

Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2011

Interviewee: Mr. Guy H. Carawan and Mrs. Carolanne (Candie) Anderson Carawan

Interview Date: September 19, 2011

Location: Living room of their home, grounds of the Highlander Center, New Market, Tennessee

Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: 54:11 minutes

[Faint sounds of guitar playing and Guy and Candie Carawan singing "Tree of Life"]

John Bishop: Can you sing that again, so I can get some —?

Candie Carawan: Sure.

Guy Carawan: What's that?

CC: Want to do a little bit of "Tree of Life" again? [Strums chord]

GC: How's it go?

CC: [Whispers] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Plays guitar and sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

CC: [Sings, call and response] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “To the tree of life.”

GC: [Sings] “Tell all the little children.”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

GC: [Sings] “We’ve all got a right.”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

GC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “To the tree of life.” [Guitar break]

GC: [Hums, then sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

GC: [Sings] “We’ve all got a right.”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

GC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “To the tree of life.”

JM: Mr. Guy Carawan and Mrs. Candie Anderson Carawan are kindly hosting us today at their home at the Highlander Center in New Market, Tennessee.

My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am with Mr. John Bishop, our videographer, and we are here to do an interview for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the [clears throat]

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. Today is Monday, September 19, 2011. John, any recording notes?

JB: No XD-cam.

JM: No XD, uh, card today. Yeah, okay. Um, Mr. and Mrs. Carawan, thank you for the warm welcome. It's just a wonderful pleasure and an honor to be with you. Thank you.

CC: It's great to have you here.

GC: Thank *you*.

JM: I thought – and thank you for the wonderful music to open us up there. Um, I thought we might start just talking a little bit about, um, 1960, and the two of you meeting at, uh, Highlander, and how that brought you both right thick in the middle of the Movement. Of course, that wasn't new for either of you.

CC: Well, Highlander, uh, hosted the first gathering of people who had been involved in the sit-ins April first to third, 1960. That's when Highlander was in Monteagle, Tennessee. And Guy was already working at Highlander as a volunteer, having come in 1959. And I came up with a delegation of students from Nashville, having been involved in the sit-ins there. And, um, it was just [laughs] an incredible weekend.

Uh, I mean, I could start with the part of Guy and I meeting each other. He was teaching songs. And we'd had some songs in Nashville. We'd been in jail and used some singing to sort of keep our spirits up. But we didn't have what I would call freedom songs. And he taught us, uh, "I'm Going To Sit at the Welcome Table," "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize," and "We Shall Overcome." And I know for the people from Nashville that was just so incredible to have those songs, because they were so perfect. And I think for the students from around the South that was true.

But it was an incredible weekend in other ways. Uh, Myles Horton, the director of Highlander, and two or three other people used the Highlander process, which is asking a lot of really, uh – questions that really got you thinking and got you thinking beyond, you know, what you'd done so far to think about next steps. And, um, you know, we had breakout sessions on what the meaning of nonviolence is, whether it was a tactic or a philosophy for us. What was our relationship [5:00] with the adult communities that had already been working to try to dismantle segregation? What about the notion of, if you, uh, were arrested, rather than coming out and taking all that bail money, uh, staying in jail to put more pressure on the system. So, there were just a range of questions that, uh, we struggled with that weekend. And it was a very heady time just to meet the other people who had been involved in similar situations.

Um, I don't know about Guy's memory. He was such an important part of that weekend. But I don't know if you remember the moment you met me, honey? [Laughs]

GC: Oh, my! Hallelujah! [Laughter]

CC: Or a few other things? I know other people that we've talked to remember it that whenever the meeting got too heavy or the questions were too hard or whatever, Guy would go off in the room with his guitar. And, you know, James Bevel and Bernard Lafayette and others would go in there with him and, uh, they would just keep the singing going.

I mean, that's actually been true of Highlander historically. It's always dealt with really hard problems and pressed people to really make good decisions, but they've always used the uplift of culture to, uh, yeah, enable people to take on some of those hard things and to keep their spirits up. We've always used a lot of music and dance and good food and humor, and so, it's part of the Highlander process, actually.

JM: Sure. To ask something that I'm sure many have asked, could you maybe say a word, uh, recalling the things that spring most quickly to your mind when you think about folks like Septima Clark or Myles Horton or Zilphia Horton?

CC: Talk a little bit about Septima, Guy, because you were her driver, you know, in those early days at Highlander.

GC: Great lady.

JM: Yeah.

CC: Did you feel like it was, um – did you feel like you'd fallen into a pretty good job when Myles asked you to drive Septima around the Sea Islands?

GC: Oh, that was incredible to be able to be her driver. But she had to calm down and listen to my superior [laughter] know when to speed up and when to slow down. I loved her.

CC: [Laughs] I think she took Guy under her wing in many ways and told him when he needed to dress up a little bit, you know, about going to the churches there in the Islands and, uh, just kind of helped his behavior. They got into trouble several times, too, because, of course, Guy would have Septima sit in the front seat. And so, they were stopped a lot of times by the police wondering why is this black woman sitting in the front seat with this younger white man.

And anyway, uh, those are small things. I mean, Septima was a huge influence on both of us, just such a wise person. And, um, a surprising person, because, you know, we think of her as a great symbol of nonviolence, working with Dr. King. But I remember when we were raising our little son on Johns Island [South Carolina], and she was our neighbor in Charleston, she would say, "Well, don't take all his little toy guns away from him. Let him play with his toy guns and get it out of his system now. If you deny him the use of those guns, they'll loom large in his life, and he might want them when he's a teenager. [Laughs]

You know, she was just a very sensible person about, uh, things like that and very tough. I mean, people think of her as a sweet woman, [laughs] but she was a tough woman. She had to be, to be at Monteagle, up on the top of a mountain that was just a totally white community. And, uh, working with Myles and Lewis Jones and some of the men there, I mean, she had to be very strong and very courageous, and she was that. So, uh, anyway, she was just a very important influence on us.

GC: Um-hmm.

CC: And we could talk forever about Myles [Horton]. Do you want to say anything about Myles? [Laughs]

GC: Very strong person. [Pause]

CC: Uh, we think of Myles as just an educational visionary. He really was so smart about the kind of education that was practiced at Highlander, is practiced at Highlander, that's very much building on people's own experiences and getting people to think about what they really already know. But he was so down to earth in his sense of humor and his method of talking. He never made anybody feel the least bit intimidated. He always made people feel very comfortable. But he also wouldn't let you get away with anything if you said something really dumb. [Laughs] He would, you know, get you to think about it in a different way.

And so, [10:00] he was, uh, yeah, just somebody really important, I think, strategically, educationally, to the Civil Rights Movement and to the Labor Movement. And, um, certainly, I mean, there wouldn't be [laughs] Highlander if Myles hadn't been one of the founding directors and stayed with it. We always try to remind people that Highlander has always been a team of people working, and there have always been women as well as [laughs] a strong male director.

But his educational vision really was so key and is still the living, you know, heritage here that we all work on.

JM: Ms. Carawan, let me ask you the question about, um, what was it, when you think back, that motivated a young woman, um, college-age, in California to come all the way to Fisk University as an exchange student? That was, obviously, something that a small handful of people did, but not many. And why did you want to do that?

CC: Well, the first thing I'd say is I grew up in a family with very, uh, progressive ideas and very strong ideas about fairness and equality for everyone. And, uh, you know, so, I mean, I'd heard it all my life [laughs] in the Unitarian Fellowship I went to and the Girl Scouts, all these things about treating people fairly. And then, when I was in high school, the Montgomery Bus Boycott took place, and Martin Luther King began to get national publicity. And all of that was just very interesting to me. I remember studying some about Gandhi, also, when I was in high school.

And it just, uh – one thing I'd say is growing up in the 1950s, you're part of the Silent Generation, you know, and there's a lot of fear because of the McCarthy hearings. That was another thing. When we first got our television set, one of the first things we watched [laughs] were the McCarthy hearings, and my father was just absolutely livid about them.

And, you know, so when something began to stir in the South, it was like, "Oh, you know, maybe something else is possible. Maybe somebody is not going to be [laughs] so silent." And, um, I heard about the Fisk Exchange Program when I was still in high school. Somebody came back to my high school from Pomona College and talked about having gone on this interesting program. And I thought, "That sounds quite interesting." And that made me, uh, especially interested in Pomona, though I was looking at some other colleges as well. My father

liked Pomona very much, just for other reasons. He thought it was very good academically. And so, we agreed I should apply there, and I applied [laughs] and went to Pomona. And my sophomore year one of my very good friends went to Fisk, and, uh, the person she exchanged with, Marietta Dockery, became my roommate at Pomona.

So, when I was a junior and a lot of my friends were making their plans to go abroad [someone coughs] for their junior year or whatever, that's when I applied to go on the Fisk Exchange Program. And my timing was just so lucky, because I happened to go in January of 1960. And, you know, that semester between January and June 1960 was just such a crucial time in Nashville, and I was just lucky enough to be there. [Laughs]

JM: Among your, among your materials and wonderful collection, um, at the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill, I enjoyed, uh, sitting down with some of those materials before we came out for this visit and I listened to an interview that you, a recording of an interview that you gave – sorry, a speech that you gave on the campus. I think it probably, guessing – it wasn't dated – but probably, guessing, that fall after you returned, still in 1960. You're referring back to the prior spring.

And one thing that you mentioned – you were describing broadly the, the whole sit-in movement in Nashville and the jailing and trial and such, but you also said one thing I wanted to ask about, that you recalled that at an NAACP meeting, still would have been in January, someone came and said, “Hey, you know what? There's going to be a sit-in in Greensboro [North Carolina] coming up pretty soon.” Do you any recollection of that? In other words, that throughout the NAACP network, there was already a sense that Greensboro would kick things off.

CC: Hmm. I don't remember that. What I mostly remember is, you know, we were already having nonviolent trainings at Fisk that Reverend James Lawson was running. And we felt like we were preparing for something, [laughs] but we didn't know what. And I can just remember the electric feeling when that Greensboro sit-in did take place, and the news came to Nashville, and we said, "Oh, that's what we're – that's what we need to do!" So, I don't remember so much the mention of it before that, so.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

JB: You did mention in the, in the talk about the music being played –

[Sound of something hitting microphone]

CC: I'm sorry.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay.

JM: We're back after a short break, yeah. [15:00]

JB: Um, you mentioned that you would sing back and forth in the cells and stuff. Were there any particular songs that were meaningful, particularly meaningful to you?

CC: Well, we had one song that was, uh, a forerunner to a freedom song. It was to the spiritual, "Amen, Amen." We would sing, "Civil rights, civil rights, Justice, justice." Um, so that was important. We did it over and over again.

But what I remember is just everybody having to tap into whatever they knew. You know, there were a lot of kind of rock 'n' roll songs. There were what I would call [laughs] camp songs. There were, um, a lot of religious songs that people had learned in church. But there wasn't so much the notion that really we would get once we met Guy about taking those

religious songs and adapting them and just changing a few words and, you know, they would become freedom songs. Um, yeah, so I don't –

JB: Well, you called your talk "I'm Coming Home on the Morning Train." I was wondering about –

CC: Uh-huh, yeah, which is a song, and I sung, that I had learned probably from Guy. I'm not sure about it, because we also – important in Nashville were the mass meetings, which would happen two or three times a week, as the whole community came together and, you know, really supported the sit-in movement. [Someone coughs] And there was always a lot of singing in those meetings. I also – I don't know if I talked about it in that speech, but I know what I felt at the time. I'd always loved music and I had always been active in choirs and little quartets and things in high school. But I had never seen music like I saw in Nashville [laughs] in those mass meetings, where it was community music, you know, powerful, powerful community music where everybody sang together. I didn't have that experience. I don't know if you know about Unitarian fellowships; [laughing] we didn't sing like that in Unitarian fellowships. You know, anyway, that was important.

JM: You would, you would marry, and, um, and the two of you would work so centrally in building out a music culture in the Movement. And I wonder if you might share reflections about some of the places that effort took you, because you were, you were in the thick of so much.

CC: Well, I'm just so sorry [laughs] Guy's not going to pull all these memories out. And I just want to say a little bit more about him, because in those years, I mean, he was very much my teacher, you know. My experience in music was really limited when I first got involved in the Movement.

Guy, on the other hand, had had a whole experience in Los Angeles working with, um, The People's Songs. He'd met a family, the Oliver family, in Los Angeles. And they had introduced him to a range of people using music politically, and, um, the whole history of the Labor Movement and the way music had been used. And through them, he met people like Pete Seeger.

And he'd also, um – I don't know exact timing on this, but he'd studied a little folklore at Occidental College. But then he went on to UCLA, where he got his master's degree in sociology, and that's where he got to listen to all the Library of Congress recordings and learn about the work of the Lomaxes and hear southern music, black and white, you know, southern music. And, um, one funny story – Guy, you're going to have to correct me if I'm wrong on this, now, but Waylon Hand was one of his teachers at UCLA, and wasn't he the president of the American Folklore Society at that point?

GC: Um-hmm.

CC: He warned Guy, because Guy was writing some papers about more of the political uses of music, and he warned Guy, he said, "Well, you know, uh, you can hang out with people like Pete Seeger if you want to," he said. "But what you really need to do is just let a folksong be a folksong." He said, you know, "Look at – this could really be corrupted." He said, "Look at the way the Germans, the Nazis, took their folk music and used it, you know, in a right-wing movement." And, uh, he said, "You're much better" to just let a folksong be a folksong."

[Laughs] And I always laughed about that, because obviously Guy didn't take that too seriously!

[Laughs]

But all this to say, you know – well, I'm going to backtrack for one more thing, too. Uh, once Guy did meet Pete Seeger at a party in Topanga Canyon, heard him play the banjo, and,

you know, he said he came home that night and dreamed about banjos. [Laughs] Uh, Pete is the one that told Guy about Highlander. Guy told Pete he wanted to travel around the South and see where his parents had grown up, Charleston, South Carolina, for his mother and rural North Carolina for his father. Pete said, "Oh, it's a great idea for you to travel to the South." And he said, "You should visit a place called the Highlander Folk School, because that's a place where there's a lot of music and they're using it, you know, as part of people's struggles."

So, you know, summer of 1953, Guy goes [20:00] around South with Rambling Jack Elliott and Frank Hamilton for ten weeks [laughs] [GC laughs], and they end up spending a couple of weeks at Highlander. And, uh, you know, that – I mean, obviously, that [laughs] was a really important visit and was going to impact the rest of Guy's life.

So, just, I mean, to get back to your question, I was lucky enough to meet Guy, and we were married in 1961. And, you know, I just became his helper in those early years. He was the one that was invited out to southern communities. As people came to Highlander to workshops about the Civil Rights Movement, uh, Guy would be there to teach songs that he knew but to also learn songs that people brought with them.

And, um, people in black communities liked that. I think they thought it was a novelty. Here's this, as Dorothy Cotton would say, "tall skinny white boy with a guitar" [laughs], uh, who liked this music. You know, so he was invited to many, many communities around the South to come and to go into the churches. They didn't like him playing the banjo in the churches, but the guitar was fine, and – um, you know. Once we were married, I was [laughs] just lucky enough to go with him part of the time.

And, um, I mean, there are lots of stories we could tell about that. In Clarksdale, Mississippi, he was invited to do a joint concert with a young woman who was studying opera,

Mary Jane Pige. Mrs. Pige is the one that invited Guy, and so they did a joint concert. Guy did his folk songs and Mary Jane did the opera that she was learning. It was a wonderful concert. But when we, uh, left the church – this is Clarksdale, Mississippi – we were followed by the police. Well, first of all, the community members said, “Well, we’re going to follow you out of town now because it’s very dangerous. You’re in the black part of town. They know you’re here.” So, we were escorted, but the police stopped us anyhow. And I was very pregnant at the time, and [laughs] they took us right off to jail.

So, you know, we had our ups and downs [laughter], but mostly we had the warmth of civil rights communities welcoming us into their churches and into their homes. And, um, I mean, I can just speak for myself. I was just learning a whole thing about American society that I was so privileged to be learning. And, um, I know Guy always – he knew a lot more musically than I did, but I think he was also learning about the strength of communities when they start organizing and, you know, the notions that we could build a very different kind of country – um, very, very rich times.

GC: Um-hmm, Amen!

CC: [Laughs]

GC: A-women!

JM: Could we do a bit of a song or two that were, were songs that –?

CC: Why don’t you get that other guitar, because it’s tuned up? You could do, um, “Eyes on the Prize” and “We Shall Overcome,” because it’s in the right tuning for that.

GC: [Plays guitar and sings] “Paul and Silas bound in jail had no one for to go their bail.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

GC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

CC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

GC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

CC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

CC: That was short. Want to do a little bit of “We Shall Overcome”?

GC: [Plays guitar and sings] “We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome –”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Some day. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe we shall overcome some day.”

CC: Do the verse that Myles says he wrote. [Sings] “The truth will –”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Make us free. The truth will make us free. The truth will make us free someday. Oh, deep in my heart, I [25:00] do believe we shall overcome someday.”

JM: I mentioned before we started that Jamila Jones, Ms. Jamila Jones, had recalled the evening of a raid at Highlander. And in the dark, someone called out, uh, “We are not afraid,” and that verse came on. And I know –

CC: That’s right.

JM: Because there’s much discussion of the –

CC: Well, I’m pretty sure [laughs] that’s where that verse – I mean, somebody else might have thought about it in another situation, of course, but Jamila, Mary Ethel Dozier, she was like thirteen years old, you know, these young teenagers there with an adult group from Montgomery. And, um, she’s the one that started humming that and just popped that verse right in there in a very tense situation. So, it was – yeah.

I mean, I guess I'd like to say something about – I know Guy is going to go down in history [laughs] as the person who was able to introduce “We Shall Overcome,” you know, to the sit-in students at the founding meeting of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. But, you know, that was almost just serendipity. I mean, he happened to be in the right place at the right time.

To me, much more important, what Guy did for the next five years, was how – what a big heart he had about music and about drawing music out of other people and encouraging people like Jamila, Betty Mae Fikes, people who were the really beautiful representatives of that Movement, and Guy's role in just giving them so much encouragement and helping them get to places where they'd be heard, getting the Freedom Singers up to the Newport Folk Foundation. I mean, he was just, uh, very generous [laughs] about giving support to other people.

And I think the other thing that's really important in our history is the workshops that Guy was able to organize to bring together the song leaders of the Movement. And I give Myles a lot of credit for this, too. Uh, Myles was not a singer himself. Of course, he had been married to Zilphia [Horton], who was a beautiful singer. But he was very appreciative of how powerful the music can be in support of movement building. And so, uh, whenever Guy felt it was time to bring people together in a musical setting, Myles and Highlander gave him the support to do that.

And between 1960 and '65, we were able to organize, um, five or six really key workshops, some at Highlander, but mostly out in the South, in Atlanta and in Mississippi. And, you know, Guy was so good about getting on the phone and sending out a letter, not so much to specific individuals, but to communities, and say, “Send us your song leaders. You know, we're going to share repertoire. We're going to learn from each other and help, you know, this incredible Movement music that's growing grow.” So, those workshops were very key.

And another thing I always was impressed about Guy – in 1961, in the summer, we were living at Highlander. And it was the period when so many people had gone to jail in the Freedom Rides, and they were all in Mississippi, having gone to Parchman Penitentiary. And they were going to come out, be released, in Jackson, uh, and somebody called Guy and invited him to come down and lead singing. [Laughs]

So, he gets down to the release of the Freedom Riders in Jackson to lead singing and he suddenly realizes that these people have been in jail together for months, and they do not need anyone to lead singing. [Laughs] They knew plenty of songs, and, uh, the songs were just bursting, you know, out of them. And, uh, he just consciously said to himself, “Well, I’m going to shift my role now. There’s another role that I can play, and it has to do with documenting this growing repertoire.”

Uh, you know, and that’s when he bought a big Ampex tape recorder and began getting around the South and recording the songs of the Movement. And he knew that people making the Movement were too busy to document themselves. But he also knew, having a relationship with Moe Asch at Folkways Records and Oak Publications, he knew that there would be a way to, uh, you know, get documentary materials out nationally. And, uh, so he just, he took kind of a turn [laughs] in his work with Highlander at that point and became more a documentarian.

And I thought that was very good that he recognized that it was time to do that.

JM: Yeah.

JB: Could you speak a little more about Moe Asch and how he related to the recording industry in general?

CC: Can you talk a little bit about Moe, Guy, and your relationship [30:00] to him?

GC: Moe Asch?

CC: Yeah, at Folkways.

GC: It's a long time ago.

CC: [Laughs]

GC: But you needed people – it helped a lot to have people who could play guitars or banjos or know songs, have a repertoire of songs that would say how you felt or how a group of people who have gone through bad experiences could come, like, try to make some good out of it, and freedom songs, and standing together, making use of the songs.

CC: Guy's always given Moe a lot of credit. I mean, here's Moe Asch, who was running Folkways Records. He's putting out music from around the world and music from people's struggles. And, um, I guess by the time Guy got really involved in the Movement, he had also put out his own three albums on Folkways of his own singing, so he had a good relationship with Moe Asch. And when he placed himself in the South, Moe said to him, "Send me anything you've got!" [Laughs] You know, so Guy knew when he started recording that there was going to be an outlet for, uh, things on long play records, and that was really helpful.

And the relationship with Oak Publications was the same way. Irwin Silber was the editor at that point, and, uh, any songs that got sent to him, you know, were going to – could come out in a little magazine that's going to go around the country. And, uh, the first collection of songs that we put in book form, *We Shall Overcome*, uh, Oak put that out, but they did it for SNCC. You know, it was a SNCC publication, eighty freedom songs coming out of the Movement. So, uh, I've heard Guy give a lot of credit to both Moe Asch and Irwin Silber, and that relationship in terms of helping with this documentary side of his work.

JB: What about other – were there any pamphlets, magazines, or things that helped promote or distribute the songs?

CC: Well, Highlander itself did mimeographed, you know, uh – [laughs] remember the mimeograph machine? Even starting back when Zilphia was still alive – Zilphia died in 1956, but she, you know, had this role of encouraging music in the labor struggle, and so, some little mimeographed songbooks came out, uh, of that work. And then, Guy’s first little “Sing for Freedom” in the summer of 1960 at Highlander, that was all mimeographed up.

And, oh, I know he went the next year to the, uh, annual conference of SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], Martin Luther King’s organization, and he traveled down there with these mimeographed song sheets [laughs] from Highlander. And I believe, also, *The Nashville Sit-in Story* had already come out in record form. So, of course, that time he got stopped by the police, and they confiscated all his materials, [laughs] and, oh, goodness!

Um, I guess *Broadside* is another – you know, at the same time this work is going on in the South, there’s a Folk Revival going on in the North, and there are people writing songs about what they see in the country, including the South, people like Tom Paxton and Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan, and so *Broadside* was another publication putting out some of that material. I think of that as not being distributed so much in the South. That was more for people in the Folk Revival and in the North, uh, so I don’t think *Broadside* was as widely seen in the South.

JM: Yeah. You mentioned, um, [clears throat] your experience in the mass meetings in Nashville as something that first brought you into that experience of community music, and I wonder if you might just say a little –

JB: Excuse me. I’m going to –

[Recording stops and then resumes]

GC: [Plays guitar and hums]

JM: We’re back.

GC: [Plays guitar and begins singing “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize”] “Paul and Silas bound in jail, had no one for to go their bail.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

GC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Hold on.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

CC: [Sings] “The one thing we did wrong, stayed in the wilderness a day too long.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

CC: [Sings] “But the one thing we did right, was the day we started to fight.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

CC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

GC: [Sings] “Hold on.”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Keep [35:00] your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.”

JM: That’s lovely.

JB: Yeah, that’s beautiful.

GC: [Coughs]

JM: I was going to ask before we took that last break to adjust the lighting if you could talk a little bit more about the sense of community that carried the Movement through song, that sense of –

CC: [Laughs] You had to be there. [Laughter] It’s hard to talk about. I mean, um, first of all, just the sense of unity in movement and the idea that you’re building a beloved community. I mean, it seems so far from [laughs] the way we are in this country now. You know, we’ve all become so cynical. But in those days, uh, you know, we were full of hope. We

really thought things would change. And, you know, looking back at the Fiftieth Anniversary of SNCC that we went to, [laughs] a lot did change, you know. But, um, yeah, I mean, the music was extremely important, and I liked it when John Lewis said, “Well, the Movement without its music would be like a bird without its wings.” [Laughs]

GS: Um-hmm. [Laughs]

CC: You know, that was a really poetic way to say it. And when I’ve heard Guy talk a lot about the music in the Movement overall, he’s always good to point out that there were songs for every mood. You know, there were the very jubilant songs. There were the very, uh, sad songs when someone was killed. You know, there were the songs you used at parties. There was all the humor where you picked fun at people, the satire.

Um, and then, Bernice [Johnson] Reagon, you know, we work together on the *We Shall Overcome* Fund, which, uh, distributes the royalties, uh, for when *We Shall Overcome* [documentary film] is used commercially, and those royalties go back into the South, into southern communities. And we have an annual meeting, and I’ve heard Bernice talk about, uh, the power of the music as a nonviolent tool. You know, that when you’re up against such powers of oppression and you’re not going to use violence, but you need things that help you feel strong and that show your strength, she talked about how aggressive the music was. And that’s one thing that pulled her into the Movement in Albany, because it was the aggressiveness and the power [laughs] of the music.

So, uh, yeah, I don’t like it when sort of nonviolence gets described as something more passive or, um, or just all these songs that are, you know, we’ll all cross our arms and sing “We Shall Overcome” [laughs] at the cocktail party. You know, I think all of that just sells short the actual power that this music had in those times when people were really in motion in this

country. And then, I would say that a lot of those songs have moved into other movements, because they still convey that power. So, you know, in Guy's career, I mean, he went on to work here at Highlander with waves of other groups of people working on other issues. But those songs, uh, translate, because they do – yeah, they carry [laughs] that spirit of change.

JM: Is there an example of a sad or a satirical song that comes to mind that you might want to share?

CC: [Laughs] We're not so good at singing those, but we love those songs that the Nashville Quartet did, you know, "You better leave segregation alone, because they love segregation like a hound dog loves a bone!" Did you interview Bernard Lafayette yet?

JM: We did not, no.

CC: Okay, because he's really good [laughs] on those songs. Or, "My dog loves your dog, and your dog loves my dog, so why can't we sit under the apple tree?" You know, I mean, there are just – yeah.

And then, I mean, in terms of, um – I don't know if it's sad so much, but when people began to feel like "We Shall Overcome" is too optimistic [laughs], and also when it got a little co-opted and used in so many situations, people switched over and began singing, "We'll Never Turn Back," which has a different kind of a spirit to it. And, uh, I mean, even these days when you go to, uh, gatherings, I mean, people don't like nostalgia about this stuff, and I don't either. I don't feel nostalgic [laughs] about it. But, you know, if we'll sing "We Shall Overcome," often somebody will say, "Well, let's also sing 'We'll Never Turn Back.'" You know, it's a little different kind of a spirit. And, yeah, but I'm not going to sing it. [Laughs]

JM: I'm sure there must have been many times when you had ample cause to be fearful, and I wonder how you kind of confronted that fear as a chronic part of living in a context like the South in those years.

CC: Um-hmm. [Laughs] [40:00] I just hate to be the one doing so much talking. And I think about that particular question, I mean, yes, there were plenty of times when I personally felt fear, but I think we had nothing to fear compared to what people living and coming up in the black South had. I mean, they're the ones that really understood, um – I mean, I talk about it today when people talk about how hard it is to change everything. You know, and I always say, "Well, can you imagine what it was like in the 1940s and '50s in the black South? You know, don't you think it was hard then?" You know, [laughs] and yet, people organized and, um, yeah. So, I don't know.

I mean, I think I almost have more fear thinking of it now. The fact that we had a child in 1962 and pretty much brought him up in the Movement between his birth in '62 and '65, when Highlander shifted and started working more in Appalachia. And when I think, you know, about some of the situations, um, where we had a baby with us, it, um, [laughs] it scares me more now. I mean, I think when you're in a movement and you're with colleagues who are in it so totally and you're seeing the courage of other people, you can overcome your fear or you can – I don't know. It just takes a little bit different place in your life. [Laughs] But, um, you know, as an adult now, looking back and knowing what I know about this country and knowing how much violence there really is, um, [laughs] I think I'm more – I carry the fear more now than I had at the time.

JM: Why don't we take a little break?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

GC: [Plays guitar and sings "Tree of Life"] "Ain't you got a right to the tree of life? Tell all the little children we've got a right. Ain't you got a right to the tree of life?"

GC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

CC: [Sings, call and response] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "We've all got a right."

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

CC and GC: [Harmonize] "To the tree of life."

GC: [Sings] "All of my children,"

CC: [Sings, call and response] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "We've all got a right."

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "Ain't we got a right?"

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "To the tree of life." [Begins singing "The Garden Song"] "Inch by inch and row by row, someone bless these seeds I grow, da-da-da, de-de-de-de-de."

CC and GC: [Harmonize] "Inch by inch and row by row, someone bless these seeds I sow, someone warm them from below 'til the rain comes tumbling down."

GC: [Returns to "Tree of Life"] "Ain't you got a right?"

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] "We've all got a right."

CC: [Sings] "Ain't you got a right?"

GC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC: [Sings] “Ain’t you got a right?”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “To the tree of life.”

GC: Yes, dear Candie.

CC: Let’s do “Ties That Bind.”

GC: [Plays guitar and sings] “Ties that bind,”

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Ties that bind friends who are the lasting kind. The road you travel may wander and wind. You’re not alone when you’ve got the ties that bind. And there’s nothing like the sound of an old song, you haven’t seen in you can’t remember when. Songs of struggles lost and won, just the ones we sang for fun, oh, there’s nothing like the sound of an old song. Ties that bind, ties that bind friends who are the lasting kind. The road you travel may wander and wind. You’re not alone when you’ve got the ties that bind.”

GC: [Hums]

CC: [Sings] “When you’ve got the ties that bind.”

JB: Guy, your voice is unmistakable. Your voice is unmistakable. I’d recognize you in a crowded room. [Laughs]

CC and GC: [Laugh]

GC: Thank you.

CC: This is a funny story, but I love this. We have a great friend. His name is Ed Cabbell. And he’s a West Virginia African American [45:00] and he’s very strong on how long African American people have been in, uh, West Virginia and the strong history that they have. And, uh, he talks about coming to a workshop at Highlander and he hadn’t met Guy yet. And it was a mixed group of people, and, uh, the music started up. And he’s looking around and he

said, "Somebody in here has been singing with black people." [Laughter] And I just love that! I thought, "That is just really a compliment to Guy."

JM: For sure.

CC: Because Ed himself is a beautiful singer, both a church singer and a blues singer and, uh, just a really great person. He's organized something called the John Henry Memorial Festival in West Virginia for years to really tell the history of John Henry, but also black people in general up in the coalfields.

GC: Where is he now?

CC: Now he's in Rome, Georgia.

GC: Rome, Georgia, thank you.

JM: Mrs. Carawan, I want to ask – you mentioned, um, that question of the hopefulness that was really something that buoyed everybody up back then, and maybe, by way of contrast to, maybe, how we feel about some of these things in the present day. Uh, I wonder kind of how you both watched the Movement evolve there through the mid '60s.

CC: Um-hmm.

JM: And I think in '67 you would go out to California and teach for some years.

CC: Um-hmm.

JM: But I just wonder about how you were, as best you can recall, how you yourselves watched the Movement move.

CC: Well, [laughs] I think, you know, again, we were very lucky to be based at Highlander, or to have the connection with Highlander through the 1960s, because, uh, I know you've heard from other people in 1965, you know, is really when white people were challenged. [Laughs] I mean, the white people were voted out of SNCC, uh, and there was a growing

cynicism about how racism was really going to be dealt with or overcome. But I think Highlander, and again I give Myles a lot of credit for this, took that just very seriously and said, "That's right." Myles was very clear that black people are leading the Civil Rights Movement, and we can play an educational and supportive role. When white people got challenged to go work where racism lives, in white communities, and also just build allies for the black movement, uh, Myles thought that was a great idea. [Laughs] You know, so there was a big shift at Highlander. Uh, Septima had already gone to work with Martin Luther King's organization to carry the Citizenship School program. Uh, Bernice Robinson, who stayed with Highlander longer, went on to work with Septima again at that point. And new people – one thing about Highlander is the staff changes through time, and it reflects the constituency that you're planning to work with. So, in the mid 1960s some Appalachian people came on the staff, uh, and there was a whole period where, uh, the Highlander staff members would get back up into Appalachian communities and learn what were issues in the mountains and what did, uh, you know, these basically white [laughs] communities want to work on.

And just on the hope question, I learned from Myles that, for a place like Highlander where you're hoping to get people in motion, you look for places where people have anger and hope. They're really mad about something, but they're hopeful that something can change. So, you know, the shift up into Appalachia was kind of looking for that: who's angry about what? And, you know, who's hopeful enough that something might be done about it.

So, uh, we had already made a shift. We had been living on Johns Island, 1963 to 1965. Nobody on Johns Island told us it was time to get out of there. You all, you know, have already interviewed Bill Saunders. He was one of the key people we were working with, but also Esau Jenkins and some of the older musicians, uh, people who carried the traditions there. Uh, we

didn't get a direct message from anybody that we should leave Johns Island, but we were just beginning to feel like – we were listening to what was going on in the South and we wondered how appropriate is us, is it for us to just be so immersed in a black community and, you know, having all our contacts in the black community and trying to do these – uh, we were putting on festivals that really showcased the traditional music there. And we began to question ourselves whether that was appropriate.

So, um, we had moved up to New York. For two years, we lived in Peekskill, New York, and the idea was to get out some of the materials we'd been collecting. And Guy – uh, we were still basically earning our living through Guy's music, [laughs] so Guy thought, "Well, I'll work again on my singing career." [50:00] And, uh, so while we're living in Peekskill, we get the call from Highlander that they're starting to do work up in Appalachia, and would we be interested in spending a period of time, uh, being part of the Highlander team, you know, listening to what's going on up in the mountains?

So, we went up to, uh, Pike County, Kentucky, and I'll have to say it was a big contrast [laughs] from living either in Peekskill or in the black South. It was a big learning experience there. And, uh, even before we went up there – we went up to Pike County for about six months, but even before we went, Guy had had a call from Pitzer College in California. It has a lot to do with Bess [Lomax] Hawes, actually. [Laughs] There was a guy teaching political science at Pitzer named Lucien Marquis, and he was a really good friend of Bess and Butch Hawes. And, uh, I don't know – I don't actually remember exactly if Bess talked to him or how he knew what Guy was doing in Kentucky. But anyway, Lucien called and said, you know, "There's this new college. It's a very experimental college, emphasizing the social sciences. And we just wondered if you might be interested in coming and teaching a course there."

And, um, our son was ready to start kindergarten, [laughs] and we were, uh, you know, not sure what our next moves were going to be. So, uh, Guy said, “Yeah,” he thought that would be interesting to go back to Claremont, a good community to put somebody in school, and I always laugh about this, though. We made the move, we got out there, Guy started teaching, and Evan started kindergarten. And after he’d been in kindergarten for about three weeks, he came home and he said, “Isn’t it about time we’d be moving on?” [Laughs] He was used to, you know, moving from community to community, and he thought it was a little dull. [Laughs] And Guy must have thought so, too, because after one semester he developed a, uh, an Appalachian field study program where he would actually take students from Pitzer and also from Pomona down into the mountains for a semester. So.

JB: Guy, do you have any of the Appalachian songs? I remember you did one, “Hi Ho, the Apple Tree.”

CC: “Apple Picker’s Reel,” do you remember that?

JB: Yeah, “Apple Picker’s –” that was such a –

GC: How does it go?

CC: [Sings] “Hey ho, she feels so fine.”

[Recording stops and then resumes?]

JB: Steel guitar or –?

GC: [Plays guitar and sings] “Hey ho, she feels so fine, du-du-du-du-du.” How does the verse go?

CC: [Sings] “Hey ho, you feel so free, standing in the top of an apple tree.”

GC: [Plays guitar] How does the verse go?

CC: [Laughs] I don’t know.

GC: [Plays guitar and sings] “Standing at the bottom de-de-de-de-de-de-de-de-de.”

CC: [Joins singing] “Du-du-du-du-du-du. Hey ho, you feel so fine.” [Hums with GC]

CC and GC: [Harmonize] “Hey ho, you feel so free, standing in the top of an apple tree.”

GC: [Goes into “Ties That Bind”] “Ties that bind, ties that bind, friends who are the lasting kind. Roads you travel may wander and wind. You’re not alone when you’ve got the ties that bind. You’re not alone when you’ve got the ties that bind.”

CC: “Ties That Bind” was written by a wonderful Appalachian songwriter, Joan Boyd, somebody that we’ve worked with here at Highlander, and she’s a schoolteacher up in Big Stone Gap, Virginia.

GC: Where is she now?

CC: Big Stone Gap.

GC: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. How about we take a little break?

[Recording ends at 54:11]

END OF INTERVIEW