Scotch-Irish and she, she, y’know she grew up uh… They were both… from the-

**END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART II**

**START OF PART III**

Bill: They were both… from the \*clears throat\* Great Depression Period so th- the people who lived through the Great Depression have a certain viewpoint on life

Andy: Right

Bill: …It’s save for a rainy day type of mentality. You know young people today now, they spend what in their pockets.

Andy: Yeah well those (few) people were very frugal in that era.

Bill: Oh Unbelievable! Yeah tha- That was the nature that was passed on to, to our family and my mother came from a family with 11, she was the youngest of 11 and boy talk about poverty in the Great Depression. That was uh,,,sh- she saw it all.

Andy: And uh did her family migrate here uh in the 19th century?

Bill: Uh might've been before that even you know…

Andy: Okay so you're not sure about er…

Bill: no, no i don't know much about my mother’s family

Andy: Okay um so you don't, do you have any stories of your family about migrating or emigrating…?

Bill: no, no, not really.

Andy: or working in the factory in Willimantic?

Bill: Uh no I know the Potson family were business people so my grandfather who I never met he passed away, he actually ran in willimantic a, it's actually amazing, there a picture of a barber shop-beauty parlor combination where there's three beauticians and three barbers in this mutual thing right on Union street in Willimantic must've been quite, and they just dealt with walk-in trade because you know that was an industrial center the industrial revolution occurred in willimantic and it there was a lot going on. To think of that kind of business now, you look and you've got a barber shop here or there you know what I mean to have something like that employing six or seven people?

Andy: Well uh probably how many how many shops were there? There probably weren’t that many in town at the time.

Bill: No (indistinct with cough) most of the business went right there I would say.

Andy: Yeah.

Bill: So I have a picture of my dad standing there at about seven years old. Quite the picture.

Andy: Well that's it, if you're first to the table you get the ,you get the most out of it.

Bill: Laughs yeah so evidently we’ve always been in the business thing and that's how my dad got a hold of Hosmer. One of the owners in the early 50s had a heart attack and the business was available. He (his dad) had some background having worked with Pepsi-Cola in the 40s so he had soda in his veins is how we described it (andy laughs) and then uh he had a couple of kids, me and my brother who worked like men for him in the late 50s and uh he was able to take the company that had been run down because the general trend in all little businesses as you know when you start maybe with the 50s is you start getting more and more corporate control so- and it's still going on. I feel so bad for so many of the businesses. Like a typical article you read now ‘Third generation hardware store closes it doors’ you know Lowes and Home Depot have driven them out and so its the story, but behind the scenes you know; they’re in debt, the family is fighting amongst themselves as a few people say well “Grandpa wouldn’t want us to let go'' somebody says “we’re losing so much money today. F- this we gotta get out.”

Andy: But there always, always are some that that survive, I mean,..

Bill: well we’re one of them (Andy: uh yeah uh ) well we’re we gotta get out too . so we don’t have much time uh I’m 76 now and my brothers, there’s 4 brothers, one of us has died so there’s only 3 left…

**\*\*\*\* END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART III - BEGINNING OF PART IV \*\*\*\***

Bill:…And they’re just entering their 70s too so you can't keep going on it's very physical work still. I did a route yesterday. Can you imagine? Jumping in and out of a truck at this age?

Andy: Huh!

Bill: But I don’t get bitter about it I- you know what the word I use is? Im Blessed that I can do it. I’m still in good shape. (Andy laughs) So blessed is the word. So- and I went to the university of Connecticut by the way.

Andy: Okay.

Bill: uh and Boy I'll tell you that's one thing I feel sorry for for you young people with student debt and stuff like that. Why has education done this to young people? So pathetic!

Andy: It's money.. Just like everything else, right?

You know when I tell young people that I got a college education at UConn didn’t borrow one penny and my family didn't give me a penny. And they said, well how do you do that? You know how you work in the summer and on the weekends and the tuition was $125 a semester when I started in ‘64 and when I got out it was still um $700 a semester (Andy okay so you could still pay that and buy your books and get an education without going into debt. (Andy: yeah) and now that's history! It's a shame.

Andy: Yeah it's crazy

Bill: It's not fair. It's not fair to the young people starting your life off with that kind of debt. It's a huge negative. So I'm blessed by the fact that I was able to get an education without going into hock?

Andy: Right

Bill: That, That’s the way it should be if you really believe in the importance of education, which i do very immensely, then you should make education available to young people without doing that because there are other models in Europe…

Andy: Like Europe!

Bill: Europe! They’ve got a better answer! Why should there be a banker? Bankers have a loads of ways of making money and student loans shouldn’t be one of them. That's wrong. That’s how I-

Andy: And the thing is it shouldn’t be so expensive!

Bill: No! no.

Andy: I mean it’s crazy students have to pay $20-30,000 a year to pay tuition.

Bill: oh oh and there’s no guarantee that you’ve got anything once you’ve done it. Most- some financial advisors- David Ramsey has a show and he has always told young people, “Don’t do it don't do it you're gonna be you know you're doing something that’s extremely risky you're going into debt with no guarantee with a job. That’s not a good business decision.

Andy: Well you know there are some new schools coming along now and uh they’re bypassing the whole college thing and teaching skills and getting their students jobs. You know. Its like one year two year programs and uh they guarantee you..

Bill: In the technical field.

Andy: yeah the technical field

Bill: Yeah well the technical field is not truly an education. An education is understanding history the arts-

Andy: the liberal arts

Bill: Yeah exactly. If you want everybody to go to a trade school lets not to me that's not the education that used to be the standard thing. Do you understand history> do you understand different cultures around the world?

**\*\*\*\* END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART IV - BEGINNING OF PART V \*\*\*\***

Bill: How open minded are you at (?)…that’s what an education, critical thinking, those are the things you know, now, now they’ve oriented towards jobs, I’m not sure.

Andy: Okay, so you were, you say you were a veteran of Vietnam?

Bill: Yup--

Andy: And uh--

Bill: I went to college and to be honest with you, nobody was looking to go to war, okay? I had friends who were in, uh, Vietnam, while I was getting (chuckling) deferments. And I’m thinking okay, I’ll stretch this out a little bit. So it took my five years to get my bachelor’s degree from UCONN. And would you believe the war was still going on when I got out in ’69? So at that point, I could’ve got drafted, and here I was a college graduate, so my parents and myself said, you know what I’ll—now that I have a college degree maybe it’s not too smart to just get drafted, go over as a grunt, right, an infantryman, get killed or maimed or something, so why don’t I join up and [go to] OCS. So I went to Officer Candidate School and I flunked out of Officer Candidate, so I went to Vietnam as an E-1, the lowest rank you can have. E-1, they said--that was my punishment for not making it through OCS. So, but, when I went to Nam, the people there, I got greeted, friendly. It was, it was, for the low point of my life but I wound up spending one tour of duty, 11 months into Nam, that’s what I did. And I got out and the funny part was, I never felt like we were the bad guys there, cause when you’re in the war, you’re fighting for your friends. You made friends and over there, there’s people shooting at you. Okay, I’ve been in combat twice. And so, you kind of forget that wait a minute what am I doing here, am I defending the United States? I don’t think the Vietnamese people are too threatening, right? Who…the fighter there? Who-who’s the great boxer? Muhammed Ali. I remember, a big monstrous powerful guy, and he said those little people didn’t do anything to me, I’m not going. And I remember my viewpoint was, a guy like you is trying to avoid…but now I respect what he was saying. He was right. We should’ve—shouldn’t’ve gone over there. It was an ugly war…we killed millions of innocent people.

Andy: Of course, they didn’t give you a choice.

Bill: No, nope.

Andy: So everybody had to register for the draft back then.

Bill: Yes…I, I know.

Andy: I was registered for the draft.

Bill: Yes.

Andy: But I, my number was, uh, I think 340s.

Bill: Okay, well see you know when that number came in, I was at Fort Dix. I was one of the last people, they, they did while I’m serving in, in the six weeks of basic training. I said oh, of all the timing, you know, so it wasn’t the luck of the draw, I was already there, haha.

Andy: So do you, do you have a memorable story from your service, uh, career, that you’d like to tell?

Bill: Well I think the most memorable thing was how did I go from somebody who left Vietnam without any feeling like we were (video #5 ends)…

**\*\*\*\* END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART V - BEGINNING OF PART VI \*\*\*\***

Bill: …that we were the bad guys, into where I am today, where I absolutely feel that what we were doing there was wrong. We were, we were, uh, occupying a country that was no threat to us, okay? Remember the domino theory—

Andy: Right.

Bill: --there was all this worry about communism spreading all [over], ehhh, it’s kind of (?). And I read the Pentagon Papers later, okay, and it’s very clear all the discussions in the Pentagon Papers made it very clear that they were lying to us. They saw that we weren’t winning, and they kept telling us we were winning. Remember the KIA, the body counts? If you lost a dozen Marines, they’d tell you well we got 120 of them. So people at home were still somewhat supporting it, until finally it got to support. When the Tet Offensive in 1968, that was a huge thing, the Tet Offensive. When they attacked at least a hundred different places at once, this supposedly run down enemy that’s ready to give up, haha, are you kidding me? They were attack forts and places all over the country and that was crystal clear that Westmoreland was throwing bullshit at us. Totally.

Andy: So, so you said you saw combat personally?

Bill: Yes.

Andy: Where, where abouts in Vietnam was that?

Bill: Well, I was in the jungle at the time. You know, I was a demolition specialist at the end.

Andy: Okay.

Bill: I started out driving the jeep for a company commander and that was a pretty dangerous job cause you’d go out on these job sites with the bamboo over the road. Somebody could put a bullet right through your ear.

Andy: I see. So you were blowing bridges and stuff like that?

Bill: Yeah, um yeah, when, when I became a demolition specialist. I-we flew into the uh jungle and in the early days you used to have to rappel down a rope and then get some chainsaws to make a place for helicopters to come in and bring supplies. Later in the war they had a, a sensor, a bomb, that when it got within 20 feet of the ground it sensed and it would blow up and create, so when we went in there, there was a big enough place to drop a helicopter and my job was to then get the really big, dangerous trees that could make it hard to get in and I remember setting up the C-4 explosive around bigger than this table, okay, all three of us would put arms together, that’s how big this thing was. And I put six sticks of C-4 around there and we got back, “Fire in the hole,” and we [chuckling] cut that thing off. Can you imagine how powerful that is?

Andy: Yeah.

Bill, laughing: Oh, god. So, yeah that’s what I did at the end of my tour of duty, but it wasn’t until years later when there was this, this anti-war thing called the Stonewall. It was a giant piece of granite that was talking about the civilians killed in war, and it went from Boston to New York City, and it, it had a cart with positions on it where oxen, oxen…

**\*\*\*\* END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART VI - BEGINNING OF PART VII \*\*\*\***

Bill: …or animals were supposed, so people would pull it and it would go through different communities and you’d push it for a mile or two and spin off and somebody else would do it and it went all the way from Boston to New York. When it went to the Willimantic area, I joined it for a while, and there was a Veteran for Peace on the thing that recruited me. And that’s when I started learning more and more and more about this [holds up booklet], how we’re addicted to war,

Andy: Ah, I see.

Bill: That's when I got my viewpoints.

Andy: So, what’s, what’s this, uh…?

Bill: That’s a, that’s a, an illustrated, fantastic illustrated thing. The whole thing is a cartoon and it goes back through all our war history of all our warmongering, with quotat—real quotations from senators and different types of people that have always promoted war. It’s a phenomenal, phenomenal booklet, I’d be, I’d be willing to let you have this thing. This is um, this should be in a library or something. I have about ten or fifteen left and you’re welcome to this, this is a wonderful, wonderful, very, very well done, on the back the people that supporting it, Ralph Nader, Ron Kovic who was the author of Born on the Fourth of July, that’s one of the greatest movies that’s, uh, Oliver Stone did, Born of the Fourth—remember Tom Cruise, Tom Cruise…

Andy: Yeah. And is this, uh, is this put out by the Veterans for Peace?

Bill: Yes. That, well, they, they, they support it a hundred percent.

Andy: Okay.

Bill: It’s, it’s what’s the word? It’s—

Andy: --they, they, they publish it, or they just simply—

Bill: They approve it. I forget the word for approval. They recommend it, that type of thing. Yeah, the Veterans for Peace thinks this is one of the better pieces that’s ever been put out about war. Ralph Nader said, “Addicted to War is the jolting graphic novel of our time with gripping facts of devastation abroad and in the U.S. that fulfill President Esienhower’s prediction about military industrial complex’s perpetual warfare state.” Very good, I, I’m willing to sacrifice that to some young people who, pass it around, please. It’s really good. You could go through the whole thing in about an hour and a half, two hours. And uh—

Andy: Yeah, graphic novels are the, uh, way to go these days.

Bill: Oh boy, I’ll tell ya. It, it says it all and it’s really, really well done. The, the trouble with everything is trying to get truth. It’s uh, truth is, we’re losing it…you know, bad information…[trails off]

Andy: Okay, I think we got more people coming in—

Bill: Yeah.

Andy: So is there anything else you’d like to add, uh, uh…

Bill: No. I just, I just, again, I think the important things to me is the injustice to young people and also avoid the recruitment. I, we’re a radical enough group where we actually contemplate come to recruitment, okay? Because you go to a Marine recruitment they’re never gonna mention anything but, “we’re gonna help you through school, we’re gonna give you a, an experience,” they don’t say you may not come back off, back with arms or legs, or you could have PTSD and by the way, there’s 22 suicides a day from military veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, young guys that are all messed up for the rest of their life, they finally commit suicide. The ones who don’t are domestically abusing their women and all the, it’s, it’s very ugly. I wish people would understand all that stuff.

Andy: Well I’m sure this, this book will probably help.

Bill: This is very, very good.

Andy: Alright, well we’re gonna have to end it there.

Bill: Yeah, okay.

Andy: And, uh…

**\*\*\*\* END OF BILL INTERVIEW PART VII\*\*\*\***