

Interview
Nancy Jo Turitz
White, Female, Married
FDP Volunteer

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Sides 1 & 2
Batesville, Miss.

A: I worked for the Herald Tribune Fresh Air Fund camps for two summers, and then I used to continue seeing the kids that I had met there during the winter and sort of ran an informal recreation program in New York and in the Bronx. That was when I was about fifteen or sixteen. Last summer I was assistant director of a recreation center in Berkeley, it was an awful, awful recreation center run by some patronizing ladies who remind sort of white South Africans, they were really terrible, and they sort of patted the little Negro children on the head and said, "Oh dear, are they using our bathroom?" But the recreation program wasn't that terrible, because the kids had a place to go. Aside from that, those kind of involvements, working for Planned Parenthood, which I did for a year, I really haven't done any civil rights work in the North, I've been on some marches, I've been arrested in the North. Let's see, my decision to come down South was partially mine and partially my husband's, and I would say that he felt much more strongly about coming than I did. I was quite frightened. I found once I was here that a lot of the problems I had anticipated were much more Northern problems than Southern ones.

Q: What kind of problems?

A: Well, I really felt for one thing that I'd seen a great deal of conflict between white girls and Negro guys, conflict and also lots of embarrassment and all kinds of problems, and this is one of the things that I was rather worried about. I found once I was down here that, being married, a lot of those problems were solved. But there is a tremendous amount of conflict between Negro guys who think that white girls owe it to them to sleep with them or to go out with them, and there's a great deal of competition among them. I found if I said I was married, there was a thing about being married, and they'd say, "Okay, is that your husband? I'll go away." But one of the big problems at Mt. Beulah(?), before jail and after jail, was that most of these girls who had come down here couldn't have any peace and didn't know how to handle themselves at all with guys who had just gotten out of jail. Most of them didn't know, and I learned very quickly, you just had to be very firm and say, "Go away." But I think that this is one of the things that white Northerners have to learn about, and that's that Negroes don't necessarily have to be treated as though they have privileges that white people don't have, because they're Negroes. I think that this is one of the great problems with SNCC at the moment and with the FDP in general, just that a great many people aren't able to face the black-white conflict, and a great number of the summer volunteers particularly, who are probably capable of doing good work, have been so completely intimidated by Negroes saying to them, "How long have you

been in the state, or what do you know about being a Negro, or what do you know about Mississippi?" They've really not been able to function as well as they might have. That's perhaps one of the peculiar things about this project, that we have no Negro staff at all, though there used to be a Negro project director and there used to be quite a few Negroes here. But, well, one of them went back to Harvard. I don't know what's become of the rest of... one, two of them are working for Headstart now. And as far as...so we've avoided this conflict completely because it really doesn't exist between local Negroes and the white staff at all. There's been absolutely no problem for the girls here at all, except that they haven't really met any men that they might have normal relationships with. Most of the boys that we work with are much younger than the girls. But we've avoided that problem completely by having a totally white staff. As far as my impressions of Mississippi, what I thought and what I thought after I got here, I suppose I knew people worked for three dollars a day, but I didn't really know it, and I didn't really know it until I went out and visited them and saw how they really were, working from sunup to sundown, getting nothing for it. Another thing that I really didn't expect was that I felt perhaps more relaxed and more myself here than I have anywhere else, perhaps because people are so completely accepting. For some reason people have felt particularly about the fact that I'm down here with my husband, that this is some sort of a bigger commitment than coming down by yourself. In fact, at the first meeting, the first FDP meeting we attended in Batesville, someone asked us if we were married and then got up and made a very moving statement about risking the lives of your whole family, and we had never really thought about it that way. Perhaps it was these people were so relieved to see some civil rights workers who were legally married. But we have found a great deal of warmth and acceptance. I really do think that most of the people who are active here have gotten over the point of feeling that we are here to help them, isn't it wonderful. I think they feel now that we're learning a great deal by being here. I find it's really only the people who kowtow to the whites who are apt to say how cute you are and how sweet to come and you're doing so much for us.

Q: Do you find them in Batesville?

A: Well, canvassing we run into them every so often, but I really feel in Batesville things are so far ahead that we're really doing a great deal of suggesting and very little actual organizing at the moment, so that I think that we've pretty much gotten over those problems.

Q: Why do you say Batesville's far ahead?

A: Batesville seems to be, well, not Batesville particularly, but Panola County, seems to be one of the counties that

has gone the furthest of any county in Mississippi, and I think perhaps some of the problems that we're facing here are problems that people have either refused to face in other parts of Mississippi or are trying to face now or are struggling with at the moment. First of all, Panola County already had an injunction when the first summer volunteers came in here last summer. This was the first successful civil rights voting case, I think it was U.S. vs. Dukes, started in 1959 and in 1962 the proceedings for the injunction started. The injunction came in May, '64, just before the summer volunteers arrived. This was an injunction against the registrar, forcing him to allow people to register in the county. So there were already people registering by the time the summer volunteers got here. There was a Voters' League that had been in existence for quite a while. And apparently they've always had a rather good project here, not as much conflict as in other places. So, where some places they're still setting up an FDP, we've had an FDP that grew out of the Voters' League, which is quite strong. We already have a co-op that's set up and functioning, we have freedom schools that are functioning, we have literacy classes now this summer, we have a student union.

Q: Student union here?

A: Yeah. PCSU. Panola County Student Union, which sponsored a student boycott here which was rather big for about two days, and then sort of petered out after a week, but the results are being seen now. They're building a band room in the Negro school. And also we assume they're building a workshop, although we haven't quite been able to determine. The kids, a number of them were arrested, Chris Williams was arrested during the boycott for contributing to the delinquency of minors, because they had stayed out of school. They haven't been doing as much this summer as they did last summer apparently. They had the Panola Freedom Reader last summer, which was a newspaper which was published weekly. It came out a couple of times this summer, but the kids haven't really put into it really what they should and they know it. They've kind of forgotten it. Anyway, we have all these organizations, and one of the things we noticed when we first came here was that, as far as we could see, the people here are really moving towards what we would call middle-class values. And this is one of the things that we ourselves would have to deal with and accept. This means that you have a completely different situation here than breaking into a new county, and finding that by walking down the street, you are appreciated for risking your life. People know that segregation is bad, and that you're the freedom riders. Here all that work has been done. We really haven't had any harassment at all this summer, except for an occasional traffic ticket, and one tiny cross burned by a rather strange

little man in a Volkswagen who didn't even get it to burn very well, who burned it at the wrong place. So, we've had to face the fact that all these programs are functioning and what our role was really was to guide them and suggest, mainly talk to people before meetings, suggest things that should be brought up. I think these are the things that a lot of people in Mississippi, a lot of workers, don't want to face, the fact that people do want more money and better houses and bigger cars, and that we who've had these things really can't say, no, you don't want them. And I think that we've all come pretty much to the decision that these things are fine to have, but that the one thing we can do is perhaps help people to realize not just that they want them but the reasons why they want them. In other words, it's fine to have a big car because a big car may last longer than a '49 Buick that's falling apart, and a big house may be more comfortable for your twelve children, but not because your neighbor has one or because of any kind of competition. I think that this is one of the things that other workers in the South are going to have to face at one point or another. I mean, we have really no right telling these people that poverty or deprivation is fine and that they should live off their three dollars a day. One of the most frustrating things that we've had to deal with here is the fact of the plantation people, and I think we're all rather baffled by the problem. There's a great deal of snobbery among the independent farmers and the Negroes who've made it in a small way toward these people whom they seem to feel could have at one point taken a chance and gotten off the plantation and gotten their own land. For these people we really see no place at all. There's been a freedom labor union here and at times it's had as many as twenty members, but these men talk about striking, they haven't been able to get enough people together to strike because maybe most of the people realize that a strike will accomplish nothing. We talked last Sunday in church, a church where many wealthy Negroes go, about the problem of plantation people and the fact that perhaps Negroes in town or independent farmers in the county would have to think about doing something for these people. And one of the wealthiest Negro landowners in the county stood up and, surprisingly, said he realized this, that he'd been talking to a man the other day who had six families on his place this year but next year was only going to have two. And this man said four families were going to have to find a place to go. And because of the fact that most of these families borrow against their earnings for next year, none of them have any money to move away with, they can't buy land and they can't even get loans. They really have nowhere to go at all. We're as baffled as everyone else. Perhaps this is the thing that's changed our position as civil rights workers. When we sit down with the people in the labor union we can no longer suggest to them solutions or guide a conversation. We have nothing to say and they have nothing to say. They have no solutions and neither do we, and that

way we just sort of come together in desperation.

Q: Does this happen (inaudible)?

A: I feel that there're a great number of positive things happening here, and that the labor union and the plantation people unfortunately are being neglected or at least have no place in a lot of the good things that are happening. The co-op has a tremendous number of problems, but I think that some good will possibly come out of it. I mean we find for instance that people have no education and therefore they've never really trained their minds to think in any kind of disciplined fashion. And I'd say one of my biggest gripes is against the church for teaching them not to think at all. In other words, in the church... We wondered for a great deal of time where the peculiar kind of parliamentary procedure came from that people follow in meetings and where all the formalities come from, then we realized that it comes right out of the church. In the church there's a great deal of voting and a lot of mock parliamentary procedure, but there's never any real decision-making except on the part of a few people. And there's never any dissension. If one's electing a deacon, everyone says aye and there're never any nays. There's a lot of mumbling about parliamentary procedure and who are the other candidates, but most of the time there's never any opposition. So people are never really forced to make decisions. This I think is affecting the co-op terribly, because for instance they elected a board of directors and the election consisted of announcing nine names. "Let's have a name. Do we want this man? Yes, we want this man. Aye. All the ayes have it. So-and-so is now on the board of directors." Until nine men were selected. The problem comes up of course when people are ready to agree to anything that either John Mudd, who's the young man who's working with the co-op, says, or anyone who seems to have any kind of knowledge about business. It happens when committees go down to see the white lawyers or the white FHA agents, and they say, yessir, yessir, to everything the man says. It happens when they find out that Hines County co-op has a set of bylaws and they'll adopt those bylaws and just change the name from Hines County to Panola County because they don't see any conflict. People who haven't been thinking or who haven't been taught to think never consider that there're more possibilities than the very obvious ones. This means that there may be two alternatives, but there're never four or five points that have to be decided. This is the problem that I think we're running into now with the okra and the fact that people are losing money on the okra. At the moment okra is being taken to the okra house in bushel baskets, but the bushel baskets are weighed and the okra is bought by the pound, then is sold again by the bushel. The people themselves aren't losing a great deal of money, but the co-op is making much less profit. And I really felt from

listening to the meeting last night that a great number of people absolutely couldn't get it through their heads what the difference was between buying by the pound and selling by the bushel. This of course is no one's fault, but it just shows the tremendous number of problems that men like this will have. You see this in men who refuse to use machinery on their farms because there're too many problems in changing one's method. For instance, we also discovered that the manager of the co-op can't do long division. I think that if you don't learn to read and to do math when you're young, it's pretty awkward doing it now. This is what's facing all these men. They're so overcome by the fact that they're borrowing \$114,000 that they're just sort of tongue-tied and awestruck. They can't really deal with the problems at all. What their solution was last night, to lower the price that the co-op is paying, isn't really facing the problem at all. It will work in the end, but it hasn't really been an education for these people because they still don't understand.

Q: What have the volunteers been doing?

A: Well, I think one of the major activities had been talking to...well, we've had some conflict about what's the best method of working, do you want to develop a good number of leaders and make them strong by giving them suggestions to bring up at meetings, or do you want to work on a very broad basis and try to get as many people involved as possible. Some of us have done a great deal of canvassing, that means trying to develop new people, new leaders, get new people interested in the movement, and I think we've been quite successful at it in many cases. For instance, the town of Batesville's been quite ignored by the civil rights movement, mainly because people felt there weren't terribly poor people here. A lot of us have a prejudice against people who are not starving. I think a lot of people felt it was more exciting to be shot at out in the counties than to go door to door in Batesville where no one was shooting at you. But, since we had no car, a lot of us worked in Batesville and I think we've gotten Batesville moving more than anyone ever has before. Now, I feel that I would rather work this way, reach as many people as possible, try to get as many people to participate. Two of the other girls, or one particularly, feels that she should go back to the same people over and over again, and develop them so that they are capable of leading themselves. I find that this method has a great deal of problems. When you develop leadership like this, this means that there're more people telling other people what to do. This means that if there's one strong woman up on one plantation now she's telling all the other people on the plantation how to vote, what to read, where to go, what to do, what meetings to come to. It's fine to have her as someone who's giving out information, but it's not very good as far as helping people to think for themselves. In fact, Bobby James said

to me last night, when we were talking about the co-op problem, "Do you know how Mr. Miles got the Voters' League going the way it was, the way it is going now? He told the people what to do." And that in a great sense is true. Mr. Miles is a leader who tells the people what to do, and when they go down to vote, you ask them why did they vote for so-and-so, and they say, "Robert told me." I think this is one of the great dangers of cultivating a small number of people, although of course you can't really avoid it.

Q: (inaudible).

A: I really don't know the situation except in Humphries County where I was for a couple of days, and there everybody was so absolutely paralyzed with fear that a leader meant that you came to a meeting. But I'd say there are a good number of leaders here, or a good number of people who are willing to spend a lot of time in the movement. I'd say again with them the problem is that a good number of them are really rather conservative in what they believe can and should be done. And this means when the Voters' League gets together and does what's really a pretty wild thing, in other words, demand that they have a Negro policeman on the police force, and then go to the police department and find that they can choose three people, again, an unprecedented thing, that three Negroes who are connected with the Voters' League could possibly be chosen as policemen, then what they did was forget about the whole thing because they got kind of scared about it and let the police department choose their own Uncle Tom, who's now the Negro policeman. I think what happened was that the committee who are the three leaders in Sardis (?) began to feel pressured and began to feel that perhaps they weren't strong enough and they weren't confident enough to demand this. And then they kind of assure themselves that a Negro policeman is okay and now they're stuck with an Uncle Tom, who can be more damaging than having no Negro policeman at all.

Q: Does this Mr. Miles tell everyone what to do?

A: Mr. Miles has been told over and over again that he's taken many more responsibilities than any one person should ever have, and that's of course true. We tell him this, other people tell him this. I mean, Mr. Miles is president of the co-op, Mr. Miles is chairman of the Voters' League, county FDP chairman, head of Headstart. He's in the Masons, he's a deacon of his church, he must be several hundred other things also. He's on the executive council of the state-wide FDP, he went to Washington last year for the challenge and to Atlantic City for the convention. Mr. Miles is a big man. And Mr. Miles' feeling is that, if you delegate responsibility, people won't do the things that you tell them to do. They won't figure out how to do them by them-

selves and therefore the things won't get done. And of course this is perfectly understandable, because Mr. Miles has not got the time to go around and help all the people learn to do all the things that he does, because in many cases he's just learning to do the things himself. Unfortunately, he should have had a committee with Headstart, because a committee was supposed to run it, a board of parents and community people, and he's running it himself. Now this means he created a great deal of animosity in the community because there were so few jobs and so many people who wanted them and Mr. Miles was the man who decided. And he did a rather fair job of it, but had there been a committee at least the responsibility would have been placed upon several other people. Mr. Miles also, I feel, doesn't really, really think about what's going on in the civil rights movement. He does all the things that one is supposed to do and he is a very fine and wonderful man, but he doesn't really look for alternatives, look to see what all sides of the problem might be. For instance, when we were talking about school integration here, at one meeting up in Crenshaw(?) a young man got up, who's a school bus driver, and brought up a great number of problems... Mr. Miles thinks that when it's time to go to the white school, you go to the white school. Now, this man, who I imagine has had some kind of experience with black nationalist organizations, who I know has been in the army and who peculiarly enough is pro-war-in-Vietnam, got up and raised a couple of questions which I myself couldn't answer and I came away feeling as though I didn't know whether we should integrate the schools. He said things like, "Do we want our Negro children taught by white teachers? Are they going to get a better education? I don't really care about teaching white people to get along with Negroes. Why should the burden be on us? I don't think that's our responsibility. If the kids are going to get a better education, okay. But if they're going to be there just to teach white kids that Negroes are equal to them, I don't want any part of it. I've never felt inferior and my kids don't feel inferior, and I don't feel it's my responsibility to do something about these poor white folks who are too ignorant to know the difference." These questions never, never came up in any discussion with Mr. Miles. In fact, we had to really prompt Mr. Miles to ask the committee when to see the superintendent to ask whether there would be any Negro teachers at the white school, to ask whether there would be any protection for the children, to ask whether white children would be forced to attend the Negro school if there were overcrowding. These problems just don't arise.

Q: In general, if Mr. Miles doesn't do it, no one does?

A: Yeah, that's pretty much true. There're a few other people, for instance, Mrs. Glover, I would say, is perhaps the woman who will be the most important person in Panola County in some time. She perhaps is most sophisticated in

her thinking. She's a real politician, she's very outspoken, she's extremely openminded, but she really knows what she thinks. She's a schoolteacher who stuck her neck out, and got involved, and that's a commitment in itself, for a schoolteacher to do this. She has twelve children to support, a blind retarded child included. She really doesn't give a damn at this point what happens to her job. If anyone should run for office in Panola County I would feel it should be Mrs. Glover, and she's perhaps most interested in running for office.

Q: How about Mr. Miles?

A: I really don't feel that Mr. Miles can assert himself. He's really...In some ways I feel that he's very hurt by the kind of problems one runs up against in dealing with the white folks. He really won't assert himself. He really doesn't want to run for a state-wide office at this point, in other words, should there be an election for senator, he doesn't want that position. I think he'd be much more interested in being a road supervisor or something like that.

Q: He seems to react to situations pretty well.

A: Like what do you mean?

Q: Well, like yesterday, people were being turned away from polls (?) and he reacted well, but he couldn't think about these things ahead of time.

A: Yeah. He will do all the things that have to be done when the situation arises. Now I don't know. The number of things that he's doing are so fantastically complicated and many that I really don't feel that it's entirely his fault that he doesn't prepare before. I really don't know how to solve the problem of his not training people to assume some of the responsibilities that he takes.

Q: Are there many people that are learning to do these things?

A: Well, Mr. Williams does a good deal of work, but he's someone who creates a great deal of animosity in the community. A lot of people just don't like him because he's much more outspoken and radical than anyone else in the movement here. Mr. Williams is really ready to say, "Screw the white folks," and go ahead and do what he thinks is right. He doesn't believe, as far as I can see by his actions, in law and order the way other people do.

Q: What about Bobby James?

A: Bobby James has only been down here since March, when

he came back to run his father's land, and he really doesn't come to any of the FDP meetings, or he comes very rarely. He's a farmer, he's a liberated man and I don't think that he feels that his duty is to the FDP at this point. He's doing what I find is really the thing that should be done, and that's some sort of...I mean, the problem is an economic problem down here, and Bobby James is working with farmers who need to make more money and who aren't working to capacity, and I find that that kind of commitment is perhaps the most important kind of commitment that anyone could make.

Q: (inaudible remarks).

A: I've never quite known what Bobby James' position was. He knows all the things that the movement people know, but in a way he's still a Mississippi farmer. And I'm never quite sure exactly how straight you can be with him. In a way I can talk to him just like I talk to John Mudd about what the problems are, but I'm never quite sure whether that's right or wrong. Now I'm beginning to feel that he's really, you know, he really sees through the whole thing, and he may as well be one of us as far as dealing with the people. I think if he hadn't felt that way he would have pulled out a long time ago.

Q: Getting local people interested in this thing, do you think things will keep going when you leave?

A: Yeah, I think so. One of the big problems I would say would be with the literacy classes, because although the people are really eager to learn now and have been working very hard they really don't have any way of making books, getting materials, getting information, and a lot of the teachers really haven't had enough experience. There've been about two literacy classes that have been going quite a while each taught by a white volunteer.

Q: (inaudible)

A: I'm still trying to find out about how organizations work and what organizations mean and what you do with organizations, and then at one point when I was writing this last article for The Movement, about plantation people, I just found out that there weren't any more organizations or any more theory, there were just people who were hungry and people who were getting put off their land. I mean, every person's got their own troubles and their own story, and I don't see how you make it into any kind of...

Q: But that's a story in itself.

A: But who the hell cares? They're starving and I don't want to write about it.

Q: It just depends on what you want to write about. If you can write like Baldwin then you're doing something. Or if you can write like Richard Wright, you're doing something.

A: I don't know. I'm perhaps being a little unfair. I think there's a big need for people knowing about Mississippi, but I think the things that have to be pointed out...Well, maybe they can be pointed out by people writing their lovely, dry doctoral theses. You know, how Mississippi is like every other place in the United States, only more so, and that you've got to begin to think about Mississippi the way you think about your own home town. I think this is the thing we can really do with a lot of the information that we have. I mean, it's fine, people do have to write about it, but I just don't like the idea at all.

Q: What do you plan to do after you leave this area?

A: Take my master's exams in comparative literature and study Latin. No, what I do is completely useless and I don't pretend that it's ever going to be useful. I just enjoy it.

Q: Is that what you really plan to do?

A: Yes. That's what I plan to do.

Q: Do you plan to have any activities...

A: Yeah, I imagine that I'll do a good deal of speaking, and we're also very serious about setting up freedom schools in the North. That's something that I intend to work on, there're already some set up in our area. We've been both very active with East Bay Friends of SNCC, which we now decided we'd like to turn into a local action group rather than a Southern-support group. We're both sick of cocktail parties, and besides the money doesn't ever get here anyway.

Q: Do you go to school at Berkeley?

A: Yeah. I will be a second-year graduate student in comparative literature, and I have some dirty government money for the next three years to get my Ph.D., and while they pay me, I'll stay there and use it. The literatures that I study are Latin, French and English, and I'm probably going to be studying some Greek and some Italian this year.

Q: Did you go to Berkeley as an undergraduate?

A: I went to Brandeis for two years, and then I did the awful thing of getting married, and Gene graduated from Brandeis and we came to California, so I graduated from

Berkeley, and now I've gone to graduate school there, it's going to be the second year.

Q: Did your attitude towards civil rights change when you moved from Brandeis to Berkeley?

A: Oh, I've never really had anything about civil rights. I've just sort of lived my life the way it got lived, and if there were Negroes who were my friends, they were my friends. I was brought up by parents, who were probably like a lot of us who are growing up today, in other words, sort of one generation ahead, and I think Gene was probably two generations ahead, having had a grandfather who was very active in the Socialist Party when he first came to this country, and his father particularly was brought up as a Socialist. I mean, Socialism was their religion. Gene went to Socialist Sunday school when he was little, and lived in a community in Long Island City which was run on a sort of cooperative basis. I myself, well, my parents were very active in various protest groups when they were young, and still do...well, my mother...I think it's not a question of doing civil rights work for my parents, my mother particularly. I've just lived my life the way one lives when one believes certain things. I remember when I first became aware of the fact that Negroes had different problems than white people did. That was when my mother explained to me at probably the tender age of six that Negroes didn't have as good a time in this country as a lot of white people did, and my reaction, and I suppose it's a reaction that a lot of kids have, was that I had to be especially nice to Negroes. And thank god I got over that at age six, because at one point I felt that every Negro child in my class had to be my friend. I learned slowly that that wasn't the case, but I also really got over having any kind of feeling that Negroes had to be treated differently than white people. I've always gone to camps where there were Negroes and gone to school where there were Negroes, and so some of my best friends have been Negroes and it's true. I can say something very frankly, when Gene and I first moved to California we moved into a rather well-integrated neighborhood. And for a while, well, Gene was writing music and looking for a job and I was going to school, and for a while we really felt that living where we lived and being who we were was part of a commitment. And I think we've both grown to feel that as we've grown more aware of the problems and things have gotten worse in this country, maybe because of the spotlight on some of the problems, that that really wasn't enough of a commitment, although it's something that I feel is very important.

Q: Did you do it as a commitment?

A: Well, when you move to a community you don't move to a lily-white area because you don't think that's the place

where you should live, because if you can get a house there why shouldn't everybody else be able to get a house there. And besides that, you know, we're poor, so we live where the poor people live.

Q: You did know it was an integrated neighborhood?

A: Oh, yeah. We moved in there because the apartments were cheap and we liked the noisy non-student community. I mean, we had children crawling in our windows and everybody screaming at their boyfriend and knifing their husband. That kind of a community. The man across the street from us broke every window in his house and then started breaking ours till he was carted away.

Q: Sounds like a great community. When you moved there how did you become involved with East Bay Friends of SNCC, or had you been involved with other groups...

A: We really hadn't been involved with SNCC at all. I had always been involved in some kind of community action program, for instance, when I was at Brandeis I worked in a mental hospital and did some work for Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. One summer I worked in a probation office. This was sort of a continuation of working at camps and this kind of thing. Gene had really not done much of an active nature since he'd been in high school.

Q: Had he been active in high school?

A: Yeah, well, he went to Music & Art in New York City, which is a special high school, and it's just on the edge of Harlem and a great number of Negro kids go there, and they were all little high school hippies together, and they did a lot of protesting together. But again, Gene grew up very naturally, being friends of Negroes whom he liked and not being friends of other Negroes whom he didn't like and that was about all there was to it. I think we both went through a period, or at least I did, when I felt... I had never felt before anything about, you know, "I'm talking to a Negro now," and I went through a period probably about two years ago when I became very aware of the kind of animosities I was creating as a white girl talking to a Negro guy, or even to a Negro girl. I think I've pretty much gotten over that, I got over it quite a while ago, but I really didn't like it when I discovered it in myself. I think Gene went through a period last year when, for about three or four weeks, he was really thinking about the fact that living in the neighborhood we lived in and doing a great deal of arguing and talking wasn't really as much as he felt he had to do. And for about three weeks he sort of sat around and didn't talk to anybody and thought about things until he decided to go to a SNCC meeting and see

what he could do. He has a tendency to be a martyr, so he got to do all the cruddy jobs that one could possibly do at the SNCC office, like working on all the machines and running off things and driving people around, all the things that nobody else wanted to do. I mean, that's the same thing that's happened down here, nobody else has taken the responsibility for the car and Gene's done all the grubby work on the car...

Q: He seems to enjoy it.

A: Yeah, he sort of enjoys it, but he doesn't like it that people drive the car and don't give a damn about it and then come back and yell at him because the car's not working, as they tend to do. He felt very strongly about coming down here this summer, and both of us, well, I felt particularly that I didn't know how much I could do this summer, but I felt that I had a great deal that I could learn about. You know, I really didn't feel that I could talk to people in the North about what was going on in the South unless I'd been here.

Q: So what was your purpose in coming down? To learn?

A: Well, I would say really to learn. In one way this attitude sort of stopped me from doing anything at the very beginning, because we got acquainted with the situation in the county, I began to feel that it was too late to start anything that I couldn't really finish. For instance, this is how I felt about the maids' union. I talked to a good number of women, just sort of got them thinking about it and wanted to see what would happen. Well, nothing happened and nothing happened and then finally I decided, well, we ought to have a meeting and some other women thought they ought to have a meeting and we had a meeting and maybe about seven people were there. Now we've had three meetings and it dwindled last night to three women who're cousins, two of whom are local whores and one, I don't know what she does but she works for a white lady somewhere. They maid in the day and whore at night and they're both really great ladies. One of them has already gone to her boss and said, "What's this business about paying me three dollars a day? I want \$1.25 an hour," and now she's getting four dollars a day. But this isn't the moment when we're going to have a maids' union here. And I think that's okay if people aren't mad enough. These three women now know enough about it so that they could start it again on their own. I was very reluctant to do something a long time ago and maybe I could have done more if I'd started earlier. I kept feeling, who am I to get people perhaps in the position to strike and lose their jobs and then to go home to the North and leave them here without even their three dollars a day. So I feel it's been a tremendous learning experience for me, I really feel

like I could walk up to pretty much any door anywhere now and say something to people and get them to think a few thoughts that they hadn't thought before.

Q: You've gotten this mostly through canvassing?

A: Yeah. I've never really had any trouble working with people, I've had a lot of experience, particularly at Planned Parenthood, and I've worked with kids a great deal, Negro kids and with poor kids, a lot of Puerto Rican kids too. But I really was rather unsure of how I'd be able to do working with adults and with men, you know there's a great prejudice against women down here anyway. For instance, last night I thought it was rather nice...There're a good number of women in the co-op who know an awful lot more about the co-op (interrupted by telephone).

Q: What do your parents do?

A: My father has a small business of his own, which is called Hoffman Displays, and he builds and designs exhibits for conventions, things like big huge booths at chemical conventions and missile conventions and such things, mining conventions. His business works so that he skis in the winter and sails in the summer, and in the fall and the spring he occasionally goes to work. He works for himself and he has one lady who occasionally works for him, and that's Hoffman Displays. I don't know where his money comes from, but when he gets enough he goes to Europe, mostly every year. My mother is a photographer who also skis and sails. She just does photographs of children. She's very good. She's one of these people who collects people. I mean, she stands in line in a supermarket and she brings the people home in back of her and in front of her. She teaches English, she used to be a school teacher and she teaches English at the New School in New York, teaches English to foreign students and does volunteer work. She's working for Headstart this summer as a volunteer. She didn't get me interested in doing it, she was just sort of always living that way and I sort of did it too. For instance, the kids that she had twenty-five years ago, her sixth-grade class, are still our good friends and come to see us and a couple of them went to Europe with us at one point. One of them is my adopted sister.

Q: Do you have any other brothers or sisters?

A: No. I'm an only child, except for this one girl, well, she's much older than I am. She's thirty-five.

Q: What about your parents formal education?

A: Well, my father graduated from Penn State, after not

having finished high school but somehow getting to college. He studied journalism, and he writes very well and worked as a journalist for about ten dollars a week during the Depression, and gave it and sold insurance for a while, which he hated. My mother went to normal school, which was teachers' college, for two years, and then taught school for about twenty years. My mother feels a tremendous lack of education and really lacks a great deal of confidence in herself which she really should have, and has an inordinate respect for education which is really kind of hard to deal with sometimes.

Q: Normal school, is that a regular college?

A: I don't think so. I've never quite gotten it straight. I think they're sort of teacher training colleges. I don't think they exist anymore.

Q: What about family religion?

A: Family religion? Well, the background is Jewish, the training is none.

Q: Both parents?

A: Both parents, yeah. Well, if you want to call it that. Not active at all. My grandparents, let's see. My mother's father was active in the temple, but my mother was never made to go to temple or to have anything to do with religion and she and my father both feel rather opposed to any kind of organized religion. They just don't feel any need for it at all.

Q: What about you?

A: Well, I went through a period in about fourth grade, we were living in a town that was almost entirely Catholic and I was walking one Sunday and met some children who said, "You're late for Sunday School, where are you going?" And I discovered they all thought I was Catholic and that they were coming home from Sunday School and thought I was late, and so I went to temple, I went to Hebrew School for about a year and learned Hebrew from a nice lady who went away and then I lost interest in it and decided I didn't want to go through all the rest of what I had decided at that point was not worth much at all.

Q: Where were you living?

A: Nutley, New Jersey.

Q: I thought you lived in New York for a while.

A: No, I lived in Pacific, New Jersey, before I lived in Nutley, New Jersey. Except that my family along with another family had a large farm up in northern New Jersey, which they'd had since, oh, these two couples bought it when they were very young. It's an ancient farmhouse, built in 1750 or so, which they, well, they and all their friends sort of repaired. It's really a great place now, it's a ninety-acre farm. They built a lake there, it's got big barns and lots of woods and trees and rivers and brooks. I spent summers there and every week-end there. We built a ski tow there. The apple orchard, we grew all our food there during the war. Now my parents no longer own it, the other couple owns the whole thing and their grandchildren and children have more or less taken over. I think that's where I probably learned to get along with people because we were always surrounded by all kinds of visitors. It was kind of a haven for a whole gang of people that were my parents' pals.

Q: What about politics?

A: Politics. Well, my father reads Time magazine and my mother's a bit confused but on the right side usually.

Q: The right side...?

A: The correct side. My mother does a great deal of work for the League of Women Voters and is interested in voter education. My parents were both very active, I don't know, they weren't ever Communist Party members, but during the thirties and during their youth they were active in, I think, in the Committee for Soviet-American Friendship. They did a great deal at that point...My father is, as my cousin calls him, an unabashed hedonist and he's really interested in doing what pleases him. All he really gives a damn about is my mother and me, so he just doesn't have too much truck with politics. Although, this summer, now that I've been down here, he's kind of gotten a renewed interest, launched a one-man campaign against the appointment of Colman and had every Senator that he could possibly get on the telephone talking to him and had a big telephone campaign and a telegram campaign going and apparently got a lot of people stirred up. I think he's very proud of what we're doing and feels it's the right thing to do, but he doesn't really take an active part in any kind of political activity. My mother does. My mother campaigns usually, well, she used to work for the Progressive Party. In fact, we got arrested together when I was about age six because we were passing out leaflets for Wallace at the wrong place.

Q: Wallace?

A: When Wallace was running for President a long, long

time ago. That Wallace. Henry Wallace, not Governor Wallace. Again my mother really, well, I would call her involvement in politics her involvement in living a moral life, which I consider that she does do.

Q: She is active? In the Democratic Party?

A: Yeah, although she has no interest in Johnson and she feels like a great number of us, completely disillusioned with Johnson. And she also has enough common sense to see what's going on with things like the Poverty Program, in her involvement with Headstart, where she could see how people were getting bought off and how a lot of the funds weren't getting to the places where they were supposed to go. She knows those kind of things.

Q: What about yourself?

A: My involvement in politics?

Q: Are you active or anything?

A: Well, you know, as active as anybody is on a college campus who...Well, I was one of the strikers in the Free Speech Movement, and was a teaching assistant who made a lot of trouble?

Q: Did you get arrested in Sproul Hall?

A: No, I didn't get arrested at Sproul Hall. I merely got people out of jail and then ran around apologizing for not getting arrested. I did a little bit of work on the "No on Fourteen" campaign, and I was a registrar last summer, went out every week registering people to vote. I don't know whether you know it but in California, anyone who's a registered voter and over twenty-one, you know, properly registered, can go to a class for an hour, and after you go to this class you get a big pad of registration forms and you go around wherever you feel like going, door to door or wherever you want to go, and they pay you ten cents a name for every person you register. Last summer we registered two thousand people one morning in Oakland. We have what you call sort of runners who go out before you, knocking on people's doors and saying, "You want to come and register? Come on downstairs," and they come on downstairs and you ask them their name and where they came from and what their occupation is, and then they sign their name and you say, "Can you read and write?" and they say, "Yes," and you say "Is all this true?" and they say, "Yes," and they're registered. Then you send all the little forms in in the stamped addressed envelopes to the registrar, and they send you back a check for all the people that you've registered.

Q: You're pretty much a Democratic?

A: No, I'm not a Democratic at all. I wouldn't say...

Q: But you're not a Republican?

A: No, I'm not a Republican either. I really feel that there really isn't anyone to vote for, or hasn't been anyone to vote for. In fact, I've felt extremely disillusioned with the Negro candidates who ran in the election in Berkeley and in the Bay Area last year. I mean, for instance, Wilmont Sweeney, who's a Negro, asked for support from the students but wouldn't support the students when it came to the FSM. Same thing with Byron Rumford, who is just a big legislator like all the rest of the legislators, and I'm not going to give him my support either. He may have had "No on Fourteen", but he's just as bad as the rest of the politicians.

Q: How would you like to vote?

A: How would I like to vote? I really don't see the time when there's going to be any one for me to vote for, and I feel very ashamed that I ever voted for President Johnson, although at the time when I voted for him I didn't feel he was the wretched man that I think he is now.

Q: What about Socialist?

A: I can't say that I've really thought clearly enough about any particular system to say that I would agree with that system or support that system. Ideally I suppose that I would support a Socialist candidate but I don't feel that there've been any candidates whom I really could trust since I've been able to vote.

Q: You're to the left of the Democratic Party?

A: Yeah, if you have to label it or place it somewhere I would say so. I mean, I really have no interest whatsoever in parties at all. In fact, seeing SNCC and the problems that SNCC has, and feeling the kind of discouragement that I feel about it, I really don't know that there's any organization that can succeed or give me any of the things that I think should happen. I mean, I'm really at a loss. I've never had any faith in organizations, I really hadn't much faith in SNCC to begin with, and it may end up by completely discouraging me from being an activist at all.

Q: Were you an activist in high school?

A: Well, the high school I went to was pretty backwoods. I mean, it's a sort of lower-middle class factory workers' town, a great number of Italian Catholics who had not much

political education at all. I'd say my high school political activity consisted of going around getting people used to the idea that they didn't have to hate Negroes. I mean, it was sort of a one-man campaign which existed with me and a Negro girl that I was friendly with. We pretty much got a lot of our close friends to change their attitudes, but aside from that, and at age thirteen and fourteen going to all the folk-sings and all the Progressive Party rallies in New York City and things like that, I can't say that I was really active in high school. I wrote for the high school paper and always reviewed books on problems in civil rights. But there really was no political organization at all in high school and I certainly didn't form any. The kids on the newspaper, and I worked on the newspaper, were probably the most enlightened in high school, and they thought I was peculiar anyway. For instance, my parents had paintings on their walls and books on their shelves, and that itself was an education, it was really bad. They used to come in and look... My mother has, my parents have prints on the walls and people would walk in and say, "Oh, did you paint those yourself?" You know, that kind of thing. The town has changed a good deal since I've been there. The population has changed. A lot more sort of suburbanites and liberals have moved in, but when I was there it was really, really small-town. I mean, the girl next door to me, who lived in a big house and whose parents ran a soda fountain, had been to New York twice, although New York was twelve miles away. She was eighteen.

Q: How have you changed in your attitudes towards civil rights?

A: I don't think that I've changed much at all. I think that probably came during that period when I felt myself so acutely aware that there were Negroes and there were whites. This was about two years ago, I'd say when I was a junior in college.

Q: At Berkeley?

A: Yeah. Probably most of it came from the fact that I was very close friends with a white girl who was living with a Negro guy who was a factory worker and who was a great deal older than either Gene or me. The girl was extremely sensitive about people being antagonistic or prejudiced toward Paul, and although Gene and Paul became very good friends, the girl at the end refused to let Paul come over and see us because Gene at one point said that he knew more... A conversation, she had said to Margie, or disagreed with Paul about jazz, and Margie said, "Well, Paul's a Negro, he should know more about jazz." Well, it so happens that Gene knows a great deal about jazz and has studied it and played jazz since he was about twelve years old. It was

possible that he knew, and Paul didn't give a damn if he knew more, he was interested in hearing what Gene knew. And I think this girl made both of us acutely aware of the fact that Paul was a Negro, you've got to watch out how you talk to Negroes. Consequently the girl really ruined a very good friendship between Paul and Gene, I mean, they used to work on cars together and it was really pretty harmless.

Q: What about your decision to come South? Did it develop last year some time?

A: Last year.

Q: And both of you became involved then?

A: Yeahm except that Gene was doing a great deal more work for SNCC than I was. He was working in the office probably five to eight hours a day.

Q: Did he have a job then?

A: Yeah, he was teaching little children clarinet. He'd go to the SNCC office in the morning. Most of his students don't come till around four o'clock and some of them are in the evening. He was also going to school, but that didn't take much time since he didn't pay too much attention to school. He was going to San Francisco State College. He's just about finished his masters in music, when he gets around to writing his last piece. So I wasn't really doing as much as he was doing. I was a teaching assistant at Cal, so I was busy teaching classes and holding office hours and doing my own grubby little assignments.

Q: What led up to your decision to come South?

A: Well, we really never decided anything very much until the time comes to decide it, and we were thinking of what we wanted to do this summer and we thought, well, let's go to Mississippi. It wasn't a very conscious kind of decision. We wanted to go to Arkansas first of all, because we felt, well, there a lot of people from San Francisco going to Arkansas. At that point we were still taking up fund-raising and the fact that it might be good to have a good number of people from one area at that place so that we could work out some kind of program together. But in our usual fashion we never filled out applications or bothered to do anything about it till it was too late to go to Arkansas. So at that point Gene called someone and asked where should we go in Mississippi. We had a choice of going to Mississippi or to Cambridge, Maryland, and we both felt that going to Cambridge, Maryland, was like going to Oakland or going to Newark, New Jersey. So we decided we'd go to a rural area

in Mississippi and really see what it was like. So we got in our car and came.

Q: (inaudible)

A: No, we filled out applications which they never got. People knew we were coming because of all Gene's connections through SNCC and knowing SNCC staff and such. We went to the orientation at Jackson. The decision was really very natural and sort of an outgrowth of what we'd been doing and the fact that we had worked enough and had enough money so that we could take a summer off. We're supporting ourselves this summer from money we've saved from jobs over the years.

Q: Do you have any definite plans for when you get back?

A: Well, I'm going to be working on my Ph.D. What our plans have sort of generally been was to stay in Berkeley this year, probably work on freedom schools and do whatever other kind of organizing we find develops. We have some good friends in SDS and SDS now has a house in Oakland and a project running there, so perhaps we'll just work with them. We've been planning to spend another year in Berkeley and I'll have my exams at the end of this year, and then go to Europe for a year. Gene perhaps wants to study with someone in Europe, and we'll be applying for Fulbrights and stuff like that. My grant gives me money for three years but can be used for a period of four years. I don't know, whatever happens, we'll probably come back to Berkeley and I have probably a couple more courses to take and then my Ph.D. qualifying exams and then write a thesis, but it's all so far away that I don't want to think about it. I sort of decide what happens a month or so before it happens.

Q: What do you think of your own experience in Mississippi?

A: Well, I think I've learned a great deal about myself being down here. I mean, I've answered a lot of questions that I couldn't answer thinking about them in the North. What I can do and what I can't do, and I've got over a lot of fears that I didn't necessarily have to have.