

McNally:

Hello, I'm Terrence McNally welcome to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK. I'll be speaking today with DREW GILPIN FAUST, the Arthur Kingsley Porter University Research Professor at Harvard, where she served as president from 2007-2018, about her latest book, the memoir, *Necessary Trouble, Growing Up at Midcentury*. You can learn more about Drew Faust, her other books, all of her work at drewfaust.com.

On Free Forum we explore the lives, the work and ideas of individuals I suspect hold pieces of the puzzle of a world that just might work. We look at politics, economics, environment, science, health, and culture - all based on the fact that I believe we can do better and I want to find out how.

The show streams weekly on the Progressive Voices Network on TuneIn. Podcasts are available anytime anywhere on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, most major podcast sites and at my site, terrencemcnally.net.

After I finished reading Drew Faust's *Necessary Trouble*, I wrote her the following note:

I finished Necessary Trouble. I read a chapter a day with lunch on the patio.

I was born May 29, 1948 - there's less than a year between us - graduated from Cocoa High in Cocoa, Florida, integrated only the year before, and arrived at Harvard in 1965, class of '69. My experience of the South - in Miami, Jacksonville, and Cocoa FL - was, of course, vastly different from yours in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. But I felt there were ways in which we certainly overlapped. Though our circumstances were different, we shared similar situations, similar questions, similar feelings.

You were at a young age what I would consider an activist, joining the domestic and foreign exchange programs you did. I don't recall such programs even being on my radar in high school. Not to mention your White House letters.

Reading your memoir - perhaps especially the way I did, visiting it for a while each day - triggered first, a mood, a state of connecting with my past through the experiences and stories of a new friend. And I recall, making such friends was fairly easy in the times you write about. And second, igniting tangents, musings, memories, and reflections on my own choices and relationships in those years. If you're up for it, I would definitely like to record an hour-long podcast conversation.

And so here we are today.

Both of us grew up in the segregated South and we'll talk about that. And for both of us, I believe college was especially formative. It allowed us to take the focus of our demands for justice, fairness, freedom, and change beyond our families to the world. And you and I went about that in different ways.

I loved my Harvard experience, and yet I was suspicious of the university as too Establishment. I engaged with the counterculture for five years after college, including an organic farm, a sailing commune, art school in Mexico, and the national staff of McGovern's presidential campaign, and I ended up never pursuing a graduate degree. And many times over the years, I thought this was a mistake.

I enjoyed as much as anything I've done over the years, fifteen times when I was a panelist at the Conference on World Affairs in Boulder, Colorado at the University of Colorado, where a lot of academics and journalists and so on speak to a mix of the community and students and present their ideas and wrestle with each other over these things. And it was like my sweet spot.

I also taught storytelling to nonprofits and foundations for years. I love teaching and I wonder whether I would've thrived with a more professional or academic path. This program, which I've been doing on radio or podcast now for twenty-five years, is my post-grad life. I say I learn by teaching and I teach by learning.

Drew Faust is the Arthur Kingsley Porter University Research Professor at Harvard, where she served as president from 2007-2018. She previously served as founding dean of Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study (2001-2007). Before coming to Radcliffe, she was the Annenberg Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. In 2018, she won the John W. Kluge Prize for Achievement in the Study of Humanity awarded by the Library of Congress to recognize work in disciplines not covered by the Nobel Prizes. Faust is the author of seven books, including *Southern Stories: Slaveholders in Peace and War*; *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, a finalist for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and recognized by The New York Times as one of the Ten Best Books of 2008, and her latest, the one we're going to focus on, the memoir, *Necessary Trouble, Growing Up at Midcentury*

Welcome, DREW GILPIN FAUST to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK.

Faust:

Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be here.

McNally:

Let me tell listeners we're recording this conversation Monday September 30th.

I like listeners to get a feel for the people behind the work & ideas we talk about. I usually start these conversations asking my guests how they see their path to the work they do today? Since we're talking about a memoir today, much of our conversation will be about your path. NECESSARY TROUBLE ends in 1968, recalling your life through your graduation from college in a year of enormous energy, turmoil, and suffering in

America. Hopefully we'll cover that period in some detail and also deal with your life since as well as the challenges faced these days by higher education.

Any response to my introduction?

Faust:

Well, I was struck by the remarks you made about your lunchtime reading and how you felt this connected you with your past and helped you think about the choices you had made. And that was music to my ears because part of what I wanted to do was to offer a portrait of that era that would resonate with those who lived through it, because we're going to depart the scene before very long. And I felt I wanted to bear witness to what those years were really like.

A lot of people generations younger than we are, I believe, don't have a deep understanding of that era, both of some of the practices and customs that they regard as from another century - segregation or how women were treated or expectations that surrounded us in the 1950s, in particular. And I wanted to portray them accurately enough for the historical record. And your sense that this resonated with your own past and helped you think about what had been the path that you chose as you moved into adulthood, that was very meaningful to me. So thank you.

McNally:

Oh, thank you. And it is very much the truth. I chose to read it that way, a) it's how sometimes things get done, but b) it was so I would sort of marinate in it rather than binge it. And it really did. I just actually looked in the last couple of hours at some notes I wrote that had nothing to do with, I'm going to do an interview with Drew Faust, but just some of my own reflections and going back and evaluating what I thought had value and what I missed and stuff. And so the book is a gift as well as a challenge.

Faust:

Well, thank you.

McNally:

Was there a moment you knew you had to write it? And I'm going to say a little bit more here. You're a historian and this is memoir. I get the feeling that was at least partially a pandemic book. A few other people that I've spoken to over the last few years, thrown into seclusion, cut off in so many ways from the world, we end up wrestling with the material closest at hand, which in your case, of course, is your personal history and your personal reflections.

Faust:

Well, the concept for this book and the commitment to it, and indeed the contract for it all preceded the pandemic. It's a pandemic book in the sense that I sat and

wrote it or much of it during the pandemic in the quiet isolation that the pandemic forced upon all of us. But I had planned the book before the pandemic struck.

It might be seen to be an outgrowth of a couple of earlier pieces. I wrote one in the early 2000's actually that was published in *Harvard Magazine*, a piece about when I discovered the letter I'd written as a nine-year-old to President Eisenhower decrying segregation. When I searched for that letter, there it was in the Presidential Archives, the Presidential Library in Kansas. And I was able to reunite with my nine-year-old self. So I wrote a little piece about that, I think it was in 2003. And then I did another piece in *The Atlantic* that came out, I believe, in 2019 that then became the section of the book where my grandmother decides to install a plaque in the graveyard where my whole family is buried - a plaque in recognition of the African-Americans "beloved servants" as she cast them, whose graves were anonymous, hadn't been marked, and were essentially going to be plowed up for graves of white members of the community in Virginia. The nature of that plaque I found striking, and I ruminated about it and its reflection of race relations in Virginia in the 1950s, but also in the decades that proceeded that.

So those two pieces existed and then I thought, I have a bigger story to tell, and these are two parts of what I saw as an endeavor as I just described, to render for those who come after me, what those years were like and what being a little girl in a segregated society and a very male-dominated society meant, and how much our world has changed, and how we need to both recognize that change, embrace that change, and preserve that change

McNally:

And expand on that change. Yes.

Faust:

Yeah, exactly.

McNally:

One thing, that story about your grandmother's plaque, even as you were just mentioning it briefly just now... I'm sure it struck you this way, but it strikes me it was done with positive motivation. She wants to honor these people, and yet through such a distorted lens in which she'd grown up,

Faust:

That's the important thing about that story, I believe because it was put there with good intentions, but the limits of good intentions were also evident and the kinds of racial assumptions with which she had been imbued from the time she was a small child in Knoxville, Tennessee at the end of the 19th century. And the choices she had, and the limits on those choices in terms of her own life and how she could lead it, but also what was available to her to think, where would she get her ideas from, and

what would enable someone to break through a set of assumptions like that, and what were the limits on her ability to do so? I wanted to tell that story to portray what some of the bedrock of segregation and of the conservative and hierarchical racial assumptions of a Virginian in the 1950s would be.

McNally:

Right. And it takes me back to Hannah Arendt...

Faust:

The banality of evil.

McNally:

Yes. The banality of evil that your grandmother is doing, sort of quote "her best," and yet this is what she's been dealt and has not surpassed and grown out of. It's quite something.

How, for you, was memoir different from history as a writer, and what surprised you most in working on something which was basically about your own lived life?

Faust:

When I approached this project, I had in mind a notion of history memoir. I wanted it to be the result not just of my memories, but also of my historian's craft. And so I tried throughout the book to place my own experience as a pathway through an era in which different pathways were also being followed.

I mean, your pathway was different from mine, and yet we experienced a lot of the same context of growing up, and the same shift in American values, the Brown V Board and its impact. All of that was happening around both us, and yet your choices and my choices were distinct. So I wanted to explain why my path went the way it did, but also to give people a flavor of the era more broadly. And so there's a lot of footnotes for this book. Memoir rarely has footnotes.

And a lot of discussion of views of the evolution of the civil rights movement or the anti-war movement, and what was going on far beyond my understanding at that time. But also, I hope, insight into the family dynamics in which I grew up and which deeply shaped me, and at least some of the emotions and feelings of being that little girl in that time and place.

I wanted very much to work closely with an editor on this book, which I really haven't done in the other books I've written. But I felt I needed someone to be a sounding board and to push me towards the aspects of writing and thinking that memoir entails because I didn't know how to do it. I'd never done it before. And I was very privileged to work with someone at Farrar Strauss, my publisher, Jonathan Galassi, who I think did push me to make it more personal, to reveal more.

There's one story that I tease him about, which is when I was writing about my adolescence and my years in college when the sexual revolution was taking place and the pill was suddenly available... It was just a time of dramatic upheaval in relationships between men and women as well as a variety of other dimensions of American life. And he was saying, "You have to tell me more about this. You have to tell me more about this." And I looked at him and I said, "You mean I've got to write about the boyfriends?" And he said, "Yep, you got to do the boyfriends." The boyfriends are there.

McNally:

They are. And can you tell us a little bit about the title? I mean obviously a recognizable phrase.

Faust:

Yes. It's a phrase borrowed from John Lewis who was a hero to me from the time I became aware of the Civil Rights Movement, he was very much an inspiration when the Selma march was taking place. And I saw his head being bloodied on television, and was moved to cut my midterm exams and go join the Selma march. And then it was my enormous privilege to get to know him when I was Harvard University president. He came to campus a number of times.

He came and spoke when we first began to recognize the presence of slavery on the Harvard campus in the 18th century with a plaque naming the enslaved people who had worked in the president's house in the 18th century. And he came and gave a beautiful speech. And then on my final commencement as president, he generously agreed to be the commencement speaker.

And he got up and he began his remarks by turning to me and saying, "Thank you Madam President for making necessary trouble." And that seemed to me, when I was thinking about how to title the book, a real explanation of my movement towards activism and being, in my father's views and the view of my family, a complete pain in the ass.

And it was to survive. It was not so much because I had a choice, but if I was not going to go the unhappy route that my mother and grandmother had taken, which I talk about in the book, I had to be a rebel in my family. And so it was a necessary gesture. And I called him just a few months before he died because I felt I can't just use these words. Somehow, I have to have his assent, his agreement, his permission. And I told him about my desire to use them. And he, of course, being John Lewis, always gracious, said, of course, of course he would be honored. And so that is the origin of the title, and why it was so imperative in my view to ask to use it and then his approval or blessing of my taking it in those ways.

McNally:

No, it's quite a beautiful story really. It's like your chapter in his book in a way.

What has been the response? This book has been out since the fall of '23, I believe.

Faust:

That's right. It was published in August '23. So really a full year. What has been the response? It's gotten very nice reviews. It sold quite a number of copies according to FSG, I don't even know, but they've been very pleased with the sales. It was on the *New York Times* Bestseller List for several weeks. And for me, most gratifying has been hearing from people who've written and a lot of people telling their own stories - "This is what happened to me in these years." So I'm saving all of those. I'll put them in the Harvard Archives, so that it won't just be my story, but an array of stories that have come to me.

And then some very meaningful correspondence from women of all ages - young women saying this story is meaningful to them, but then women of my age and generation, our age and generation, saying, "Oh, that story about your mother is my mother." So I think it's not just, "I remember the products in Life Magazine," which is something I talk about in the book, or "I remember the horrible food we ate in the 1950s," but also the family dynamics seemed to not have just been my own family dynamics.

McNally:

And one question before we switch to your story, which is will there be more volumes now that you've written memoir and gotten a positive response?

Faust:

Nope. This is it for me in memoir.

McNally:

Wow. Okay.

So let's jump into your story. Can you tell folks where you come from? What part of Virginia, what part of society?

Faust:

I grew up in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in a county called Clark County, which was a county to which Tidewater Gentry in the 18th and early 19th century sent their younger sons when they ran out of land in the aristocratic Tidewater. A number of those first families of Virginia sent their scions to Clark County. So their names like Burr and Carter and names that are part of the Virginia legacy that owned property there and still live there in many instances. And I grew up in a privileged family in that community in a time when segregation was very much the assumed way of operating in the world. The population was, I believe, about 20% African-American in

my community. I grew up on a farm and was very actively engaged with horses and sheep and cattle and other animals. And it's funny, I mentioned the animals before I mentioned my brothers, but that should not be taken as significant.

McNally:

Well, we know who you spent more time with.

Faust:

Yes, maybe that might be true, but I grew up with three brothers, and that's significant as well, because being the only girl in the family made me very aware of the rigid gender expectations that were not applied to my brothers, and the force with which my mother felt that I needed to become a lady, and the power she exerted to try unsuccessfully to make that so.

McNally:

Well, as I cheekily sort of referred in my intro about how college and activism allowed us to take our protest outside of our families to the wider world. We had six kids and blah blah, but there were the fights for fairness and justice, and "Wait a minute, how can you set that crazy rule?" and so on, were the battles I waged until I moved away. And then that path opened up. And...

Faust:

That's such an interesting way of framing it. My first battle that I recall was when I was probably two years old, maybe three, and my mother decided I needed to wear these little lace panties that she called fancy pants over my regular underwear. And I was just outraged. It seemed ridiculous. They itched. What was the point of this? I already had underwear. Forget it. I'm not going to do it. And we just had a battle royal over that, and then continued to battle often about clothes, often about hair, all those girl things that my brothers didn't have to do. So yes, the domestic battles preceded the larger, more meaningful ones - warm up acts.

McNally:

I was fighting a sort of crazy authority and have been doing so ever since.

Faust:

Yeah, and your remark about fairness, that was so central to me because I had my brothers exempt from these things and it's not fair. It's not fair. But then I saw there were much bigger things that were unfair in that society than whether I had to wear lace pants.

McNally:

Okay. You mentioned your grandmother in terms of the plaque story, just a touch more, and then I want to move into talking about your mom, but your grandmother spanned a certain time and embodied a certain consciousness.

Faust:

She did. She was a very bright woman, beautiful as a young woman, very much a belle. And she presided through kind of a force of will, and also the iron hand in the velvet glove. She was very strong, but she always officially deferred to the men around her. She was widowed at an early age. She was in her forties. Her husband died in his early fifties. She never married again.

And her history actually is worth thinking about before I encountered her. And I write in the book about World War I, which I'm not old enough to have lived through, but I felt was such a shaping force in our family life. She was the daughter of a man who became a senator from Tennessee in the 1920s. He'd graduated from West Point in 1883, and he was in the military for a time, and then left the military to be a lawyer and publisher, and so forth, and businessman in Knoxville. But then when World War I broke out, he went back into the military in his fifties, and was a general commanding troops on the western front in the terrible, terrible bloody battles of the summer and fall of 1918.

And he had a son, my grandmother's older brother, who joined the Naval Flying Corps. This is a time when airplanes were extraordinarily dangerous, and his airplane crashed and he was killed in the North Sea just weeks before the armistice in 1918. And my great-grandfather was just distraught. And my grandmother writes him a letter that I think is a key to the whole history of our family. She writes and says that she knows that she can never replace her brother.

And she says, "A girl is never the same and the family name now comes to an end and basically all you have is me, your daughter." And that acceptance of her second-class status and the tragedy of her brother's death, and the way the world changed for her in that moment permeates her life thenceforth.

And of course, she's a young bride, has her first baby, my father in 1919, and in just over 20 years, he's going off to war. So war is kind of a theme in this book with World War I, World War II and then the Vietnam War - all shaping the family so profoundly.

McNally:

Right. Your mother died at 48 and you were how old at that point?

Faust:

I was 19.

McNally:

19. Okay. So this is once you're off to college... She comes across as a very significant figure in your development of your self, partially as a warning, as a model of what you didn't want to become. Can you tell us more about your mom and the messages and lessons that I'm sort of hinting at you took from her?

Faust:

My mother died at 48 - to our great surprise when we shouldn't have been surprised at all. She was obviously quite ill, but we just got so used to seeing her emaciated self that we took it for granted. That's just the way she was. Looking back, I think she likely was a kind of adult anorexic.

She was desperately unhappy, forced into the role of wife and mother, and she cut herself off from many of the things that had given her great pleasure and sense of accomplishment as a young woman. She was an excellent horse woman, but I never saw her on a horse. I heard legends about her. I saw paintings of her. She rode side-saddle of all things. I can't imagine how she managed to stay on the horse, but she did. And she gave it all up saying, "I have to spend my time with the children. I have to be a dutiful wife." And yet she was clearly bitter about it in ways that expressed themselves, I think, in her medical issues.

But she would say to me often, "It's a man's world sweetie, and the sooner you figure out that, the better off you'll be." And even when I was small, that seemed to me like a consignment or a sentence rather than a really fully embraced or cheerfully embraced message. And so I was very aware that she was unhappy.

In fact, sometimes with my two older siblings, one brother older and one just younger... The littlest one was so much younger, he didn't take part in these conversations - but we'd say, "We need to think of something for her to do other than to focus on us. We need to give her some kind of meaningful role. What could she do?" And, of course, we weren't going to figure that out.

McNally:

I will tell you, my mother, when her father died and her mother moved in with us and could take care of the kids, she went to work and she became such a fuller person when she went to work. I said before about crazy authority. She was way too protective, and once she went to work, it was like she became so much more normal. And your mom never got that chance.

Faust:

Exactly. And I'm not sure what exactly she would've done with herself because she was a terrible student. Just terrible. She never graduated from high school. She, I think was probably dyslexic in a time when no one paid attention to that. So what for me became the great engine of possibility - education - was something that she had not had, and I think that made a huge difference.

McNally:

Yeah. Let me just say, in my family, the story is that my mother and my father each skipped two grades in school, which of course was much more normal then. And on his return from World War II, my dad went to Harvard on the GI Bill, graduated at 29 with

three kids, commuting each day from his family home in New Bedford. But my mother never went to college. That was the era. They both had the same potential, but it wasn't in her society's view, it wasn't available.

Now, one last thing about your mom. She grew up in New Jersey.

Faust:

She did.

McNally:

So she only married into this Virginia countryside.

Faust:

Right. And I don't think she was ever comfortable with it. I knew she wasn't comfortable with it and often thought about the relationship she had with my imperious powerful grandmother

McNally:

Who was your dad's mother, your dad's mom, not hers.

Faust:

Yes. And I think that was difficult for her, but as I wrote this book, I began to think about memories I had that suggested to me that my mother was also not at ease with the biracial nature of this society and with the customs that surrounded those relationships. She grew up in a community outside New York. Her father commuted to New York, and it was essentially a white community. And she was not used to the character of the community in which she landed as a wife and mother.

McNally:

Right. And you said in your family there were African-Americans who did the cooking and drove you to school, that sort of thing.

Faust:

Yes, yes.

McNally:

So she walked into that.

As I mentioned in the intro, I see you as an activist. Before I knew anything like that was possible. I assume I read about Freedom Summer and saw it on the news, but that I might leave my family and go there myself, wouldn't have been on my radar. Same with the foreign exchange you did. Among my family, my friends, my guidance counselors, such possibilities never came up. You seem willing to accept the notion of

being an activist. How do you define it and when do you see your first turn in that direction?

Faust:

Well, maybe when I fought with my mother over my waist pants, a second milestone would be when I wrote to President Eisenhower.

McNally:

Right. The letter you mentioned earlier...

Faust:

I was nine years old. It was a time when Virginia was seized with upheaval because of Brown v Board and the mandate from the Supreme Court that schools be integrated. The response of white leaders in the state of Virginia was to call for resistance. And then Senator Harry Bird, who lived not far from us, just about five miles down the road, was to call upon white Virginians to close the public schools rather than integrate them. So suddenly racial arrangements that had gone without saying from the part of the white community, things that one learned almost by osmosis suddenly were being talked about. And the principles on which they rested and the differences among different factions within Virginia and between Virginia and the Supreme Court and the national government suddenly became evident even to a small child.

And I remember being in a car with Rafael Johnson, who was an African-American man who worked for my family. He was driving me home from school, and I started hearing on the radio, debates about what Virginia was going to do and what the next governor was going to do. And it was centered probably around the gubernatorial election, I think, looking back in retrospect. And I suddenly thought, "What? My school is all white on purpose. This isn't just an accident."

And I asked Rafael, "Is that true?" And he said not a word. Of course, he did not want to get into such matters with a young white girl. That would've been dangerous. And then I asked him again, I said, "If I painted my face black, I couldn't go to my school?" He said nothing.

And so I took that to mean assent, that I was right. And I was just outraged if things aren't fair. Boy, that wasn't fair. And so I went home and wrote an irate letter to President Eisenhower. I always told myself I'd written it. This was a memory I had. And then in the early 2000's, I thought, did I really do that? Did I make that up? I'm a historian. I ought to be able to find this letter in the National Archives. So I did.

McNally:

And..

Faust:

There it was,

McNally:

What's wild is it wasn't in your archives, it was in Eisenhower's.

Faust:

Yes, exactly. Exactly. So I got to see what my arguments were. To my surprise, they were very religious. My family were Episcopalians, go to church on Sunday, kind of Episcopalians, no grace at meals, nothing so involved as that. But clearly the message of Christian benevolence had penetrated my nine-year-old brain. And I started in a very bossy way telling the president, he knows what Christ dedicated himself to, and I called upon him to remember that and integrate the schools.

McNally:

In the consciousness of a 9-year-old - He must have a similar experience to me... He'll relate to this,

Faust:

Right? I was bossy. I was bossy with everybody including the President.

McNally:

The exchanges you went on... I mentioned them briefly. One in 1963 at the age of 15, where you went to West and East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia at the time. And then in '64, a year later, a racially integrated group of students to several cities in the American South, cities that had a particular resonance or were highlights or lowlights of the civil rights battles of the day.

What drew you to those? How did you find them? And how have what you learned in those two trips stayed with you?

Faust:

Those two trips were life-changing, and I just stumbled upon them. I was in high school in Massachusetts at Concord Academy, a boarding school, and I came upon a flyer that said, "Come on this trip to East Germany and Eastern Europe... Hands across the Iron Curtain. Let's have young people contribute to world peace..."

And this was very appealing to me, in part, I believe because of the occurrence of the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962, which was, I don't know if you recall it, but it was very destabilizing and upsetting to me.

McNally:

Yes...yes...

Faust:

And I remember sitting around in an empty classroom one night with several of my classmates talking about the world ending. And if the world did go up in a nuclear conflagration in the next few days, what would we feel we'd missed? And what would our regrets be about our lives? Now that sounds a little bit like hysterical teenagers, but it wasn't. It was a very real perception.

McNally:

You weren't the only ones having those conversations.

Faust:

Yeah...So when that calmed down and we survived, I nevertheless remained very open to the idea that I wanted to do something for world peace. So I came across this flyer and that put me in contact with the Quakers. And I had not been in contact with that group before, but that was very much the bedrock of the assumptions and the people who went on this trip to Eastern Europe. And began to give me a much more sophisticated and nuanced view of the Cold War, and how, for example, the monolithic view of Communist countries just didn't hold up, when you thought about the differences between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and East Germany, each of which had a Communism that was different from the other.

McNally:

Mmm-hmm...

Faust:

Then to talk to young people about what they believed in their society and what they didn't, and to see some heroic young people who plan to try to escape to the West, or other young people who felt that they wanted to contribute to making a better society in their own countries. And so that was an eye-opening experience for me.

Then the person who'd organized that trip asked me if I wanted to the following summer, participate with a group of students going to cities that were chosen because the Quaker organizations, American Friends Service Committee and others, had really been doing work in each of those cities.

And we ended up staying with African-American families in those towns. And in the wake of the passage of the Civil Rights Act in the summer of 1964, just as we were departing on this trip. We undertook actions with young Black teenagers, who were very involved in the movement and were challenging segregated facilities, demanding that they comply with the new law.

We would go in biracial groups to do that, because Black testimony often was not believed or accepted, and so we could be the white observers. So we got in the middle of things in Orangeburg and in Birmingham and Farmville, Virginia, where the schools had been closed for many years prior by the massive resistance of the state of

Virginia.

I got exposed to a lot of heroic people... people my age had been jailed many times because of being on picket lines, or, in the family I stayed with in Orangeburg, South Carolina, there was a 9-year-old who I think had been to jail 10, 11 times. It was stunning to me to think people devoted themselves to ideals like this, and what was I going to do with my life? And what did all this mean in terms of... human beings advancing the cause of justice, and seeing something bigger than their own little personal lives? So that made real for me the civil rights struggle in a very personal way.

McNally:

Yeah, those two experiences seem to me to have given you an experience of adolescence at mid-century that was rare...obviously. I think one of the things that worked for you was that you left Virginia and did high school at this boarding school in Concord, Massachusetts, which exposed you to these trips and so on, and a different upbringing before you go to college.

Faust:

Can I say a word about that?

McNally([00:44:39](#)):

Yes.

Faust ([00:44:39](#)):

It was a girls' school at that time. And so for me to be put in this world where women ruled and there were powerful female role models... I'd grown up in a place where I never saw a female doctor. I never saw a female business person. I never saw a female lawyer. And suddenly here I am in this world where women are in charge, encouraging girls in the school to dream of being lawyers, dream of conquering the world in whatever way they might choose, and also being taken hugely intellectually seriously. And that was eye-opening for me and life-changing for me the way those trips were as well.

McNally:

I do want to say to listeners, if you get to this book, the story of the leader of Concord Academy is really a wonderful one. She was a model of female strength initiative, ambition, and yet told her students, "Defer to men." It's wonderfully contradictory... a woman who somehow... like we talked about your grandmother having one impulse but through a weird lens... This woman had, again, these contrasting consciousnesses. I highly recommend you pay attention to that when you read the book.

I will take a slight digression here just to again talk about the contrast between your

experience and mine, which overlap in lots of ways. In 1964, that summer you are going to the South with this group... And imagine, for people who didn't quite maybe focus on that, this is a group of White and African-American young people - one of the most scary prospects for White Southerners - and staying in the homes of African-Americans. I just want to emphasize how radical that was.

Let me just tell you a brief anecdote of where I was at. I went to Florida Boys State the summer of 1964, and Boys State was run by the American Legion. It was very conservative, but with macho ambition rolled into it. What you do at Boys State, and I'm sure you know this, and Girls State... and there have been two pretty good documentaries that have come out in the last few years about a Boys State and a Girls State.

You're split up into two parties at random and you run for city council, county council, legislature, and ultimately someone by the end of the week becomes the governor of Boys State Florida 1964. I immediately deferred from the track they offered me, As you went through the line entering, you got either a green card that said you were a Nationalist or a yellow card that said you were a Federalist.

I took one of each, split it down the middle. They were the Nats and the Feds, and I called myself the Nads. And if you can think about the mentality of a high school junior, our cheer was, "Go Nads." And I had people who joined my party. We did fake campaigns and fake cheers and all this stuff. I was a yippie, basically, right?

Faust:

There you go.

McNally:

I knew this was crazy, but here's the sad and so telling thing... It was only after I got back home that I realized that out of 540 young boys, there wasn't - God, it's making me choke up - there wasn't a single African American.

Faust:

Yes, yes...

McNally:

...and that I couldn't even see that. I knew this was hokey, I knew it was BS, but I didn't even notice the segregation.

Faust:

Blindness. Blindness is a theme for me in my historical work. What haven't we seen in the past? What didn't we understand? And then how can looking at that historically

make us more aware of blindness as we have now? What are we not seeing? What are we not seeing?

McNally:

Thank you. Thank you.

I find it really interesting... talking a little bit more about college. While you were an activist involved with SDS, yet you also sought and served major roles in student government at Bryn Mawr while you were there. Now my own experience? Student government by my sophomore year seemed way too conventional. I was being groomed - actually, it was pretty clear to me - to be the next head of the young Democrats at Harvard, and I decided I'm not going to run. I ran the campaign of one of my roommates and he won. But for me, I had already begun to see or to feel from my perspective that student government and young Dems were too 1950's. And yet you were in both. Talk to us a bit about that.

Faust:

I was just thinking as you were saying that, wasn't Chuck Schumer in the Young Democrats in your era at Harvard?

McNally:

I don't remember him. I remember James Roosevelt, grandson of FDR.

Faust:

Well, Chuck Schumer always tells a story about how he was much more moderate than the SDS forces that emerged, and I think the Young Democrats was his identity.

McNally:

Well, I think he was a couple of years younger than I.

Faust:

At Bryn Mawr, there wasn't that division so starkly etched in the political landscape and there wasn't much of a sense of hostility to the college at that point. As you and I both know, in 1969 at Harvard, there was a very significant eruption with the police called in to drag students out of their occupation of a building. Things at Bryn Mawr never got to that. It was more, as the book describes, actually more of a sense of collaboration with the administration, pushing the administration, enlightening the administration, but not so much trying to overturn them or chase them out of town.

McNally:

You finally end up President of the Student Government or the Senior Class or something. You actually were working with the administration to push them - and succeeding.

Faust:

Yes. This sounds so absurd, and I talk about how absurd it is in the book. We abolish parietals, we abolish these rules that said women couldn't be out all night. The absurdity is made clear to me when I say to my daughter of college age many, many decades later, "I abolished..." - and this is taking too much credit - but I say, "I abolished parietals at Bryn Mawr," and she looks at me and says, "What are parietals?"

McNally:

Of course,

Faust:

That's the good news and the bad news. The good news...

McNally:

Those same changes happened at Harvard while I was there. My freshman year, there were parietals. By senior year there were coed dorms.

Faust:

They were gone. The fact she didn't know what it was, that's tribute to how successful we were. But she needs to know that things like that existed.

McNally:

By the way, I was in the building when the state troopers came in. I was lucky enough - people who listen to the show regularly have heard this before - but once we heard they were coming, we gathered in the central lobby at University Hall, and there were two entrances.

I was on the front row, if they came in, say, the north entrance, and there's a picture in the Harvard archives of me at that moment, and I am scared shitless, right? They tried their battering ram on that entrance and the chains didn't give. So they went to the other entrance. I'm now in the back row, and they come in the door, and I expected something like, "File out single file...You face the possibility of arrest, dah, dah, dah...." No, they didn't say a word. They came in swinging. And so I look back and I see people being hit over the head with three-foot billy-clubs and blood, and I jumped out of a window.

I'm looking at the clock and I realize we've got like five minutes left, Drew. There's your whole career. There's what's going on in academia. I would love to talk about that stuff as well, but let's just skip way ahead and... What is your sense of what's most wrong and working best in the way the universities are dealing with the protests? There's free speech and there's academic freedom, and they are two different things, and I think they've gotten mushed together.

Faust:

Well, it's important to understand how different campuses are today from the ones that you and I occupied in the 1960s, in that these student bodies are so much more diverse, representing people from so many different backgrounds, countries, perspectives. Our campuses were far more homogeneous, and only in part because of activism of our era did the campuses begin to become more expansive in who they included. A

And we've had over the last year, a situation in which a terrible war in the Middle East has brought tragedy to so many people and individuals representing both sides of that war are here on campus. I know of students who've had awful things happen to their family members in the wake of the raid on Israel on October 7th, people whose family members were killed or raped or taken hostage. And at the same time, we also have people very connected to, for example, the three young men who were shot at in Burlington, Vermont, because they were wearing keffiyeh and they were Palestinian.

And I don't think there was anything quite like that when we were young. And that people who on one part of the world are literally at each other's throats, fighting a terrible war, are represented on different sides of a bathroom in a Harvard house.

So it's a challenge to say we want everyone to sit down and talk rationally and thoughtfully about their differences, and use reason to reach out across divides. A lot of people on this campus were and are experiencing deep trauma from what has happened, and we have to acknowledge that and respond to that, with the ideal always of having people communicate across tragedy and across difference and across variety and so forth. But that is an ideal very much tested, and if we're not always perfect in achieving it, I think we should understand why and commit ourselves to the kinds of measures that can support an environment in which it's possible.

The great promise of the American university, it seems to me, is just that. It represents a place in society that's supposed to transcend narrow political goals in search of allowing a variety of points of view, a variety of different approaches to everything from how you do biology to how you argue about literature. A standard of rigor and proof, but a tolerance of the difference that can lead us towards greater approach to truth. And we've got to champion that.

But we also have to recognize that we're dealing with human beings. And human beings are imperfect and complicated, and they have nuanced views that sometimes our social media censorship culture does not permit.

McNally:
Right.

Faust:

And that's another thing that we didn't have in our childhood is social media to reduce everything to a polarized reality. I think people have enormously good intentions who are running these universities. They're trying to find a way. They need support and understanding, not constant harassment and harranguement. "Harranguement" is not a word, but haranguing for their shortcomings, but rather some sympathy with their goals.

McNally:

I will give you one last question, which is - The Right has been attacking universities for years, and have seized on the difficulties you've just mentioned of how do you deal with the conflicts on campus nowadays as a way to ramp up their attacks. And we've seen presidents of universities resign in the face of disappointing congressional testimony and so on. Why should people realize how valuable... what the value, the purpose, and so on of universities should be?

Faust:

Well, let me just start answering that by saying the perturbations that we've seen magnified, I believe by the media, involves such a small part of what's going on on these campuses. While people may be sitting in or protesting or even encamping in a yard or in a campus, there are so many research activities, teaching activities, athletic activities. I mean, people are playing on the basketball team or discovering new ways of dealing with viruses in the medical school, or figuring out how to educate in urban settings in the ed school, or trying out for the freshmen play in the college. I mean, it's just such a feast of positive things going on across our campuses. So I think the balance of understanding is really out of whack. So that's one thing I'd say.

But I also want to underscore what you raised: this is part of a longer assault on higher education because universities are supposed to make people feel uncomfortable. They're supposed to say, we want you to think in a way that enables you to change, to learn more, to become somebody you weren't when you started. That's the whole point of a college education. You get a degree saying you've taken all these courses, you've succeeded at learning all these things that make you different and that you are more learned, you are more reflective, I hope.

Also, as researchers and scholars, to think about a future in which we understand the world around us differently. and that to challenge the status quo is not always something those in charge of the status quo are comfortable with. And so we need to recognize that if we don't let universities do that, they can't make the discoveries, they can't educate and build human beings in the way that an education must. And so I worry that our intolerance for that kind of discomfort is a danger to the higher education system that is one of the gems of this country, and has long been seen as far and away the best higher education system in the world.

McNally:

Yeah, you cite statistics... At the time that they're under this attack, I think a global review, maybe it's *US News and World Report*, has the US with 7 out of the top 10 universities in the world.

And I will just throw out two quick things. One is that the feeling that students shouldn't be uncomfortable seems to happen on both sides. You get the trigger warnings on the Left and you get the whitewashing of history on the Right. It's not the way forward. And then as you also point out, most of the people doing the big complaining, whether on Wall Street or in Congress, are still sending their kids to college.

So we're going to bring it to a close. There's so much more about your life after '68, but we're stopping sort of where you did in the memoir. So again, the website is drewfaust.com. and the book is *Necessary Trouble: Growing Up at Mid-Century*.

For this conversation and many other interviews and articles, to join me in pursuit of a world that just might work, go to terrencemcnally.net or aworldthatjustmightwork.com. They're the same website. If you want to receive my weekly email newsletter telling you who's going to be on, what we're going to talk about, and usually links to 10 or 15 articles to flesh out the conversation, email me at temcnally@mac.com. You can also subscribe and listen to the Free Forum podcasts at most of those podcast sites. You'll find years of podcasts in the archives - Michael Lewis, Jeremy Scahill, Naomi Klein, Robert Reich, Van Jones. You can also follow me on Twitter @mcnallyterrence. Thanks to Kiyana Williams in production, George Vasilopolis at Progressive Voices, and most of all, you, my listeners, please share this podcast widely. And finally, thank you, Drew Gilpin Faust, keep up your good work.

Faust:

Thank you so much.