

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

So, what about this Klan? What about, what about, what is it you wanted to say? This is the most important thing you got

Speaker 2 ([00:05](#)):

Important thing really. And before we talk about it is, is getting things out of order. I always felt, and I I'm trying to remember. I think Bob miles was the grand Claude, but don't hold me to this. Now we're working from a long time ago. And I think the grand club was the chaplain of the United Klans of America, the UK. And so these people to me were God-fearing people and yet they hate. And when I look at what's going on in the world today with the, the mid East crisis and in everything over there, these are religious people, but they hate, and I can't get that through my head. That precludes me understanding anything about the Klan or anything about what's going on in the world today. I don't understand hate, and that's what this is about,

Speaker 1 ([01:01](#)):

But you had a chance to see up close,

Speaker 2 ([01:04](#)):

Very up close, very personal.

Speaker 1 ([01:06](#)):

Tell me about the first time that you're interacting with the Klan as a professional. In fact, what were you doing at that point? What was your job?

Speaker 2 ([01:13](#)):

Well, job at that point, when I was a staff photographer at the Lansing state journal, we had a very good writer named Charlie half and Charlie and I were friends and we bowled together, drank together all the nonsense that friends do. And we decided that we wanted to do a story on the Klan, but we didn't know how to reach them. So we just simply put the word out in the newsroom. We felt there might've been some people in the newsroom that might've had tendencies, leanings. What have you, that we wanted to do a story on the Klan and lo and behold, it wasn't very long after that. And Bob miles contacted us and we did a one on one interview with him at the newspaper. And Charlie did the interview and I took the photographs. It was during that initial interview about what the Klan was, what they stood for. And that I said, I would like to go to a cross, Bernie and Bob miles. It's not a problem. You know, the next time we have one, I'll give you a buzz. The next time they did, he did. And I indeed went,

Speaker 1 ([02:21](#)):

Why don't you back up and tell me a little bit about his philosophy. What was, what were you hearing while mr. Haas was taking notes? You were photographing, but that's okay.

Speaker 2 ([02:31](#)):

Requires you to listen to it. It does. What I'm hearing was two things. One Bob miles was probably the most personable man that I had ever met. If you didn't know what he stood for, you would like him. He would be an easy man to like an easy man to sit and chat to a good man to go and have a cup of coffee with, I mean, truly this man, personable, he had that quality that made you want to like him and the

qualities of a leader. I mean, that's how he became a leader of this group. He had the necessary qualities, but knowing what the Klan stands for, you couldn't get beyond that barrier. That was a huge barrier. You could see through it. You can see these other things, but you couldn't let yourself like this man, because your beliefs are so entirely different. I mean, we're, we're truly 180 degrees apart.

Speaker 1 ([03:33](#)):

Did he explain how he came to those beliefs? Why did he believe as he did? And what did he do?

Speaker 2 ([03:38](#)):

What he never did to my satisfaction. I'm not, I don't recall that Charlie ever asked him that, but at, at the picnic, I went to the gathering of the Klan, uh, the, the words they use and I want to use the same words they used. And they're going to be offensive to some people that are gonna watch this tape, but I'm not gonna, I'm not going to try to pussyfoot around it. They didn't like, and this order, as I recall, n*****s Jews, the federal government and the Kennedys, that when I was at this particular meeting, it was shortly after Chappaquiddick. And there were many bumper stickers that said Kennedy for lifeguard. So these people, you know, and their hate, you could almost feel the hate and they would use these words, these pejorative words. I just, it was easy for, well, they didn't like Catholics also, but it's easy for me as a white man to hide my Catholicism at the time I was a practicing Catholic. Uh, but they didn't like Catholics. I mean, they had their way of looking at the world. And if you didn't fit into their way, they didn't like you. I don't, I don't have the feeling that it was as narrow as I described. I think it was much more broad than that. And Bob miles went on to be convicted of the Pontiac school bus bombing and serve time and in Michigan for that. So, you know, and that was part of the desegregation problems in which obviously they were against. So

Speaker 1 ([05:17](#)):

You got the invite to your first Klan rally and you've been to several. What happened? What, what led, what led the way to the Klan rally and what happened there? What were you thinking?

Speaker 2 ([05:28](#)):

The very first thing, this is the first Klan rally was up near Birch run. And I can't my wife and I were just up at Birch run at the shopping center there. And I was driving down the road. I tried to remember which farm it was and I can't, I would love to be able to pinpoint for you where I was, but I do remember, and there's a photograph here, the negative I pulled in and there were four at least guys standing at the driveway right near the road. And they all had guns. They all had carbines or long, long guns rifles. And I have no reason to think that they weren't loaded. And they said, you know, what are you doing here? Cause they didn't recognize me. And I said, I'm here to be a guest of Bob miles. This is y'all wait right here.

Speaker 2 ([06:17](#)):

We'll be right back. And a couple of them took off and came back. Sure enough. I was what I purported to be. So I was allowed in and Bob and I had a conversation and I said, you know, obviously I'm a photographer at this time for the state journal. I've got my cameras and my gadget bag. And it's pretty obvious I was a photographer. And I said, I want to take as many pictures as I can. And Bob said, you can take as many photographs as you want, but if somebody says they don't want their picture taken, you probably ought not do it. And you know, I agreed with him. So, but I had the absolute run of the place. There was no secrecy at all. And it was, it was a family picnic in the afternoon. Yep. Little children,

moms, dads, what have you. And they were all just getting together and having a, compare it to a family reunion. They were having a good time. It was a summertime picnic

Speaker 1 ([07:23](#)):

With special entertainment at night

Speaker 2 ([07:26](#)):

At dusk. Then there was a little bit of secrecy. I was not allowed into where they were rolling up or getting dressed for the, they wouldn't let me see who was putting the robes on. And that was fine. I had, I wasn't there as an expos. A, uh, they all knew who I was. I knew who they were. Uh, the one thing that strikes me as we're talking and thoughts pop into my head. So we're not in a straight line progression here. Most of these people would be what today is called a Cracker or a redneck. And they all speak with an accent from South of the Mason Dixon line. I don't want that broad brush to, you know, be used to everybody. But just about everybody at this particular meeting was working class spoke with a, with a Southern accent,

Speaker 1 ([08:27](#)):

Not miles, not much.

Speaker 2 ([08:29](#)):

You're absolutely right. Very articulate, man. Very articulate, very bright, very personable. If Bob miles were sitting here and you were talking to him and you didn't know that he was a Klansman, you would like him. I just almost guarantee that.

Speaker 1 ([08:48](#)):

And we're taught to love our enemies. Why you even love him?

Speaker 2 ([08:53](#)):

Well, we taught really to love our, or are we taught that we don't have to be like her enemies? If I love my enemy, do I embrace what he stands for? I can't quite go that far. Uh, this hate thing bothers me deeply. And they're there. That is the pervasiveness of a Klan gathering is one of hate ridicule, all, all the nasty terms that you can apply to people they did. And it was not good. So they were rubbing up and then what happened?

Speaker 3 ([09:40](#)):

Alright,

Speaker 2 ([09:40](#)):

I believe in God, let me say, let me say that I'm not an overly religious man, but I do believe in a God. I do believe in a Supreme human being and the symbol of my belief is across and to see a cross that's wrapped in burlap and soaked in kerosene or some such flammable liquid to see that put up right. And then torched and burned. I can't begin to tell you David, how much that got to me to see my symbol of what I think the world ought to be like in a Christian sort of way, uh, recognizing their other face, but do unto others. It bothered me a lot to see that cross, uh, touched off and burn.

Speaker 3 ([10:43](#)):

Oh,

Speaker 2 ([10:45](#)):

And when I mentioned something, Y Y Y across and there wasn't a really good answer into the burning. It was nothing more to them than a signal for the gas Klans to gather you burn a cross. And the Klans gathered to the burning cross, certainly in this day and age, uh, crosses burned in people's front yards have meaning. Other than that, our Supreme court has even come to grips with that. And there are some limitations to how free our speech really is when it comes to burning across in a person's front yard back,

Speaker 3 ([11:24](#)):

Good

Speaker 2 ([11:27](#)):

Being trespass, which is I think, where they're coming from on that. So what happened to everybody, everybody gathered to the cross gathered to the cross. They threw their things in, and from there on it just, I don't really recall any singing or any, uh, organized kind of service. It was just light the cross. And they all had their long sticks that they with burlap wrapped the end there torches as it were that were all thrown towards the cross and landed on the ground. And then I don't really remember how it ended it just to me, once that cross was ignited, my own emotions got in the way of a lot of things. And I'm not sure that maybe that's why I don't remember where that place is.

Speaker 2 ([12:19](#)):

It's entirely possible. I don't know because normally I'm the type of person that you drive me someplace. Once I know where it is. Uh, I went to one other cross burning after this, which was insure lot. And at that burning, they had a cross for every year, every year that the Klan had been organized around here. And I think there, I'm going to guess at 10, there were 10 crosses burning in this farmer's field were not alongside one of the highways. And again, I couldn't drive you to that field. Could not do it. What year was that? I don't remember the exact year, but it had to be after Chappaquiddick because of the, and I think it was before 1970. Do you have to remember when miles was convicted of the school bus bombing?

Speaker 1 ([13:24](#)):

No, but we're going to find out this afternoon, but it wasn't the school bus bombing. Wasn't that in 69?

Speaker 2 ([13:29](#)):

No, she didn't. This was prior to that. So it is,

Speaker 1 ([13:32](#)):

It might have been in the early, I'm trying to think Kennedy and Chappaquiddick though, was that seventies that would have been the seventies.

Speaker 2 ([13:42](#)):

Yeah. See, I, it was, it was still fresh. So carrying that as Fred, you know, Mary Jo Kopechne, Annie. Yeah, exactly. Why do we remember those kinds of things? Uh, so we're gonna say between, I went to work in the newspaper in 66. So between 66 and 70 in that four year span is when all of this happened. So, and I went to three gatherings. One was at Birch run, one was in Sherlock and one was in the Flint area where, uh, the photograph, I, I don't remember the gentleman's name, but he was the head of the Klans of the United States. He was the grand dragon, I believe was his title. You'll be able to find that out this afternoon and take that photograph with you and somebody will be able to identify it. So I went to that meeting, which was indoors in our union hall or some such thing. I scrapped union hall. It was in a meeting hall of some sort. I remember that. Well, it was that kind of place. I don't, I don't want to peep unions with, I don't want to do that. I'm not willing to go there.

Speaker 1 ([14:59](#)):

Uh, that would be an interesting surmise when the tape is turned off, I'll ask you about that. Uh, so, so you came, you came away with photos and what'd you do

Speaker 2 ([15:10](#)):

With the photos? Uh, I was able to turn a little profit. I sold some back to the Klan. They were, they were much impressed. I tried to convince the editors that the shot I had of a cross burning needed to run. And they were under the impression that it was too inflammatory. If you'll recall, this is the time we were having the peace marches. The riots were in Detroit. We had a certain amount of black, white unrest here in Lansing. Uh, the editors were reluctant to run it for whatever reason. And when a photographer is talking to an editor, the photographer doesn't carry a lot of weight. You can't, you cannot force an editor to run a photograph, even though you think it needs to be told this is going on in our community or very close to our community in Birch run is what 60 miles, uh, that certainly is within reach.

Speaker 2 ([16:31](#)):

Shallot is certainly within reach. So this hate is going on and we're not willing to talk about it. We're not willing to show that. And these are things that, that bothered me then as the photographer and some of that, that, uh, learning on my part, I took with me and in my career later, so that I wasn't quite as willing to say no to some things that were not necessarily the most positive things that were going on in our community. I think going through that process probably made me a better person in my other careers than I would have been had I not had that lesson.

Speaker 1 ([17:24](#)):

There's one thing you didn't know about that though, which was in 1919, the New York world, uh, took on the Klan and the world learned to its dismay that the Klan took every attack and turned it into a recruiting tool. Yes. And so the newspaper editors in as early as 1919 gathered and were determined not to give the Klan press, which is one of the reasons there isn't as much in the paper about the classes that were otherwise might have been. And your editor may actually have been hanging on to that handed down wisdom. We don't publicize the Klan. We don't publicize the Klan.

Speaker 2 ([18:06](#)):

And I w I would not disagree with what you've just said, but I suggest that by doing that, that we're getting into the ostrich syndrome that, okay, so they use it as a recruiting tool. Let's look at the other side of that coin in, perhaps it opened some eyes in, Oh my God, we have that kind of hate going on in the world. The easy way for evil to survive is for good men to do nothing. Who said that it certainly

wasn't me, but Edmund Burke. Yes. So if good men ignore evil, is that also doing nothing? You can, you can make the argument. No, it's not doing nothing. You made the, you made the decision to not show this, but by not showing it, you're keeping a lot of good people ignorant. So people are recruited. So what we need to know they're there, or we can't, we can't deal with it. We need to know our enemies.

Speaker 1 ([19:22](#)):

You went to three cross burnings to cross burnings enemies and to cross burnings enemy. Yeah. Was that your last contact with miles that would put it in the early seventies?

Speaker 2 ([19:34](#)):

That would be my last contact with him. It was brief. And it was intense.

Speaker 1 ([19:43](#)):

Do you think that, that he used you to further his hands? I mean, that's a yes, no question, but a w

Speaker 2 ([19:49](#)):

Oh, there's a third. There's a third thing there. I don't know. It's entirely possible. I won't say that it's not possible. And I won't say that at that time, the police were keeping the, was it the red squad? I mean, so I I'm in attendance at a lot of these meetings and I can be painted with that brush. Uh, Cornelius was there, is he a Klansman? And the, the, the thought process is the police agencies at that time, if you have anything to do with them, you're part of them, whether you're a news person or not, or there weren't many other news people around there, I'll tell you that.

Speaker 1 ([20:34](#)):

Did you write or go with you? Did mr. Hoss go with you? No, no, no. Why not?

Speaker 2 ([20:40](#)):

You'd have to ask Charlie and he's dead.

Speaker 1 ([20:43](#)):

Well, did he ever say, did he say I got a family picnic we're talking

Speaker 2 ([20:48](#)):

30 years ago? I don't remember. Uh, it could have been any one of those things. Back at that time, I was a photographer and I took my craft very, very seriously. And I went many places where many reporters wouldn't go with me simply because I was working way more than eight hours a day and going much farther than our circulation boundary. I always felt that if there's something that's worth photographing, I'm going to go. If I can make it, I'm going to go. And that was my own personal philosophy. And it, it held me in good stead.

Speaker 1 ([21:31](#)):

Well, it's the difference between a pioneer and a, a me too?

Speaker 2 ([21:37](#)):

Well, there were a lot of other photographers that went there before I did. So I'm more of a, me too, than a pioneer. I look at that compared to your peers. Uh, well, it depends on who you view as your peers. You see, you don't have any, well, no. Then you're starting to talk word people versus photo people. And my peers in photography, I was staying up with them and we had ways of measuring that. We had our little contest and, uh, so I could enter contest. And then I would know if I was as good as my peer in Detroit, working for the free press and the Detroit news. And, uh, I was, let me put it this way without being immodest. I held my own.

Speaker 1 ([22:28](#)):

What did you find? So visually compelling about the Klan. I mean, he would have a photo here. What, obviously this is your favorite.

Speaker 2 ([22:38](#)):

Ah, that's, that's tough.

Speaker 1 ([22:40](#)):

I know, but as an image, tell me about this picture.

Speaker 2 ([22:44](#)):

Well, as an image to me, as, as an adult white male that has heard about cross burnings that says cross burning, that says to me what it's all about. You have an unknown person worrying, a pointy little cap in silhouette against the cross. You can't tell who he is, and they don't want you to know who they are. So I'm at least, I'm at least showing the cross. I'm showing that these people exist. I'm not showing you Bob Miles. I'm not showing you Bob Miles, his compatriots, but I'm showing you that there's a problem out there. And the problem is hate, and we need to be aware of it. And it bothers me that the media doesn't address these issues in their community, asked me if I think the plan still exists today. And my answer is an unequivocal. Yes. And beyond that, I'm not going to be able to tell you who is a Klansman and who isn't. I'm not going to be able to tell you whether they wear a Sheriff's uniform or they don't.

Speaker 2 ([24:10](#)):

I'm not going to be able to tell you if the guy that's driving that Caterpillar bulldozing our roads is a Klansman or is a good Christian or Jew or Muslim or whatever. I can't look at somebody and tell you that deep down inside, they hate. And they hate only when they've got their faces covered up. If you're going to hate me, look me in the eye and let me know who you are and hate me, but don't put a sheet over your head and hate me and then take the sheet off and think I'm a nice guy.

Speaker 1 ([24:51](#)):

What gives you reason to think that Klan is still active?

Speaker 2 ([24:55](#)):

There's nothing that gives me reason to think it's not. Does it just dissolve? Does hate just dissolve. These people were, were organized. They're still, there's the, is it David Duke?

Speaker 1 ([25:11](#)):

Gez. Yeah, it is with the Southern develop. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([25:16](#)):

Yeah. He's a client. Why, why would I, why would I think that something that was organized enough to bring several families? I don't want to put a number on it because my memory isn't that good, but it was a large group of people gathering that hate doesn't dissolve. Maybe the organization becomes weak and the organization doesn't hold meetings and the organization doesn't, but it wasn't very long ago. They were marching on the Capitol here in Lansing, the Neo Nazis, March on the Capitol. How do you know there, there are too many ways for hate to manifest itself for me to think that the Klan no longer exist.

Speaker 1 ([26:00](#)):

Miles was singular though. I mean, he is the last Klan spokesman, the last unapologetic that that was willing to interject himself into the news media to say, here I am ask me. I mean, what he did the Klans not doing anymore.

Speaker 2 ([26:21](#)):

We come back to this conversation way back to the beginning. When I said Bob miles was a personable man, he was an excellent spokesman for the Klan. He was articulate. He could voice his ideas and he was unashamed of his hate. He would project himself into, he was a leader. I'm not so sure that there are other leaders there, but that doesn't mean that there aren't a lot of followers. And it's just good to take that one charismatic person that can stand up and say, Hey, I'm the new Bob miles, Bob miles held rank in the United Klans of America. He happened to be based in Michigan, but he was every bit a national spokesman as he was a Michigan spokes.

Speaker 1 ([27:16](#)):

And one of his last pieces of advice was, uh, hang up the robes, take off the hoods, go underground, read like mad.

Speaker 2 ([27:24](#)):

I guess that just fits right in with what I just got through saying. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([27:27](#)):

Oh, I know. But I thought you'd like to hear what he said about it. What have I not asked you about that? You know about this?

Speaker 2 ([27:37](#)):

I think we've touched everything. I know my, my, my knowledge has really limited about this. My knowledge is three meetings, two cross burnings and a meeting. Well, that's in the interview was certainly another thing. Uh, so that was four times in content in a short period of time. Uh, my, my thoughts on the Klan are that that's just too much hate. There's too much good in the world. We don't need, we don't need to hate somebody because of their religion, because of the color of their skin. It just bothers me a lot.

Speaker 1 ([28:11](#)):

When you were involved in, uh, in channel six, did you have covered anything as a claim there? No. No. Never came up.

Speaker 2 ([28:19](#)):

Had it came up. I think I would have. Yeah.