

**Harriet Sheila Tanzman** was born in Brooklyn, New York, on October 12, 1940, the second child of political progressives, Abraham and Miriam (Dinnerstein) Tanzman.

Abe Tanzman, as he was known to his family and friends, taught French in a public high school and at the end of WWII, at a time of great economic growth, established a real estate business on Long Island. The family, described as part of the “transitioning Jewish middle class,” moved from Brooklyn to Far Rockaway, Queens, where Harriet and her brother Daniel lived through their high school years.

Miriam Dinnerstein’s family provided an atmosphere of leftist politics. “My aunt and uncle were active in trying to save the (Julius and Ethel) Rosenbergs,” Harriet said. “I was between 10 and 13. I didn’t understand, but [it had an] impact that people could be killed for what they believed in.... [T]hey were very ordinary people, the Rosenbergs, and so were my family.” She attributed her strength, perseverance and integrity to her mother. The “Tanz” in their name translates as “dance,” and folk dancing was important to Harriet and her family. Her parents taught folk dancing in their home throughout their lives, and each celebration included folk dance and folk music.

Harriet remembered being upset at some residents’ and fellow high school students’ prejudiced comments because they ran counter to the very liberal Jewish set of values with which she had been raised. She chose to continue her studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison because of its reputation for progressive faculty and students. While a history and then social work student, she was active with the W.E.B. DuBois Club and also worked with the local Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter. After President Kennedy’s assassination, she quit her fieldwork placement, moved in with Atlanta friends, and worked in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee national office until she returned to Madison for Spring semester 1964.

During 1964 Freedom Summer, Harriet worked in Holly Springs, Mississippi, then was recruited to be a field organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Gadsden, Alabama. She worked with SCLC in Selma, Alabama, during the January-May 1965 “Selma Wars” on citizenship education and voter registration and with a SNCC-organized youth group. She was arrested three times for “unlawful assembly” and “parading without a permit.”

She “returned to the (increasingly) local people-led movement in Mississippi in June 1965 and stayed through December 1966 in Cleveland, briefly in Rolling Fork, and in Holmes County,” to which she continued close ties for decades. She helped with Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party elections and against the Vietnam War in 1966. “The movement changed my life and shaped me into a lifelong social justice and anti-war activist,” she wrote.

In 1968, Harriet set up the audio tape archive at Highlander Center in Tennessee. From the 1970’s, she worked in progressive, alternative media over 15 years at San Francisco Newsreel (documentary films), the *Guardian* newspaper, and WBAI-Pacifica radio, where she put local peoples’ and organizers’ stories on the air for 7 years. In 1999 and the 2000s, she conducted dozens of interviews with Holmes County activists and others that are part of the McCain Library’s Mississippiana Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi, the Tamiment Library, and the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive.

After returning to live in Mississippi in April 2004, Harriet participated in COFO Building, Inc.’s work for a movement-run facility, served on the Board of Directors of Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, attended SNCC’s 50th Anniversary Reunion in Raleigh, NC, worked against the death penalty with Mississippians Educating for Smart Justice, was active in the Jackson chapter of the League of Women Voters, picketed against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, supported Conversations Mississippi and other progressive nonprofits, volunteered with the Mississippi Democratic Party, and was interested in building the Green Party. She also enjoyed documentary and other films, ushering at New Stage Theatre, programs at the Two Mississippi Museums, art projects and shows at the Mississippi Museum of Art, Sundays at the Unitarian-Universalist Church, walks in Friendship Park, and lunch with 10 friends for her 79<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Harriet Tanzman is quoted extensively in Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, Pamela S. Nadell, ed., *American Jewish Women’s History: A Reader*, and interviews with the League of Women Voters of Mississippi and the Veterans of the MS Civil Rights Movement.

Harriet died in Jackson, Mississippi, on May 5, 2020.