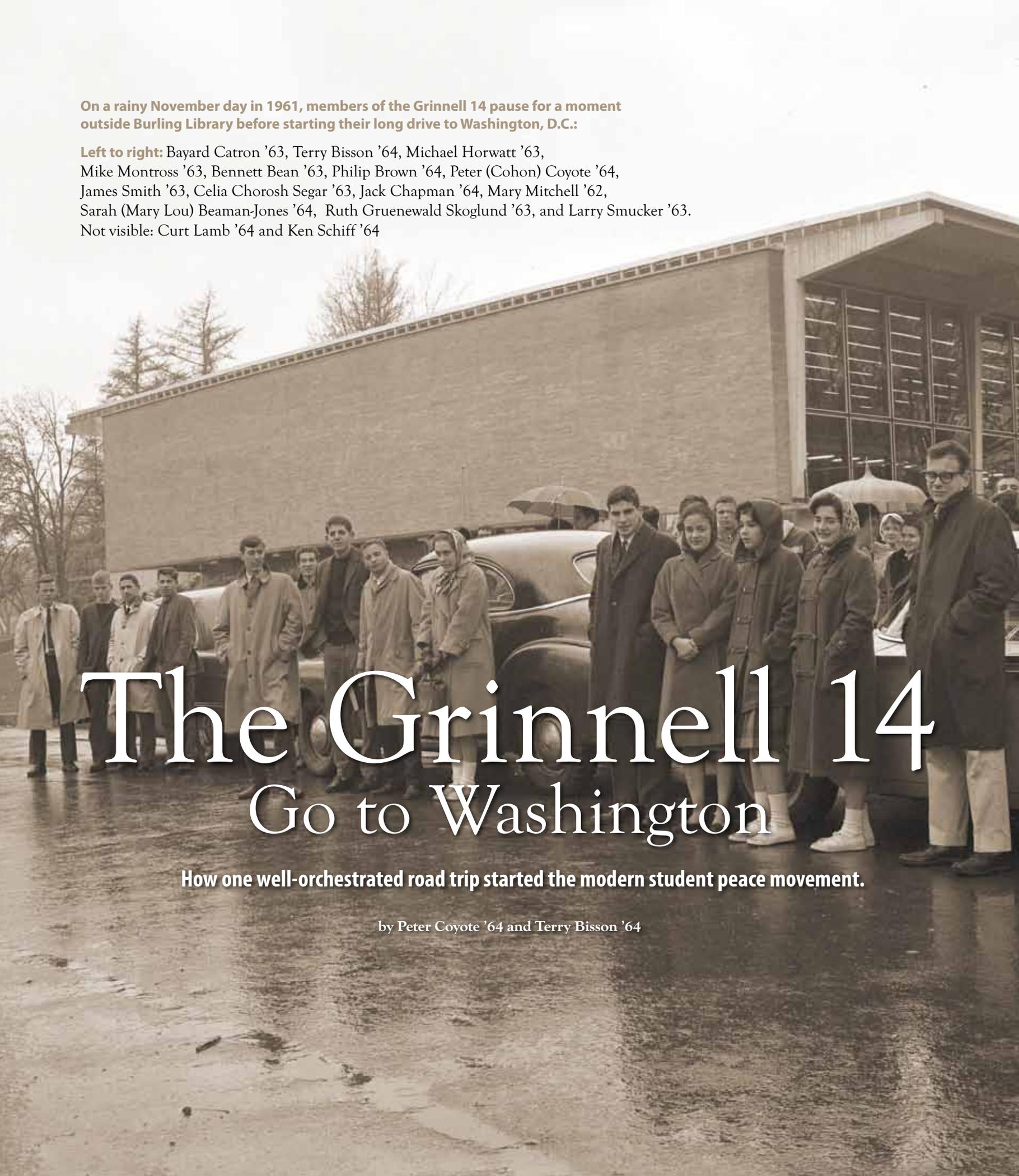


On a rainy November day in 1961, members of the Grinnell 14 pause for a moment outside Burling Library before starting their long drive to Washington, D.C.:

Left to right: Bayard Catron '63, Terry Bisson '64, Michael Horwatt '63, Mike Montross '63, Bennett Bean '63, Philip Brown '64, Peter (Cohon) Coyote '64, James Smith '63, Celia Chorosh Segar '63, Jack Chapman '64, Mary Mitchell '62, Sarah (Mary Lou) Beaman-Jones '64, Ruth Gruenewald Skoglund '63, and Larry Smucker '63.
Not visible: Curt Lamb '64 and Ken Schiff '64



The Grinnell 14

Go to Washington

How one well-orchestrated road trip started the modern student peace movement.

by Peter Coyote '64 and Terry Bisson '64

It was autumn in Iowa; it was 1961.

It was 50 years ago.

“Men in grey flannel suits” and the military-industrial complex President Eisenhower warned about were the dominant voices. Bob Dylan had just released his first record and the folk music movement was emerging, but the old order maintained cultural hegemony.

Nuclear Armageddon was in the air. *On the Beach*, a movie about a group of Australians attempting to come to terms with the imminent total destruction of life after a global nuclear war, was in theatres. Plans were afoot to install a bomb shelter in the basement of Burling Library. The Russians were setting off nukes like cherry bombs, and the United States was about to resume atmospheric testing as well.

According to the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’* Doomsday Clock, it was 7 minutes until midnight.

The cusp of change

Like America, Grinnell College was on the cusp of change. The consciousness of a new generation was simmering, and a few Grinnell students, in particular, were seeking sanity in a world apparently bent on nuclear high noon. Their initial ideas ranged from writing letters to the editor to chaining themselves to the White House fence and fasting in protest to packing for Australia.

Their intensity, rationality, and commitment — at a time when nuclear madness passed for normalcy — drew others to join us. They had passionate, focused discussions and refined a strategy. President John F. Kennedy’s proposed nuclear test-ban treaty provided the focus for a plan that we thought both judicious and bold.

Fourteen Grinnell students — four women and 10 men — decided to drive the thousand miles to Washington, D.C., and fast for three days in front of the White House. Others would stay behind to organize campus support. The goal was to protest the nuclear arms race and the resumption of atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons, to support President Kennedy’s proposed test-ban treaty and “peace race,” and to force the subject into the public forum.

Professors were supportive and promised to let us make up work we would miss. Grinnell College President **Howard Bowen** granted us leave, but would not take a position politically. The Student Senate — at first resistant to our representing the College — was swayed by our resolve and finally voted its approval.

As one might expect, there was grassroots opposition as well. Soliciting support outside the Quad dining room, we attracted such clever quips as “Go back to Russia” and “Better dead than red.” But a residence hall poll showed 65 percent in favor of our actions and 35 percent opposed. This was Grinnell, after all, which had welcomed abolitionist John Brown on his way from Kansas to Harper’s Ferry.

Bold talk

We issued a statement of purpose, which read in part:

We are not advocating new loyalties, we are urging the utilization of new means. We are not abdicating our responsibilities as citizens of the Free World, we are saying that we want to inherit a world in which conflicts can be resolved rationally. In the present situation the probability of war is ever-increasing. If this is viewed objectively in the light of modern weapons technology, it is easy to see that in the event of a war, neither side can “win.” In effect, we are saying that war is an obsolete instrument for obtaining policy objectives, and that we as a nation must utilize new alternatives for settling disputes.

That was bold talk 50 years ago. Students were expected to train for a job, shut up and study, or drink until they puked. Foreign policy was for men of means. The reigning Midwest liberal, Hubert Humphrey, called us together and tried to dissuade us on the grounds that our protest would only aid the enemy.

We had a clearer idea of who the real enemy was, though, and would not be moved.

Framing the issue

Control of our message was important. We did not want it co-opted or dismissed by a derisive press. The group agreed on a dress code: coats and ties for the guys, sensible skirts and stockings for the women. Clean-cut would be the order of the day. We would represent a voice of sanity — respectful, but firm.

Mike Horwatt was one of our original visionaries. His father had been red-baited out of government, and Mike offered to drop out of our group so we wouldn’t be tainted by the association. Instead, we made him our leader and spokesman.



Bennett Bean, Ruth Gruenewald Skoglund, Larry Smucker, Jack Chapman, Curt Lamb, and Peter (Cohon) Coyote march in front of the White House.

Horwatt and several of us met with Grinnell's public relations office and pitched the proposition that our trip might be more successful (and reflect better on the College) if that office ran media interference and helped us frame the event and the issues before the press did.

The College contacted *The Des Moines Register* on our behalf. An article appeared, and other news outlets began to preview our trip. The late **Peter Hackes '48**, a well-respected broadcast journalist, interviewed our leaders on the NBC radio program *Monitor*. Wire services picked up the story and attracted help from unlikely sources.

On the road

Hats were passed and two old cars were bought, a '50 Ford Six and a '48 Chevrolet. A progressive insurance executive from Des Moines read about us and loaned us a brand new Chevrolet Impala company car and precious two-way radios for the trip.

Road maps (free in those days) were unfolded and we pulled out of campus and headed east on U.S. Route 6 on Nov. 13, 1961. There was no Interstate 80 in those days. We threaded two-lane roads until Chicago, then executed unnerving *pas de deux* with 18-wheelers on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, trying to keep each other in sight. Complex headlight signals kept our caravan intact. We slept on one another's laps and shoulders like puppies in a box. Gasoline was 30.9 cents per gallon; Cokes and Clark Bars cost a dime each.

A White House reception

Base camp in Washington was Gaunt House, a shabby hostel near DuPont Circle, favored by impecunious job seekers and political protestors. Speaker of the Senate Sam Rayburn had just died and the town was deserted, but we held a press conference anyway. To our surprise, both Associated Press (AP) and United Press International



The Grinnell 14 meet with Russian embassy attaché Gennadi Paitakov.

(UPI) showed up. The doughty little reporter from UPI was Helen Thomas, who later became the *doyenne* of the White House press corps.

Suddenly, The Grinnell 14 were national news.

The first day without breakfast – marching in a circle on the sidewalk at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, dressed as if for job interviews – was tough stuff, but fasting gets easier after the first day.

President Kennedy was away giving a speech in Arizona, but he read the papers. He sent a bright young staffer, Marcus Raskin, who sat with us on the threadbare rug at Gaunt House. He was soulful and sympathetic, and extended his boss's invitation *into* the White House. Kennedy had set up a meeting for us with his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy.

The next morning, we found ourselves facing Bundy across a table in the Fish Room. His cold eyes were totally devoid of empathy as he offered us orange juice and advice on how to conduct ourselves as citizens. We demurred on

the orange juice. Not accustomed to being refused, Bundy reminded us that even Mahatma Gandhi drank juice while fasting.

We stuck with water and presented our case. Bundy remained immobile, a statue with slicked-back hair and rimless glasses, wearing a dark, elegant suit with a gleaming white shirt and tie. Before long, we left his chill for the friendlier cold outside.

Our White House invitation was news, and right-wingers (including Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi party, in uniform!) were waiting to jeer and heckle. They gnawed on Kentucky Fried Chicken drumsticks as we marched and fasted.

The next day, demonstrating evenhandedness, we presented a petition to the Soviet ambassador. *Pravda* and *The Washington Post* showed up and took photos of our spokesman shaking hands with a Soviet attaché.

Now we were international news.

A movement is born

Back on campus, our supporters had established office space with a phone in the offices of the *Scarlet & Black*. When the publicity broke, college students from around the country called to ask how they could join in. We had touched a chord. Soon we were coordinating requests from other campuses, trying to schedule a continuous student protest presence at the White House.

We broke our fast at Mike Horwatt's suburban Washington, D.C., home, where his mom rewarded us with delicious chicken soup and hamburgers. As we were leaving, Bluffton College students rolled into Washington, and we learned from them that students from several other colleges were scheduled to follow. The protests continued for more than a year.

While driving home, our caravan was pulled over by state troopers in Ohio. Suspecting the worst, we were surprised when courteous officers transmitted an invitation to breakfast from the maverick anti-Cold War billionaire Cyrus Eaton, founder of the Pugwash Peace Conference and winner of the Lenin Peace Prize. They led us, lights flashing, to Eaton's estate, where he showed us the prize steer that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had sent him and served us an elegant, celebratory breakfast. (The hitchhiker we had picked up kept his mouth shut and stuffed his coat with biscuits.)

We returned to campus welcomed as heroes by many and buoyed by enough success to ignore the others. We went back to class ruffled but renewed, having left the incubator of college for the larger, chilly world, amazed and exhilarated that we had created something directly out of our imaginations and effort.

We had pressed the world and felt it yield.

Several years later, at a Yale symposium on the history of the peace movement in America, Tom Hayden — one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society and later a California state senator — traced the beginning of the modern student peace movement to the Grinnell 14's Washington trip.

Generous, perhaps, but we all do still believe that Grinnell played its part. ■

— **Peter Coyote '64**, an actor and author, and **Terry Bisson '64**, a science fiction writer, have been friends for 51 years. They wish to express their deep and lasting gratitude and respect to the many who contributed to this story.



Contributors' Notes

“What was it like to be one of the Grinnell 14 (16, including the ‘ground crew’)?” “How did it affect your life?” “What does the event say about Grinnell and Grinnellians?” We asked these and other questions of as many of the original participants as we could find (with the generous help of authors Coyote and Bisson). Here are their recollections and reflections of history in the making:

How it began



Michael Montross '63 told Michael Horwatt '63 that he (Michael No. 1) was going to starve himself on the White House lawn. I first heard this when I went to meet Michael No. 2 at Park Street, an off-campus house, and found him in the living room amid all his stuff. Books were piled by the window, dirty laundry in white laundry bags, clothes in

sloppy piles all over the sofa. Michael (No. 2) was preparing to evacuate — to New Zealand.

I did the only thing a preliberated woman of the '60s could do at that time. I started to cry. In fact, I think I wailed. “Whaaat? You're going without an education!?” In my house, going without an education was like going without toilet paper.

Somewhere in that drama, the man from the local cleaners came in to deliver Michael's laundry. He took one look at us and must have concluded that I was pregnant, because he immediately began reassuring me that this had happened to other women, that I could still have a life. I was so touched that I didn't even laugh until later.

That act of human kindness brought me down to earth.

After lunch and more talk with Michael Montross, Michael consulted with **Paul Smith**, political science professor, and concluded that he would stay and fight. And by then others — lots of others — were involved in the discussions.

— **Sally Singer Horwatt '63**
married Michael No. 2; they live in Reston, Va.
At Grinnell, she majored in political science.

We started a movement



I saw that humanity faced a great danger that could perhaps be irreversible. I decided the best way to deal with it was to go to New Zealand.

It was from that irrational point of departure that we eventually ended up with a strategy of dressing and speaking and acting that would enable people to open their ears and hear us. The focus was

on change rather than ventilating frustration or anger or fear. We agreed that we would fast for three days to communicate our sincerity, conviction, and authenticity, and that to stay on message there would be one spokesperson: me.

When we got to Washington, everyone had left to go to Texas for the funeral of Sam Rayburn, the legendary Speaker of the House of Representatives. We figured no one would pay attention to us, but the White House correspondents for UPI and AP didn't have anything else to do, so they decided to cover us.

President Kennedy, who had just come face-to-face with the radical right, saw the stories about us and decided **our kind of dissent was the kind he wanted to encourage**. He asked Bundy to meet with us. Bundy was an arrogant patrician with questions designed to make us look absurd. But we had answers, and he ended up spending 45 minutes with us.

My father was an electrical contractor who did work for the Army and Navy, and a lot of the contractors he knew were conservative but spoke with great admiration for what we did.

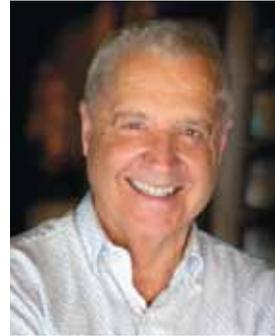
We started a movement. It was successful. We decided to go it alone but 120 schools followed. At the time I was hoping we'd have a peace studies program at Grinnell, but the unity and singularity of purpose dissipated because the challenge was over, and that's what happens.

Perhaps the signature characteristic of a Grinnell education is how to bring about change within the periphery of tradition. For instance, there was a Grinnellian and career Air Force officer who was exposed to Air Force training materials designed to teach about communism. But the materials equated ideas that might be unusual or eccentric or liberal with treachery. He was able to get those materials changed.

I think that a hallmark of Grinnellians of all persuasions is an ability to envision and implement change that extends the borders of tradition by maintaining the trust of those who must agree to the desired change.

— **Michael Horwatt '63**,
majored in political science at
Grinnell, and is an attorney with Law Offices of
Michael Horwatt, PC, in Reston, Va.

Why we succeeded



We succeeded where many failed because we focused our efforts on supporting President John F. Kennedy's proposal to ban aboveground nuclear testing. Because of that, we were invited into the White House. We were handled by his staff, who knew far more about public relations than we did. That our visit was followed by 120 other schools, keeping up

an ongoing "march," reflected White House assistance.

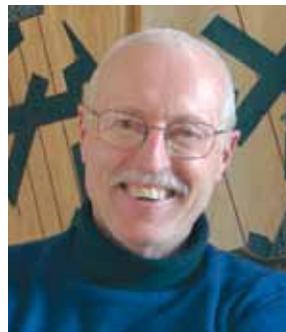
There have been a lot of protests — against Vietnam, the Iraq war, etc. Our particular contribution was that **we focused on a specific issue**. Atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons was not generally perceived to be a significant threat at that time. In 1961 it was unthinkable that a small group of students from the Midwest could alter public policy, particularly national defense policy. But by 1963 we had accomplished 100 percent of our stated original objective, and open-air testing of nuclear explosions became internationally prohibited.

Did the Grinnell group have this great an impact on something so important? I think we did. The DNA in your body may very well be different today than it would have been if the military had continued to explode nuclear devices in Nevada, with fallout coming directly over Iowa.

Fifty years from now, your grandchildren's DNA may reflect the success of the Grinnell 14. Altered DNA is usually not altered for the better.

— **Michael Montross '63**
majored in philosophy at Grinnell and is now
proprietor of The Silver Coin Shoppe in Winterset, Iowa.

We had a strategy



We had a strategy: John F. Kennedy was afraid of the radical right, and we represented the rational left. We laid out our rational argument to McGeorge Bundy and he said, "I don't think so."

That experience clarified that I was never going into politics. I thought "Screw 'em, I'm going to go make art. I left Grinnell and

went off to study art at the University of Iowa. That was really a watershed event for me.

I don't look back very much, but it was actually a really cool thing we did.

— **Bennet Bean '63**
is an artist living in Johnsonburg, New Jersey.

Watch the fireworks



My roommate, Mike Montross '63, got upset about nuclear testing and war and got me into it. His plan at the time was to fast to the death on the White House lawn. It was extreme to me, but it seemed important to take a stand against the nuclear threat.

It totally astonished me that it resonated the way it did. I remember when Mike Horwatt was going to hold a

press conference, I thought no one would come. But it resonated because we had a positive message and because the threat of nuclear war was very palpable. I remember talking with other Grinnellians about what we'd do in case of nuclear war. The consensus was: Have cocktails on the roof and watch the fireworks until we burnt to a crisp.

The trip was one of a number of signal events at Grinnell that changed me forever. **I learned how to think, to take nothing at face value, and to figure things out on my own.** I felt very much that what we were doing was connected to the College because so many other students fasted with us. There was a gathering in Herrick Chapel. I felt like we were representing a much larger group, although not everyone at the College. Some disagreed with us vociferously.

— John “Jack” Chapman '64

majored in American Studies and is now a location consultant for department stores in Arlington, Va.

A tiger by the tail



I was one of two who stayed behind and agreed to coordinate communications between the protesting 14 and the campus. The whole thing happened pretty fast, and my role as a communication link and press contact quickly escalated after the news report of President Kennedy's instruction to invite the Grinnell 14 to the White House. That prompted students at other schools to start calling to ask how they could participate.

We quickly realized we had a tiger by the tail. I thought the best thing to do would be to have a continuous thread of protesters from a series of schools; it would be a constant, visible protest that would increase the potential impact.

I have three distinct memories of the event. One is the photograph of everyone before they left. That's when we realized that this was really going to happen, that it was serious business.

The second memory is sitting in the *Scarlet & Black* office,

ear to the phone, looking at a chart I was making to organize other schools joining the protest. That's when I realized, "This is a job. Someone has to man the phone. I'm responsible for making this one element happen."

The third is walking across campus with the Washington, D.C., correspondent for *The Des Moines Register*. He was a skilled, seasoned guy and he was asking me a question! I thought, **"Oh my God! I'm being treated like a responsible person!"** It wasn't clear what it meant, but it was clear that we were having an impact.

It certainly gave me a sense that social action could be a potent force for change. It was a rite of passage to adulthood. Subsequently I joined the Peace Corps, was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, and worked for state government for more than 25 years. I probably wouldn't have done that if I hadn't learned that we could make a difference in people's lives.

The whole group made it happen. I feel grateful to have been a part of it. They left pariahs and came back heroes. That it happened at Grinnell is certainly not incidental.

— Phil Brown '64

was a philosophy and religion major. Now living in Morrisville, Pa., he is a fellow at Rutgers University's Center for Applied Psychology, a member of the National School Climate Council and of the international Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network.

I just said “yes”



I remember hearing on the radio about the Cuban missile crisis and thinking the world could end and I could die. I wasn't politically astute; I just really believed in the cause.

I wasn't a prime mover, but after having participated, I felt very heady. It was a very bleak time, and a time ripe with promise. I just said "yes." I had no idea it would play out the way it did. The trip reinforced my belief that individuals could make a difference, that I could make a difference.

I had been quite ill that summer and was still recuperating. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to fast and walk for three days. But **my commitment was stronger than my fear. Recognizing that set a pattern for me in my life.**

Afterward, I received a letter from Norman Cousins, the editor-in-chief of *Saturday Review*. He was somebody I respected. I felt proud that his recognition of what I did mirrored my own.

A lot of Grinnell students at the time were socially more conservative than we were. Before the trip, some of our

guys had long hair and looked like beatniks. I wore a lot of turtlenecks and long boots.

I would like to thank the College for the support it did give. It could have offered more, but it also could have made it difficult. I thank above all the people I went with and the two who held the fort back on campus. I think the mature, meticulous way that the plan was formulated and executed made all the difference.

— **Celia Chorosh Segar '63**
majored in French and is a retired pediatric occupational therapist living in Marlboro, Vt.

Reaching beyond ourselves



In the fall of 1961, Michael Horwatt '63 and I were roommates. Mike Montross '63 was following the news about Russia resuming nuclear testing, and reporting his alarming research on the arms race and the health effects of atmospheric testing. Several of us, including Jack Chapman '64, engaged in intense conversations — not contentious but more a mutual discovery process — to understand in our own minds

whether we were pacifists or believed in 'just war', whether we favored unilateral disarmament. But we all agreed that nuclear testing was alarming and serious.

In a few short weeks, that conversation spread throughout campus, and with it the idea of taking direct action in Washington. As the group took shape, Horwatt emerged as the natural political leader. To him, political strategy and tactics were like blood and oxygen. I was an active fellow traveler, giving speeches in favor of the group, but **my decision to go on the trip was tortured**. I had a conservative Midwest upbringing, and taking that kind of political action was beyond my comfort zone.

By early November, the Grinnell peace group had perhaps 100 members, including many who pledged to join a sympathy fast. There was opposition, too: The Student Senate was initially against our representing the College, but ended up voting to support the trip.

In Washington, I remember McGeorge Bundy as very cool, detached, analytic, and somewhat patronizing. So it was particularly gratifying to be acknowledged on the Huntley-Brinkley report that night. I remember a lot of positive responses after we returned, and I felt good. We had done what we'd set out to do.

The trip and John F. Kennedy's inaugural address — "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask rather what you can do for your country" — helped shape my subsequent career: moving to Washington, working for the federal government, and 30 years teaching public policy, including nuclear weapons policy. The tension between being an

observer and taking action became a dominant theme in my life. In fact, the title of my PhD dissertation was "Thought and Action: Reason, Ethics, and Public Policy."

As I was reading through the summer edition of *The Grinnell Magazine*, I read in **Samantha Schwartz '14's** "Student Musing": "I've begun to realize that a Grinnellian isn't just a college student; a Grinnellian is someone committed to learning, social responsibility, and compassion without the promise of reward." That's a pretty darn good definition; I am very pleased that this emphasis is so explicit in the mind of current students. It's important for all of us to reach beyond ourselves.

— **Bayard Catron '63**
was a philosophy major; he is professor emeritus of public policy, George Washington University, and is in the process of moving from Springfield, Ill. to Charlottesville, Va.

Listen to Your Heart



I played less of a role then than I would now. Now, I would take a more active role and do more research so I would be better intellectually equipped to handle questions. Then, it was mostly the men doing the planning and speaking.

And the driving. Terry Bisson drove the car I was in. It didn't have windshield wipers. We were driving through the mountains in the middle of the night while it was snowing, and Terry was reaching out and wiping the windshield off with a towel.

I felt good about picketing and proud of my advocacy. It was a pure action. We had no ulterior motives. I think we impressed upon policymakers that we felt strongly, and we weren't trying to make names for ourselves. Nor was I conscious of making history. That was for Gandhi to do, not me. **I didn't think we'd have any effect, and I didn't have any idea what we were doing would get national recognition**, but I thought it was important to make the effort. But of course, it did have an effect.

It had an effect on my life, too. Afterward, I went to see my aunt in Baltimore, who was involved with the Young Republicans for Nixon; we had a long conversation. The impact in my family was very powerful.

Grinnell always encouraged critical thinking skills. Some people at Grinnell were not happy we were there, but they couldn't argue with the reasoning that got us there.

I'd say to current student activists: Listen to your heart. Listen to your gut. The Quakers believe in an inner light. That's what's important.

—**Mary Lou Beaman-Jones '64**
was a sociology major, and is now a literacy program developer with LIFT:Missouri in St. Louis, Mo.