

Chude Pam Allen

November 06, 2020

SUMMARY

Chude Pam Allen was born September 17, 1943 and grew up in a semi-rural area of eastern Pennsylvania near the New Jersey border. She attended Carleton College in Minnesota. In the spring of 1964, Chude attended a term at Spelman College, a historically black women's college in Atlanta, Georgia as one of only 13 white exchange students. That summer, she was recruited and trained by SNCC to go to Mississippi where she taught at a Freedom School in Holly Springs during the Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign. She also worked in the Atlanta SNCC office and participated in demonstrations throughout the summer. After graduating from college, Chude helped organize women's liberation groups, first in New York City and then in San Francisco. She also worked with the San Francisco based Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality, advocating for better working conditions. In 1989, she helped organize the 25th anniversary of the Mississippi Summer Project in the Bay Area sparking new work with veterans around civil rights education. Chude is one of the founding members of the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement where she continues to work.

LOCATION

Recorded via Zoom teleconferencing system. Chude Pam Allen was at her home in San Francisco, California. The interview team was in their separate homes throughout the San Francisco Bay Area during the "shelter in place" order due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTERVIEW TEAM

Lead: **Sam Yancey** ('22),

Support: **Simona Nigusse** ('21)

Instructor: **Howard Levin**, Director of Educational Innovation

TRANSCRIPT PROCESSING

Transcript and video content represent the interview in its entirety with minor edits due to breaks and occasional language. Initial automatic transcription via Otter.ai by Sam Yancey '22). Howard Levin completed editing (11/28/2020). Please report additional suggested edits to: howard.levin@sacredsfs.org

Notes:

1. content within [brackets] remain to be further checked
2. content within (parentheses) are editorial additions

Introductions

My name is Sam. I am in San Francisco. And this is Simona. She's also in San Francisco. And we are interviewing Chude Pam Parker Allen, in San Francisco, on Zoom. As you know, my name is Sam. We're here to record our conversation with you with the intention of publishing your story as part of Convent & Stuart Hall's Oral History Production class. We're recording video of this interview and intend to publish this on our school website, as well as other nonprofit educational websites, along with a text transcript. This means your story will be available once published to anyone via an Internet connection. If you agree, please say your name, the

date, and if you agree to publish your story.

Chude Allen

Yes, my name is Chude Pam Allen. And I agree. The date today is November 6, 2020.

Sam Yancey

Just a quick question, is this your birth name? No, I was born Pamela Parker. And changed my name when I married for the first time, I didn't know that women didn't have to change their names, they could keep their own names. I probably would have done it anyway, because I was marrying interracially and it seemed important to really identify with the family, even though it was just as white-sounding a name as the name I had. Then I changed my first name to Chude in the '80s and legally only recently because I wanted to take a name that for me, had the meaning that divisions between races were not fundamental divisions. It's an African name. I have no idea how it's pronounced in Africa, but I read it and I thought, yes, that's a good name. Then I've had people say to me, it's a perfect name for me. It's spelled C H U D E. But as one woman said, "You tend to chew over things." So it's a perfect name. But that's not the reason I took it.

Sam

Nice. What is your birthdate and how old are you now? My birthday was September 17, 1943, which makes me 77, old enough to be your two grandmothers. I would say. Yeah. It's funny, my grandma actually just turned 100.

Chude

Ah, all right. Congratulations.

Sam

She's a trooper. I know this is a bit of a big ask but in a short one to two-minute overview, could you give us just a summary of your life from birth to now?

Chude

I don't think I can do that quickly. But what I can say is that I grew up in a semi-rural area of eastern Pennsylvania in what was predominantly a white community, mostly middle class. I was four miles from the Delaware River and the black community lived across the river in a different state, in New Jersey. So, we essentially didn't go to school to get together. There was one black family in my public school. Then I went to private school as a day student for the last three years of high school and there was one student there. So, of course, we didn't think we were segregated. But essentially, we were, it was essentially a white community. I went to Carleton College in Minnesota. When I went to Carleton, there was one black student in the college that year. Two years later, they would bring in a few more, that's when the northern white colleges started to pay attention to the issue of really bringing in students of color. Then there were like 13, my senior year. I went to Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in the spring of 1964 on an exchange program. The way the program worked, and this was the fourth year of it, is one student from Spelman, which was a historically black women's college, came to a college in the North and one of us went south. So, we essentially were changing places. The woman who exchanged with me moved into my room at college and I moved into, I guess what would have been her room or similar at Spelman. I was there for the spring of 1964.

I was recruited from there to go to Mississippi and be a Freedom School teacher. While in Atlanta, I worked with the student movement there doing demonstrations and stuff. Then I went back and finished college. Then in the fall of '67, I started organizing women's liberation groups, first in New York City and then in San Francisco. We organized a women's alternative school. So that Freedom School teaching, you see, was coming up again, called Breakaway. And then for a number of years, I also would do workshops in various alternative schools. Then I worked with an organization called Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality, which was based in the San Francisco Bay Area but did have chapters elsewhere. And that of course, was supporting women especially to unionize and to better their working conditions. But it had a broad base of different things that it believed in.

In 1984, there was a small little mini-reunion of some of us who had gone to the South, because a writer named Doug McAdam was doing a book on the Mississippi Summer Project, which has been called Freedom Summer. And so a number of us met and then were introduced by him. And then that book came out. And then in 1989, we organized the 25th anniversary of the Mississippi Summer Project in the Bay Area, bringing in people basically from the whole West Coast. And that was the beginning of starting to work with other veterans around education, around bringing other veterans together, and around opening things to the public. Okay, thank you. So that's where we are now, as I work with the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement.

Sam

Thank you very much for that. I appreciate it. So, let's just start the interview now.

Chude

Good. I wanted to start with first talking about where we are right now in history so that people know that we are not together in one room because of the pandemic. We are all separate and I've been sheltering in place for seven months seeing virtually no one except my husband and people, of course, all masked on the street. I think this is important because one of the key differences anyway between and even before COVID and the '60s was that it was very personal in the '60s. We met together and mass meetings were hugely important. Most of the time, especially in many southern areas, you had to go house to house to tell people what was going on. Certainly, you did your organizing that way. We talked to each other, and we talked in person. Even before COVID, even before the sheltering in place, a lot of communication now is done by people if not Zoom, certainly cell phones, certainly texting. It's different. Those of us my age, sometimes wonder about what is lost. Clearly, it's more efficient but what is lost by not having that personal togetherness, and especially because we're talking about integration, talking about bridging that segregated barrier between especially black and white, what it meant that we were in the same room together and we were learning from each other. I offer that as just one of the things. You can ask me more about the mass meetings because of course, they were incredible.

The other thing, I would say is the technology, in addition to the fact that you can do everything so fast now, email, even if it's a poster, if it's even a position, paper, everything gets zipped out like that. Well, we did have telephones, long-distance was very expensive and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had what was called a WATS line that they paid a lot of money for so they could call out without each phone being charged. What we did a lot was handwritten letters, typewritten letters, and if it was to be duplicated, it was either what was called mimeographed, or it was typed on a stencil. In both cases, again, it was typed, manually typed, and then run off on a machine. Things were slower and of course, labor-intensive. There are pros and cons. Of course, they were mailings, especially in the North for support. People were folding pieces of paper and putting them in an envelope with a stamp. Snail mail is what people call it now. It slowed things down. In some ways, that was hard, in some ways what did it mean? It meant, if we were doing things slower, maybe we also are paying a little bit more attention. That's something I offer as a question. And the one other difference I would say that's important to just be clear about is that people call the Movement now the Civil Rights Movement. We called it the Freedom Movement and certainly, in terms of my group, we call it the Southern Freedom Movement because we're specifically talking about the struggle in the South. Civil rights is part of something that freedom encompasses a lot more. Freedom is about dignity and respect. It's about support for everyone being all of who they can be. The fact that one has legal rights does not necessarily require of a society that it reach a point of real mutual respect and treating each other with dignity. That's obviously the case today, that the Civil Rights Movement in and of itself, winning some rights for people of color, did not create a society in which people are treating each other with dignity and respect.

The other thing I'd say is that today, right now, the same issue that was true in the Southern Freedom Movement around the South is still here, voter suppression, the right of people to vote, and be part of democracy. Now I'll let you ask questions. Pardon me, but I felt like we needed to have a context. Yes, yes, of course. Okay, let's move on to the first question. Can you recall your first childhood memory? Measles, chickenpox, excuse me, chickenpox. That's not what you wanted to get, no, but that's my first childhood

memory. If you mean in terms of people of different ethnic groupings or anything like that, all I could say is that I was always taught that everybody was equal but it was not until I was already a teenager that I was in a situation where I was able to be in a black community. That was after my sophomore year in college. Up until then, anyone I had known who was not white, was coming into a white context.

Sam

One thing I neglected to mention is just to be clear, the pre-Movement, which means, childhood and family, that's gonna be about 10 to 20 minutes, and then going into the Movement era, that's going to most of our interview. There's like, 60%, and it's about an hour. Then the post-Movement, which is concluding questions, anything you would like to say or things that'll be 10 to 20 minutes at the end. I just wanted to let you know that. I know you had lived in eastern Pennsylvania as a child. What was your old house like?

Chude

First, I lived in a small town. My parents wanted to move when I was around six and seven. This is the time of what's called here, the Korean War. There were no building supplies. My parents had already bought a plot of land in a suburb of Trenton, New Jersey, that's where my father worked in Trenton, New Jersey. The suburb was across the river in Pennsylvania and they bought the property, they had the plans. We used to look later and see, "Oh, that would have been my room. Oh." But anyway, there were no building supplies so my mother started going around looking for places and she found a house that was in what was still country at that point, beautiful country. So, we moved to an area that the little town had one store and one post office. The closest big town four miles away was on the river and it was called New Hope. Across the river was Lambertville. These are now hoity-toity places but back then, New Hope was a mecca for gay men and women to come on weekends and stuff. I grew up in public school in a very homophobic public school. Across the river was a working-class, mainly the Roman Catholic white community down below.

And then up on the hill was the black community. I didn't know about the black community because of where I lived. Okay. Understood. Thank you for that. Who did you live within your house? I had a mother and a father and an older sister, 18 months older, one brother, three years younger, and one brother 13 years younger. All right. This meant, just as a reference, that when I went to Mississippi, in '64, the youngest boy was six years old and at home. I remember my mother telling me later that, sometime during that summer, he said to my mother, "Pam might not come back huh?" They had totally not talked to him – none of us had ever sat him down and said – I hadn't before I left – "This is what I'm doing." He had just picked it up. They thought at six years old, he wouldn't have noticed but he knew that my parents were living with the fear that I might die.

Simona Nigusse

He already knew the danger?

Chude

He already knew the danger, yes. I think I should also add, though, in terms of both brothers, is that the summer of '63, which is when I lived in the black community at the Church of The Advocate in North Philadelphia, my brother, then five/six year old came in for a week because it was a day camp and stayed with the minister and the family the same as I was. So that was his first experience living with a black family and being in a black community. Then my other brother, the one three years younger worked there the next summer. So we were very connected to this Episcopal Church in this community.

Simona

Did brothers ever ask you – I know you said your brother was six when he said you weren't coming back, so did they ever ask you when you came back about what you were doing? How was that conversation like?

Chude

I'm sure that if you look at all your interviews, I'll be very curious but I wouldn't be surprised if most people tell you we didn't talk a lot about the details. I would go out and give a talk, but it was always in terms of what SNCC is doing in the South, what the local people were doing, the struggle to win the right to vote, to end

discrimination. It was not about the kind of personal stuff. I wrote about the personal stuff so my letters talk some about that. I think for many people, it really was when we began to get back together that we began to talk in details about what it was like. I don't remember either brother ever asking me, "Were you scared?" Those kinds of questions that students ask all the time now. But that's a good question. I will think more about that.

Sam

I'm just trying to lead this to talking about more of your childhood because we're going to get into the Movement stuff a little later. How were the kids like in your neighborhood?

Chude

For one thing, when you live in the country, neighborhoods are kind of odd question, it doesn't quite fit that way. When I was small to go visit a friend, one of the parents had to drive us there because you couldn't walk there. When I was older, I could walk in New Hope, where my best friend was when I was 12 or 13. but we're talking about a four-mile walk along a road. There were no sidewalks or anything. The friends, we were mostly white, as I said, but I did have a friend in elementary school, whose name was Rosa Sanchez and she was from Cuba and dark-skinned. What I want to say about her was that she was extremely lovely. She wore very bright colors together and being raised as a white Anglo Saxon Protestant, you can even see it in what I'm wearing, we didn't necessarily – my mother said, "You didn't ever wear chartreuse with pink," you didn't do those things. Right? She was gorgeous. This sounds silly but it means it's the first time in my life that I can remember where I realized that in my brain, I saw that my mother was wrong. She was a perfectly lovely person, too. But I mean, just how she dressed I was taught was not right, and yet, it was so very right. That's how I think people begin to change. It's little things like that.

The other thing I'd say is, we white girls all curled our hair because back then you couldn't have straight hair. Now that's going to change in the '60s, where all of a sudden all the white girls want straight hair and they're even ironing their hair if they have curly hair. But back then, we curled our hair. When I was 16, my best friend was going to the private school, Solebury School, as a boarder. Her family was in Costa Rica, and she invited me to come down for the summer. I asked my father and I don't know why I was smart enough to do this, but I asked him during a party when he was a little happy and said I wanted to go and he said without thinking that if I go there with half the money, I could go. Then he was stuck with letting me go to Costa Rica and paying half which was, compared to now, not a lot of money but for us, it was a lot of money. It was my first ever experience being out of the country and other than camp, Girl Scout camp, away from my family. So that was one of these moments where I again, got to experience life in a different context, which again, opened me up, opened me up to different kinds of parenting as well as of course a different culture. That was an important part in terms of friendships, that friendship because she opened up my world.

Sam

Can you talk more about your relationship with your parents? You talked about how your mother wasn't necessarily right in your eyes in some ways. Can you talk more about that, what that meant to you?

Chude

Nobody's mother is right in all ways. Let's tell the truth. It's part of growing up. First of all, nobody's all perfect. I wasn't a perfect mother. But when we're differentiating, when we're beginning to figure out who we are, one of the things we have to do is see the ways we aren't like our parents. What I would say is that my parents were liberal Episcopalians, and by liberal then they were Republicans, they weren't Democrats. But, they were not the kind of Republicans we think about now. They were people that cared about other people and had a sense of right and wrong. They were in many ways ignorant of a lot of the things that were happening both in this country and in the world, the bad things our country has done. My mother, I know, watched the McCarthy hearings in the early 50s. We would come home from school and she would be ironing and watching the hearings. That's all I remember about it, that there was a kind of tone, a kind of feeling in the room that told me that this was not good. But I don't ever remember them talking about it to us. They would have been just average anti-Communists. They were Christians and of course, they were being told that Communists were

anti-Christian and all that stuff but they were not mean people. They were not mean spirited the way we can think about a lot of Republicans today, at least the way I think about a lot of Republicans today. In that sense, they were good people. I adored my father. This is back when the idea was somehow man was better than women. We didn't have the Women's Movement yet, right? He was a very charismatic and a big personality person and enjoyed people.

My mother was more shy, the more quiet one. I don't think as a child, or as a young adolescent, that I respected her as much as I do now. They're both passed now, of course, but she was an intelligent woman who basically cared a lot about people. She was the one who I think – I know, more than my father was willing to support my going to Mississippi, I was not 21. So I had to have as a girl, I had to have my parent's permission to go. And my mother had to work on my father to get him to agree. Because think about that. Well, you're the young person, I'm the one that's more like, I can think now about, "How would I feel if I were going to be signing a piece of paper that might get my son killed?" Or now my grandson. They had the courage to do that. So that's the kind of people they were. I think this is not the place to talk about all the limitations in the family, but I will comment that I came from a community in which all adults drank. That's just the way it was. And so that's a whole other discussion. But I do know that summer of '64 that, being hard for my parents, I do know that they did drink a lot. And that may be one reason why they weren't as present for my six-year-old brothers as they could have been. But they were doing their best. And believe me, it wasn't just by alcohol, then as now, was a big cultural issue in this country.

So anything else about my parents? Let's see... We were church-oriented. My father's father was an Episcopal minister, and the Episcopal Church was very big in our lives. It was right down the road, it was a quarter of a mile down the road in a little tiny chapel. I guess I had said that I came from a little town that had a store and a post office, but it actually had the Episcopal Church too. So it had a church as well. And so every Sunday in particular, we went there. And this is a good example of my family in that we would go to the eight o'clock service, which was half an hour, and then the men would make breakfast on Sundays. And so my father would be in the kitchen talking and making bacon and eggs and everybody we'd all eat. And then we go to Sunday school. When I was in high school, I was a Sunday school teacher. So the Episcopal Church was very key in my life and I was at that point in my life very devout.

Sam

Can you talk about how your experiences going to church and in your religion? How did that maybe influence or play a part in your involvement in the Movement?

Chude

I believed God wanted me to go. And I believed that God, Jesus, would be with me in any trials I had to face. I should say that when I was at Spelman, which is when I really began to learn about racism is when I went to live in, in Atlanta, Georgia, in that black college and had to begin to really learn about the history of this country, which I hadn't been taught that one of the things I had to work through was guilt, the guilt of being a white person and being of these people who had done such horrible things, and were still doing horrible things. And my mother wrote to me at one point because I'd written her about it, and she just said, "Remember, God loves you." Well, I think for those of us in whatever kind of spirituality we have, if we do believe in some kind of spirit, or God or greater being, there is that belief that fundamentally all of us are lovable and can be if we open our hearts. And so that was a big step for me. And so that definitely comes from having been raised in a religious context.

Sam

I see. Thank you very much for that. When you decided to join the Movement and get your parents for permission, was there any hasn't hesitation of going?

Chude

I was at Spelman and I was so aware of my ignorance, and my arrogance I'd come down there thinking I knew a whole lot and then discovered how much I didn't know. So there was the question of whether I was worthy to

go. But I was taking a course from Staughton Lynd called Non-Violence in America. And he was to head the Freedom Schools, he was the director of the Freedom Schools. So I talked with him and he told me that because that was my question, "Am I worthy of going?" And he said, yes, then I should apply. So I didn't have fear, but you have to understand, finally, having been raised a Christian, I was big into, you know, if you were a martyr, if you died to end the sin of racism, and that is literally how I thought about it, that I was going to give my life to end this. I mean, you are talking about this, you're talking about a religion that believes that somebody died for our sins. So it was being been a 19 year old, 20-year-old at that point, it was something that was easy for me to shift into, it was like, "Oh, I could do this." So I see in my letters home from Spelman, that even as early as the beginning of February – I only got there like the last day of January or something– I'm already writing my parents and saying, "If you had to give up a daughter to end this racism, it would be worth it." And that's long before I'm you know, I've even heard of the Mississippi Summer Project. So I'd been working on them.

The thing about, again, about being with people, going to mass meetings, walking on a picket line with other people is that I at least – and I think most of us there – you begin to think of it as a "we." "We are going. I'm with these people. "If I died, they'll carry on. If one of them dies, I'll carry on for them." But if I wasn't thinking just about myself, which isn't to say that I didn't have fear, but being in the Movement, and especially the singing in the mass meetings, there's no way to describe it, what it means to be in a room with a whole lot of people singing songs that are saying what you believe. Now, of course, one of the points is that there's one song that says, "We are not afraid." "We are not afraid." Well, of course, we were all afraid. But the song, the singing together, as one of the early Freedom Singers said, Wazir Willie Peacock – who was one of our members out here and I was privileged to know in the 80s and 90s until he passed – he used to say "The singing made us bigger." And that's what I would say, it created the sense that you were connected. And being connected really does help the fear. And then before I went to Mississippi, I went to a training in Oxford, Ohio. And there – I was in the second group because I was going to be a Freedom School teacher – and there, the three who had gone previously, the previous week, were already missing. So we knew on the first day of our training that three of our members were already missing, and probably dead. So we did go in with that.

But again, Friday night, there, we were all together right before we were leaving, and Bob Moses, who headed the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, he stood in front of us – and he is not a charismatic speaker, he's a very slow, thoughtful speaker – he stood there, and he was looking at his feet, that's what I remember so much about him, looking at his feet, saying, "All I can say is, I'll be there too." And I totally trusted him. And then some woman in the back, a black woman, started the song, "They say that freedom will be a constant struggle," and we all sang, we all stood up, we put our arms around each other. And so again I didn't have that sense of being alone. I had that sense of being part of. And I think that's one of the key things about being involved in a movement for social change is you are part of something where you believe with other people in something more than just your own self-interest.

Chude

And I don't know how it happens if we're just doing it this way. I mean, this is quite lovely in many, many ways. It's just thrilling how we can talk to each other. And you can even interview somebody that's living in New York City or Atlanta, right? I mean, you're not limited in that way. But we don't have that, we can't build that collective energy that happens when you're together in the room.

Sam

So what was your impression of Bob Moses? Why him? Why do you think he was such a significant part of why you were joining these movements?

Chude

I think for everyone that that that I've ever heard that Bob was one of those very thoughtful people, who was not asking anyone to do anything he hadn't already done, if not done to a greater degree since he went into Mississippi early into the southwest part. I think that, that he listened. It's a pretty profound thing to grow up in what is essentially a society that says your job is to be told what to do and to give back the right answers, and

all of a sudden, be in an environment where you're, you're learning from people who are saying, "Go out there and listen to the poor. Listen to the people." Now, what Bob said to those of us who were going to be Freedom School teachers, one of the key things he said was, "People in the South they talk slower and remember that they haven't had the advantages you have had. But that doesn't mean they're stupid." And so the point was to listen, to learn how to listen, and to not assume that because we had better education that we knew all the answers.

But I think especially that thing about slow, Northerners talk fast, Southerners talk much more slowly. And there are references in books, too. Anita Blackwell, who is in this very small little, very, very poor community in Mississippi says that when the workers came in the summer of '64, she couldn't understand the northern black guy because was (speaks fast gibberish). And for her, again, slower. We had to learn to slow down. So that was one of the things I learned from him. But I think the key thing – and it wasn't just him, but everyone – is that they weren't asking us to do something they hadn't done themselves or weren't willing to do themselves. It's not like the general who sends the troops out and is living a fairly comfortable life while the troops are out getting killed. They're right there with you. And they're sharing with you out of their own experience. Plus he treated people with respect and good modeling. We haven't talked about names and it just pops up now to say this that the southern black men and women were never referred to by "Mister" or "Misses." by the racist whites. And so it was very important that we spoke with respect. At the same time, because the black men and women, as well as children, had been taught to always refer to white people as "Miss" or "Misses" or "Mister," we were first names.

So I just add that too, because when I say the thing about respect, I mean it quite seriously, that people who had not been retweeted with respect, were by everyone in the Movement, treated way. That was part of what we were there to do. And the thing that was so profound about it is that the people who were rising up to change their lives in terrible conditions were so worthy of that respect. I learned that you don't respect people because of the degree they have, or how much money they make. You respect people by who they are, how they act, not just what they do, or tell you to do, but how they actually treat other people, and how they themselves stand up for what they believe is right. And there I was, in the South being given that privilege to learn from people.

Sam

Thank you very much. Did you ever realize the scope of how big this movement would become globally, and how intensive it would really get?

Chude

I was in the South in '64, both first in Atlanta, and then in Mississippi. So already the Movement was very big and was affecting around the world, people were aware of it because of the photographs, especially of children having dogs on them, or the hoses on the demonstrators and stuff. So I was aware I was part of something. That's a very key thing, you're interviewing someone here who was recruited into a movement that was very viable and had very strong black leadership. Later, I will help start the Women's Liberation Movement, then I'm one of the leaders at a time when there isn't a movement, and we're a lot of people are telling us we shouldn't be doing what we're doing. But when I go into the Southern Freedom Movement, I'm coming in as a follower because there is already this huge, strong movement. I would say, yeah, I was aware of its significance. And I truly believed we were going to end racism. I was very idealistic, very naive. I think it's important for us to talk about the difference between pacifism and nonviolent direct action. Because I was influenced in Atlanta at Spelman. Staughton Lynd was a pacifist and there were a number of other pacifists that were involved in the Movement, Vincent Harding, different people. And so I was very taken with this. "Oh, yes, we don't believe in killing." And there would be these discussions like, "Well, what would you do if you had a baby and these you know, violent, racist whites came in and they were going to kill your baby, would you defend yourself? Would you defend your baby?" There were always these kinds of conversations. Part of me was, "Oh, yes, I wouldn't kill anyone. God wouldn't want me to kill." It is one of the commandments, "Thou shalt not kill."

So then one day – I used to go on Sundays to the Quaker meeting with the Lynds who were pacifists – and

one day we're riding back and we're going back to go to lunch and I'm very hungry, and their older daughter either hits or does something to the younger boy – they're the two kids – and so they pull over to the side of the road. And, and Staughton says, "We're not moving until you apologize." She wasn't going to apologize. And I'm hungry. I tell you, I was ready to kill her. Forget this pacifism stuff, right, I'm hungry! It's a funny story. But the truth of the matter is people who believe in pacifism really are taking a very extreme position around how to relate to each other. And it's very impressive, but it's very hard to do. Most of the people in the Movement were about nonviolent direct action. It's a tactic, and it does not preclude self-defense. The Southern Freedom Movement was never an offensive movement in terms of using any kind of violence. But in the black community, where we slept and lived in the South, people had guns to protect themselves and us. So self-defense was a different question. But until I went south, I'd never been in a situation where somebody might shoot at me, shoot in the house. You see the curtain I had to put up here so that you could see me so I wouldn't disappear from the light. Well, that's what we had to do at night, put curtains up, put blankets up – that's a blanket – to make sure that we wouldn't be seen if someone was going to come with a gun and try to shoot us.

Simona

Did you witness any violence while you were protesting?

Chude

I didn't on the picket lines, by chance, there never was. In Mississippi, I went to Ole Miss, the University of Mississippi, to speak in two sociology classes. Two of us white volunteers were invited to come. And we'd gone with the people who were doing the voter registration in that area, one black and one white. And when we were done, and they picked us up to go back to Holly Springs, we were stopped by the sheriff. And they held us until a truck was behind us with guns and stuff. And then we took off and we were able to escape. The thing about that one – this is just my own experience – was that they told me to get down, I was in the backseat, and they told me to get down. But I knew that what we'd been told was that the truck would come up alongside and try to shoot the driver. So I thought, "Then I should sit up because after all be better if they shot me than the driver," right? So I would sit up and then I would remember that he told me that I should get down on the floor. And I really believed in the importance of leadership – that was one thing in the civil rights movement, you followed leadership – so then I got back down on the floor. I did this two or three times and afterward, the man who'd been driving, said to me, "What were you doing?" And I said, "Well, I kept thinking I should protect you." And he said, "You could have put your pocketbook up." You know?

You know you do your best. That's all I can say, you do your best. But the real answer to your question though, is there were four people killed in the summer of 64. And the fourth person was Wayne Yancey. And he was in Holly Springs. He was killed in an automobile accident. No one ever has quite known what happened. But he was killed. And the other black man who was with him was injured. And the local hospital would not treat him because he was black. And the black funeral director used the hearse to take him to Memphis, Tennessee where he could get treatment. So I did deal with the question, before going it was like, "Yes, we can handle anything." But I'll tell you that was the first dead body I ever saw. And it was for all of us devastating. And then very soon after that is when the bodies of the three who were missing were found who had been murdered, James Chaney, Mickey Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman.

Sam

Can you explain more about your philosophy of nonviolence and even when witnessing so much of this violence with Wayne Yancey and these four people who were killed, what helped you to sustain that ability to keep that in your mind and not have a breaking point?

Chude

Well, I didn't. It was actually '67 and the murder of the Indonesian communists – which the United States helped give the list to the Indonesians to kill – was when I realized that self-defense was something that every people had a right to do. People had a right to defend themselves against violence. Up until then, I hadn't been quite clear about how I felt about that. That is still, to make the distinction, different from offensive violence. To

defend yourself is very different from going out and killing other people or beating up other people because you don't like what they say. I feel still today that one of the great values of the pacifist teaching I had was their belief is that, again, God is in everyone, or some kind of soul or spirit, goodness, love, whatever it is in everyone, it can be reached.

So some of the people that we look upon as most hateful and vile right now, saying horrible things and doing horrible things, and you think is there ever a chance that these can be real human beings because they're so vile and hateful? I don't have an answer to that. But I do know, the answer is not to become vile and hateful ourselves. That much I know. I am not in agreement with those aspects of the demonstrators who go out and are almost as mean and violent themselves. I don't believe that. I also think that many times they are provocateurs, and not really members of the people who are trying to really change things. But I think there's a lot to be said, for learning how to be a loving, kind person with each other. And that is what then we're trying to create as we begin to try to change the society. But when we become as harsh and as nasty and start to bully, we're replicating what we say we're opposed to. So that is what I really benefited from, the challenge of the pacifists who said we have to keep remembering we're all human beings.

Simona

And love how you keep bringing up Christianity and the Bible on these things. But how did you feel because I know that there were people who brought up the Bible to support segregation and things like that? So how did you feel about that, them using your religion in a different way?

Chude

Well, clearly, I didn't agree with them. But it's a very good question. And it's a good question today. I no longer, by the way, consider myself a Christian. I do consider myself spiritual, but part of the history of Christianity is such that I found that I needed to have a belief that allowed for other belief systems to be just as viable. But I certainly do believe in spirit. I do believe that there is something greater than us. I don't have an answer. And it's an incredibly important question. And it's important today, I don't have an answer today, with people who so many of these right-wing people, nasty people, believe in a form of Christianity. So it is hard. But what I would say is that the way I was raised, Jesus was a kind and good person and that my job was to try to be a kind and good person too. And so someone who was believing in a society that allowed for some people to be dehumanized, discriminated against, violently attacked, that they couldn't possibly be following, at least the Jesus that I believed in and had been taught. That's the way I would answer. But I think it's a profound question for today.

Simona

Yeah.

Sam

I just want to bring something up. Did you ever hear about the death of 14-year-old Emmett Till?

Chude

Oh, a good question. No, it really does show where and how I was raised. I would have been 12. I have no memory. Now we, of course, did not get Jet magazine in my home, we got LIFE magazine. But I have no memory of hearing a thing about it until I was older and stuff. And I don't know how much my parents knew and how much they were just trying to so-called protect us because a lot of times parents will think they shouldn't tell their children things. I don't know, I just don't know if they knew – I should say how much they knew, they would have known something. And by then we had a television, we did have a television. But I don't remember watching the news either when I was a kid.

Sam

So in your memoir, [My Parents Said Yes](#) on the CRMvet.org website, you talked about how, once you got your parents permission to go and work for the Movement, you had a somewhat long conversation with them in the car while waiting for the two volunteers to come pick you up and I believe take you to New York to work. Can

you talk about what those conversations were like?

Chude

Actually, they took me... in those days, um, – let's see how to put this for you to even grasp it. You see, I grew up in the country. I was meeting two people who were coming – two or three people in a Volkswagen bug – to pick me up to go to the training in Ohio before we went to Mississippi. They were coming from New York City. I lived about 65 miles south of New York City. And so we were driving to the northeast extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. What that meant was that we were on the side of the road. There were no stores, there were no houses, we had no cell phones. And they were going to come off the turnpike means you paid to be on it, it's like the freeways here – they were going to come off at that exit, pick me up, and then we were going to swing and go back on the turnpike and my parents were going to go home. So we got there at the allotted time. And they weren't there. They didn't come all night.

This is one of the most profound things for me about my parents – before we were talking about the kind of parents I had. So we've come there to meet them. And we stay up all night long sitting there waiting for them to come. I didn't particularly remember this I'm young and I'm going on to all this other stuff that's happening. But sometime in the '80s. I wrote to my mother and I said – I was dealing with this question of fear, because when you speak about the Movement, kids always ask, "Were you afraid?" And so I asked my mother if she was ever afraid. And she said this was one of the two times she was most afraid in her life, sitting there all night long. And then I remembered, of course, yeah, we were just there. I'm just amazed that they didn't say, "Well, we'll put you on a bus tomorrow, let's go home and get a good night's sleep or something." Right. But remember, there were no phones, there was no cell phone. We couldn't call them, they couldn't call us. We didn't know where they were. So we just waited. And that meant they waited all that night knowing that they may never see me again. I'm just stunned by that, that they had that kind of courage and strength. And they didn't try to talk me into giving up. But I don't remember what we talked about. I'm not even sure. When I go back in my memory – and of course we're talking a long, long time ago now – what I remember are long periods of silence. We were just there together, not knowing what's going to happen when these people are going to come.

Sam

Very interesting. When those two volunteers came to pick you up, how did you feel when you got out of your car and went to when they picked you up? How was that goodbye experience for you knowing that you might not survive?

Chude

From my point of view, I was off! One of these people was my friend, we were going to the training. Because I'd been in Atlanta, I knew a lot of them, we trained together. There was a whole group of us that were going into Mississippi. They were all in Ohio. I was gone! Which is probably why my mother misses it more than I do. That's the thing about when you're young, and especially when you're about to start what is a whole new experience, I was in forward motion. They were the ones saying goodbye to me, which is why now at my age, being a mother and a grandmother, I can respect them so much for having the courage and the fortitude to do that. But for me, I was looking forward to getting the going on to doing what you know, we were setting out to do.

Sam

Right, right. I see. Going off a little bit, I want to switch over to more of your experience in Spelman College. What was that like for you being one of 13 students out of, I believe, 500 or more African-American students? Did you feel accepted there?

Chude

What I would say is that certainly by the end of that semester, I think most of the black students felt that 13 white girls was about 12 too many. What we're looking at is this whole question of tokenism and what happens as the numbers increase and how much that shifts things? Not all of the white students who came were

activists, but I was, I'd already been active in my college and I immediately joined the Southern Freedom Movement in Atlanta, the student movement. So there were tensions around that question. I did come in pretty arrogant. In the first or second day – I guess the second or third day it would have been – I saw a sign for one of the student meetings, many of the Southern Freedom Movement activists in Atlanta had been arrested in December and January, '63 and '64, at some massive demonstrations against the segregated restaurants. So I came down when some of them are still in jail. And this was a poster saying, come join the support group to go down and support the people in jail. So I went and we marched down and stuff. But it was a small group. You see, I somehow had assumed, in contrast to my college, where the vast majority of white kids could care less about anything except their grades, I thought, "Oh wow, here everybody's going to be involved in the Movement. Well, it's not true. Activists are – it's like something like a few percentages. The idea is something like if 5% of the population becomes active and can win over 50%, then change can happen. But you're talking about a very small number, and I didn't know that. So I go bopping back to the dorm I'm in and I say to the women on my floor, "How come you weren't at the demonstration?" Except I probably said it even more like, "How come YOU weren't at the demonstration? Hello!" Can you believe it? And one of them says to me, "I couldn't be nonviolent, somebody touched me, I'd beat the shit out of him." And that was the first time it had dawned on me that somebody might choose not to be nonviolent. And I began to then, of course, understand that not everybody was going to join in the Movement. Not everybody was going to work for freedom in the same way, etc. And not everybody cared about it. I mean, they would like racism to end but they weren't putting their bodies on the line. And then other people, of course, were way ahead of me and I learned a lot from them. That was important.

But the key thing was I began to learn about racism. I began to learn about the history of this country and what whites had done. And we're still doing. And I read a book that the black students didn't like at all. They were very insulted by it. *Black Like Me*, by John Howard Griffin. The book was advertised as this white man who disguises himself as a black man and goes through the South in something like six weeks and learns what it's like to be a black man. They were just insulted. But the truth of the matter is that book is about what white people were like. When John Howard Griffin disguised himself, he got to see how his own people were. And in my reading that book, I got to see a whole lot about white people that I had never perceived, of course. The way some people he described them as just be testing him for no reason except he had blacks skin. And the key one, for me, I still remember to this day is coming from the protected environment I did come from, I had very little understanding of the vulnerability of women who were not of the more affluent classes. I didn't know about the prevalence of rape, of white men raping black women. So in the book, there's this one moment where white men in a truck has picked up John Howard Griffin, and they're driving along and he starts bragging about all the black women who work for him that he's had sex with them all. And the writer says that he said, "Well, what if they said no?" And the man that laughed and said, "They'd lose their jobs." I didn't know anything like this before then. I had no idea that there were white men that would take advantage of the women that worked for them, who were poor and had no... And then I started to learn about the white men raping the household workers and all the different ways and that there was no protection for black women, and for black girls. And that happened to girls, girls younger than me. So that's what I was learning. I was learning about what I would now partly call the underbelly of our society, what people don't want to admit really existed and still exist, unfortunately, much too often.

Simona

About your experience at Spelman, tell me more about your experience in the differences culture-wise. I know you said you came from a predominantly white neighborhood to going to school with mostly black people where you're the minority in that case. So was that different for you?

Chude

I think a couple of things are important here. One is that Spelman was one of the elite black women's schools and they were thinking in terms of educating their students to be "young ladies." Well, one thing I can guarantee you is that I had little interest in being a young lady. So there were some discordances that had nothing to do with my being white and them being black, but my being much more of what we might call a "free spirit," and certainly believing in being involved in social change. So there was that dynamic. In addition to the

fact, there were women who had never ever been around white women, and I had no sense of that. And then there was just this ongoing dislike of white people. I mean, why wouldn't they dislike us? They'd only known nasty white people, right? And so there was all of that.

Then there were just my personality things. I had a best friend. She, interestingly enough, had been at Carleton two years before as an exchange student, I hadn't known her because she was a year ahead of me and she was in a different dorm. But she sought me out as soon as I got there because I was coming from Carleton and we were in the same dorm. That means something – it doesn't mean anything today – but girls were locked in dorms. There were hours for girls back then. It was called *in loco parentis*. And it was even worse at Spelman than it had been at Carleton. And long before I was involved in working around issues of racism, I was working to end hours for women, because I considered it such an insult that the boys didn't have these rules, but the girls did. But here at Spelman, it was even worse. But anyway, we're in the same dorm and she had a single room, so we had become best friends. And she's one of the best friends I've ever had. She was very different from me and she was not involved in social struggle. She was a math major. She would end up going to graduate school in Europe, and she basically never came back. She married and lived over there.

And the way I look upon it is that we were both people that were what I call "bridge people." I was beginning to move into a situation where I wanted to be in communities other than just all white. She had been involved in some white... to be at Carleton and stuff. And so we both wanted to be in integrated situations. There was pressure on her to not be my friend, but she refused to let anybody tell her what to do. And how do I put this for? There were some personal reasons that were not my responsibility, but there were tensions in our dormitory for a number of reasons. And there were just tensions generally.

But I was also involved with – because I was Episcopalian – with what was called Canterbury Club, which was on the Morehouse campus, the men's college next door. Interestingly, twice I'd gone on trips with the Canterbury kids, the men, and women who were part of this group. So I was the white member of this group. In that group, I didn't feel separate. And we went to a conference in the northern mountains of Georgia, where a white minister called Malcolm Boyd, Episcopalian, who had been already very active in the Movement against racism, he led it, and there were white students, and there were us. And the first night the white students are on one side of the room, and we are on the other. And I say "we," I was one of the Canterbury kids. So there were situations and there were places where I fit. On the religious side, two of us from Canterbury House, went to Mississippi that summer, one man and myself. And then another time, they had had a group come down from Pembroke and Brown – Brown University, and then the women's college was Pembroke – to visit and they were going to do an exchange back and they invited me. So I ended up being an exchange student to a white school from a black school. What this then meant that I was in their paperwork, as having gone to this from Spelman. And at some point the president, who was not a nice man and was trying very much to control and contain the thinking of the young women – it wasn't just what they did, it was that they thought – anyway, I got this thing in the mail saying that I was to go to a meeting. That's all, just come to this meeting. He didn't tell you why or anything. And so I go to this meeting, and it's this room full of black women, including my best friend, and me. And I'm sitting on the floor, and then the president comes in and he looks at me and he says, "Get out. And I go, "But I was invited." "Get out of here!" And I'm white, right? And so when you're upset, you get all red. So I know I was just burning. And I have to get up and I have to walk out in front of all these women. And of course, what it was, was a meeting of Spelman exchange students who'd gone north and because I had gone north with Canterbury House, I was in it, right?

The next day, he actually wrote me an apology. He didn't say it out loud, anybody but he did write me the apology. But the key is, all of a sudden, all these women are saying hello to me on the campus. All of a sudden, they are identifying with me because of what had happened. And all I can say is that I think they were both embarrassed that he could have been so rude. But I think also just that we were... they could identify with what had happened. I don't know how else to say it, it was profound. It was humiliating as hell. But it was at the same time it meant that another level of women, women who didn't know me personally, were all of a sudden saying to me, I care about what happened. And I'd say at the end of all this, I'd say two things. One is that I really learned we're all human beings. And in any grouping, there are going to be some that are going to like

me and some aren't. And I'm going to like some, and I'm not going to like others. It's just we're all people. But there were dynamics that were different. And I did learn there, which is partly what you're asking me that there is a difference between saying, "Oh, we should allow black people or people of color to come into our communities and into our culture as long as they're just like us." Versus "Oh, we should open ourselves to having the experience of learning about their culture or their ways that are maybe different. Or just that we can be different and still be together? I mean, that's the benefit, the positive side of diversity, trainings, and all that stuff today. The negative side is they aren't dealing with racism, but the positive side is this idea that we can be different and respect each other and learn from each other and enjoy each other. Did that answer?

Simona

Yeah. Talking more about the Movement, were there different roles for women than there were for men? And what were their roles?

Chude

In particular, I think this is one of those times we have to talk about white women as different from black women because especially in the deep South, it was very dangerous for white women to be on the projects, and certainly to be driving in cars, because of the racist whites, especially men's, obsession with the whole question of not allowing black men to have access to white women. So in that sense, there were limits to what we could do, and where we should be. And I think it's part of it, that when I was at Ole Miss, and we were then chased, it was an integrated car, and I was a white woman in that car. And that night, I wasn't part of the voter registration people, but there was a big rally in that same area. And there was a huge white mob. And there, again, was a white woman in that group. It inflamed things. So there was that aspect of it. And so we tended to do more, first of all, Freedom Schools and then the office and stuff. It didn't mean that there weren't women doing a variety of even things in the field, but it was more limited. And so when you nowadays read sometimes about how women were limited in what they could do, it's partly was because of that, what we would call racism and sexism. But it was because we brought danger. And sometimes white women, if they were in a car would have to be on the floor with a blanket over them, so that the white men couldn't see because it would inflame the situation.

Black women talk differently about the whole experience of what they could do. Some of them were totally happy and thrilled to be typing, to do whatever was needed. They did not see that as demeaning. And in particular, Endesha Ida Mae Holland who was Ida Mae Holland back then, she tells that story about how she was in Greenwood, and she's this young girl and she goes to the SNCC office, and she sees a black woman typing, and she thinks the woman's pretending because she has never... because the idea that a black woman could actually type was outside of her experience. So that was not seen as demeaning. Whereas I think some white women, especially now, implied that it was, and it certainly was not. It was necessary work. But there were limitations to what we could do.

Also, there were black women who were leaders of their projects. The woman who headed the Freedom School in Holly Springs, Barbara Walker, who was from Spelman, she was treated with great respect by the other two leaders of our project. Ivanhoe Donaldson and Cleveland Sellars. It wasn't as if they treated her like she didn't exist because she was doing Freedom Schools. And she was a black woman that understood the South, she was from the South. And I remember being very conscious of that, that they treated her with respect. Most black women I've known, and certainly, this was true of myself and many white women, is we feel that that experience in the Movement was the most we've ever been asked of us as women to extend ourselves. And of course, there were a lot of very brave, strong, incredibly impressive, older black women that were leaders in the Movement. So we had great role models.

Simona Nigusse

So you guys were basically treated differently than males, you guys had different roles in that case?

Chude

Certainly, if we were white. I think it was slightly different if they because black women could move around,

they could be in a car with another black man. It didn't incite the same craziness on the part of the white men. So yes, some of our roles were different. But there are others that did a tremendous amount. Holly Springs had a Freedom School in Benton County and it was a white woman who drove out there every day and did that work and organized that school and had other teachers come out. We did a lot of different things. We did a whole lot more than most of us had ever been asked to do. And I heard Jean Wiley, who was an African American woman working in Alabama, I heard her more than once talk about how she was trained to, to drive a car because nobody could drive cars until they knew how to drive them fast to get away from if they were chased. She was trained, but she couldn't drive the car until she was trained. But that was just equally true of a man. He wasn't going to get a car and be able to drive until he'd been trained.

Simona

You also talked about Ole Miss. Could you describe your experience at Ole Miss?

Chude

There were some ministers that came through the projects that summer and one of them was in our project for a few days. And he was going over to Ole Miss to meet with I think a couple of the more progressive professors, or maybe the Episcopalian minister. Anyway, some progressive of white men. And so he invited me to go along, and I went with him. And I met, along with meeting the Episcopal minister, I met the sociology teacher who invited me to come back with one of the other white volunteers. It was very clear that I could not come back with one of the black workers. And so I went back to my project, and I told Ivanhoe, our leader, Ivanhoe, Donaldson, that I wanted to do this. And he said, "No." He said, "First of all, it's too dangerous. But second of all, if they want to know why there's a project here, they should ask the black members." And I said, "Well, they invited us. I'm a northerner, they want to know why I would come down," and blah, blah, blah. And he said, "No." And I said, "But, but, but, but, but." He said, "No, no, no, no, no." Eventually, he said, to get me off his back, he said, "If you can convince the two people who drive that area to take you, you could go. So I did. He of course, was right. I mean, I could have been killed for going to talk to two sociology classes. And I was very bitter about white people after that because it seemed like they thought they were being very brave to come and speak to me in the cafeteria after the classes.

The first class, the big question had been – and I do write about this in the memoir piece on our website, CRMvet.org, that, [Would You Marry One?](#) And that was the question, "Would you marry a negro?" And I don't want to go into it in detail here but what I understand now is that I had no way to answer that question except to say "no." Because they would've killed me. To go there without having had either thought about it myself or had anybody else talk to me about the fact that, "You may get this question cuz you're a white girl and they're obsessed about the question of white women and black men, and especially inter-marriage, you might want to think about that ahead of time." But nobody did. And I didn't. And if you read "Would You Marry One?" you'll know that I was, in fact, had gotten involved for a short period with a black man and was beginning to look at that question of "How do I feel about interracial marriage?" But that was not a place where I could sit there and talk about that with these students.

The other thing I'd say about that experience of then being chased and possibly could have been killed just for doing this is that I did write home about it and I did really question whether white people were worth it. I mean, part of it was I was going to talk to white people and try to help convince them that they should care, right? Were white people worth it? And I came from this, as I say, a country and small community, and the little town, New Hope, had a progressive newspaper. It was a newspaperman who'd once been in New York and had left and bought this little paper and he was progressive. And he was printing my letters for the whole community. And he was printing letters from another student, a white student who came from Yale and was down in St. Augustine, Florida that summer, with SCLC. He was printing his letters as well. So he wrote me a letter and he said, "Don't give up on white people." I still have the letter. I mean, it was like, "Please, don't give up."

Sam

I just want to move the conversation for a little bit so we can get through this. So I know you had volunteered as a teacher at Holly Springs for a Freedom School teacher, and you taught young women. Can you tell me

how your experience was with that?

Chude

The primary class that we all taught was black history, called Negro History, then. Of course, I hadn't been taught that. At our training, we were given a Xerox, not Xerox, it would it have been... anyway, a printed, it was about this thick. These were our lesson plans. And so every night, I would read the next lesson plan. And then I would go in in the morning to the students and share what I'd learned. We didn't have lots of history books at that point that talked about black history. And I didn't know much. So I was starting pretty much where they were. And then we would talk about it. And we would talk about how it made us feel and those kinds of things. That was the main class. We could do whatever we wanted.

And so I was helping a teacher, she was a professional teacher from New York City, Deborah Flynn – probably my mother's age, certainly already probably in her 40s or 50s – and when teaching in New York, she would help the students write their own plays. And so she did a playwriting workshop in the afternoon, and I became her helper. And the students did a play called "Seeds of Freedom," which is, again, on our website. And when they finished it, they first did it for their families there in the community. And it was very good and very moving. And so the people who were putting together the Freedom School convention at the end of the summer, this was to bring people, two representatives from each of the different Freedom Schools, two of the students, plus the Freedom School director, to a central place, Meridian, Mississippi, so that they could have a convention. And again, the stuff is just really impressive that comes out of that their resolutions and things. And so Holly Springs students were invited to come to give the play. So I ended up being able to go to that because I was helping with the play. So that's one thing we did that summer. And they wrote that play around how they imagined it would be to be Medgar Evers' family, who had been murdered the summer before. It was more how they imagined than literally historically correct, but it was very moving. And they wrote their own, they kind of would think up their parts and then Debbie would type them up at night, give it back to them. So they made their own speeches, they made their own talks and they worked through this whole thing of making this play. So that was one of the high points. After that summer, Debbie then brought it up to New York that winter during the holidays, to raise money for SNCC. So it was quite an experience. And I have read, I never was able to verify this with the students, but some of the women students went to a Roman Catholic school. And they supposedly were threatened with expulsion if they went, and they went. So I don't know for sure exactly what happened. But what I had read was that they were expelled.

So that was that school. Then I also did – and this we can get into the question of mistakes, mistakes are very important. We have come from a culture that thinks if you make mistakes, you're bad, and stupid and should be punished, or humiliated. Mistakes are – especially when you're trying to do new things – are where you learn. If you do it, right, you don't quite know why you did it, right. But if you do it wrong, you got to figure it out, before you can move forward. Or, if in my case, you didn't know it, then but over time you realize what you did wrong, you learn. So I offered a class on religion because I was a religion major. And I thought we would go through talk about all the different religions. And I thought it'd be great to start with Atheism. So one of the workers on the project was an Atheist. And so I asked him to come and he came to talk – and I think it was mostly the girls, I don't remember if there were guys or not there, but anyway, these teenage girls. And he came and they had, of course, never met or heard of a person who didn't believe in God. They were either Baptists or Roman Catholics. And it just so freaked out a couple of the students that they went to the nuns to talk about it. And one of the nuns insisted I come speak to them to justify what I was doing teaching religion, right? I mean, after all, who was I? So I did, I went and talked to the nun and told her that I was a religion major in college, which of course, didn't impress her in the least bit. But then I went to my class, and we did, we did everything, Buddhism... I was trying to talk about there's all these religions.

Now, of course, as an older person who's learned a lot, I understand the mistake. You start where people are. So the place to start would be with the students who were Roman Catholics to talk about what it meant to be a Roman Catholic. And with the students who were Baptist, to talk about what it meant to be a Baptist. And then go to whatever might be. And obviously, Atheists would be the furthest along the line, because it was the most extreme, not even an Agnostic, he was like, "There is no God." So that's what I learned. And if you ask a lot of

people, what they learned working as outsiders coming into the Southern Freedom Movement from the North, what did we learn? One of the key answers is always learning to listen to other people. And the other is to start where people are, not to come in and lecture them or give them, tell them what you think is right. So that was one of the mistakes I made was how I started but we went on, it's not like anybody died. I did go talk to the nun. So all I can say is I did go talk to her,

Sam
Right.

Chude

And people do have a right to know that not everybody agrees that what you've just been told is the truth and the only truth. I mean, we are not talking about, at that point, at least, expansive religious training, we are talking about, "This is it and only this." It wasn't that I shouldn't have told them, just that I should have been more cognizant of who they were and starting where they are and asking them, asking them, "Tell me about your religion." Not just assuming I had all the answers, right. So those are my three main classes. I think that's in terms of the teaching. I supposedly was known for being a very good teacher, it's in books now, people found that. But it was that kind of teaching, it wasn't like I made it up. It was like a part of the idea of the training that we got in Ohio before we went was, teach in a way that encourages the students to think, and to think in new ways. Critical thinking. And to express themselves. Our job was not to impart the word as it were but to give what we could to encourage them to think in new ways and to know, to learn new things and, and ideally become leaders in their communities.

Sam

If there was one major thing you've learned from working in the Freedom Schools, what would that be?

Chude

I think now what I would say is what I just said is listen more. I mean, we did have conversations, especially the black history class was mostly discussion. But there still was a way in which I would say now that I was raised – and I realize now – in an environment where to ask anything to personally was, was invasive. You didn't do that. And if I were to do it again, I would be asking, I would certainly have asked the students, "What's your life like? How is it at home? What is it like for you in school?" I would have just asked more questions of people individually, learned more. But I came out of an environment where that was considered impolite. You know, "why," don't ask those kinds of things.

Sam

I really appreciate you talking a lot about your personal experience, just in the Movement, in general, working in the Freedom Schools really, really good stuff. So now what we're going to do is, I hope you don't mind, but we're going try and move on to the concluding questions and the post-Movement. Did you ever have any doubts that things would change for the better?

Chude

When I was there, I thought we were just going to charge forward and things are going to get better and better and better. I didn't understand what I do know that some people say, historians would say that there's an ebb and flow, it doesn't just go forward, then there's some backward movement, too. I don't think I really grasped ever. I know, when I went south, I did not understand that racism was a deep-seated illness of this culture, I thought it was kind of like a blight on top of, just this kind of minor thing that we could just get rid of. Because it was so clearly wrong so all we had to do is know, learning it was wrong, and we could get rid of it. I had no clue of how deep and central it is to the whole development of this country, because of the enslavement of people. And then you know, what followed from that. So in that sense, I was naive.

And I also thought that I believe that as you change things, with the laws and stuff, that this would automatically change people. And it's not enough. I think now what I really do think is that racism is a serious illness in the white psyche and that it's something that cannot just be legislated for, it has to really be rooted

out. And I think internalized racism is a serious problem in people of color. This is deeply, deeply in our culture. And I didn't know that when I went south. And I certainly didn't know when I came out. Because again, I just was so – I don't even know how to say it exactly, moving, exhilarated come up, to know people of the caliber that I was privileged to know who were black, local people, and then, of course, the SNCC Movement people, these people were phenomenal people. And so it wasn't in my brain that people could not understand that kind of thing. The Black Power Movement was difficult in the period of separatism. I understood it, but some of it was very hard. Some of the separations were hard for a while.

But I think, again that the key thing was that I was still naive about the economy, I didn't really understand how capitalism and colonialism were connected to the enslavement of African people. My politics continued to expand. I would say that. But no, I hoped and believed everybody would come to understand the importance of loving each other. Some of the civil rights, people laugh at me, because that's so naive, but I wanted love, I wanted us to love each other. I don't mean just sexually, I mean romantically. Although in my case, I ended up marrying an African American man, not once, but twice. I'm now in my second marriage. But, I mean, just between women. I was lucky, by the way. Some of my first connections with black Americans, or with women and with older men, so they were not connected to romance at first, and then friendship. So that, for me, it's what I said before about that part is just that I really learned, we're all people. And some of us are going to connect in very profound ways, and some of us are really not going to have much interest in each other. And that doesn't have to be a problem. It doesn't mean anybody's better than anybody else. It's just personalities, as long as we're all starting with the principle that we are equal, and that we all deserve respect and dignity.

Sam

Thank you very much for that. Once again, I'm sorry about my cat. I just have a few more questions. And thank you for talking about your philosophy and everything about how we need to love each other. I also agree with that. It's really something that, especially now I think we need to work on because the media and elections and so many other things with racial complications are going on right now. And I think it's important to understand that we are all human and that we should really take into account how we need to have this relation with each other. I want to say I really thank you for telling us that. I just have another question. If you could go back in time and change anything about the Movement or your work in the Movement, what would you change?

Chude

I'd listen more. I would hopefully be sensitive enough not to pry and be insensitive in my questions, but I would ask people more questions about who they were and what they thought. I think that would be the key thing for me. The Movement as a whole, I don't feel in terms of the Southern Freedom Movement that I was ever enough in leadership to have a sense that I would know what should be different. The thing about it was, especially that summer of '64 was so huge, and then going to the Democratic Convention and doing the challenge and saying these delegates from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party should be seated instead of the regular Democratic Party delegates, because they were racist and exclusionary, and we were inclusive. That was huge. That's just so huge. Because if I were to say, outside of that context, of how demanding that was, how incredibly disappointing it was that Johnson and the Democrats couldn't do that, that people had risked their lives to do it and then went back to Mississippi. In that context, I can then say, what we didn't have that would have been really helpful, was what we might call today "debriefing" for the volunteers who'd gone in. We all just splintered up and went back to our various colleges, and we didn't know how to talk to each other. There's a lot more training and understanding about how to talk about difficult things today.

So I went back to a campus where – my colleagues, by the way, sent one of the highest percentage of people to Mississippi, we were a little college, 1300 kids and six of us went, five of whom had been there that year. Three of us went back, the others had graduated. We organized support for SNCC. We sent curtains that we found in the basement, and bed-spreads and clothing and stuff, south, as well as money. But we didn't talk to each other about, "What happened on your project?" And, "How was it between the black workers and the white workers? How was it between the men and the women?" We didn't talk about those things. We didn't have to talk about those things, then. And a debriefing then would have helped only marginally, because nobody knew how to talk about those things. We didn't have that part of it yet. But still, the fact that we didn't

come back together, that we left Mississippi and disappeared into wherever we went, the isolation was very difficult. And there were people like I told you, Doug McAdam interviewed us in '84, he interviewed people that had never told anybody about their experience in any kind of detail. I worked with women in women's liberation. I either didn't know that they'd been involved in the Southern Freedom Movement, or we knew that about each other and we still didn't talk about it. When I organized that first reunion with people here in 1989, I called a friend who was Canadian, she'd gone back to Canada, and I said we'd had this reunion, and she says to me, "Oh, I was a Freedom Rider." She'd been one of my best friends before she went back. And I'd never known she'd been a Freedom Rider. The only Canadian she knows was a Freedom Rider. So we didn't know how to talk to each other. If I were to do it differently, I would think I would say it would have been wonderful if we knew how to talk to each other. And we could have helped each other heal from the traumas. And there were many traumas of being in that kind of situation. So a lot of us suffered some kind of post-traumatic distress from it.

In my case, it happens to be in terms of driving. Other people, other things. That's what I would say, I would say that nobody knew quite how – and I think it's still true – how do you heal from really difficult things that most people don't even grasp, but you've been through. And think about people who lived there. I'm talking about somebody – I left. Many of them stayed and lived in communities that were very violent for a long time. And many of them continued to work and to build. And they suffered all the contradictions that happened in life. And I guess I would end with that part. I never knew as a young person, that contradictions were the name of the game, that there were always going to be contradictions. That the three of us can sit here and we can all agree today about all these things, next time we get together, one of you asks a question, and what do you know, but we're in totally different parts of the room on the question, and angry at each other because we're no longer in full agreement. And then we work it out. We work it out because we know that's normal. But back then, I didn't know that was normal. Especially in the Women's Movement, we start having a disagreement, "Wait a minute, we're all supposed to be on the same side!" Well, yeah, we are on the same side. But it doesn't mean we're going to agree on everything. We have to work it out, learn from each other. One thing that would change in the Movement is that I would help everybody not to be afraid of contradictions. And not to be afraid of disagreeing, but to learn how to really learn from each other.

Simona

You talked about your driving issue which you said, how you have trauma from that. Can you explain more what your PTSD is when that (happens)?

Chude

There are two things. Of course, I was in this one, chase. And I sometimes think that those of us that only had one or two experiences of a certain kind have more trauma around the specific than if it happened a lot like it did to some of the workers. It just is what happens. You know what I mean? It's just what happens. I don't mean to say they didn't, don't suffer post-traumatic stress, I just think that it might focus a little differently. But in my case, and this is part of that story that Samuel had raised about my parents said, yes, is that after I came out of Mississippi, my parents had been waiting all summer to go visit friends in New Hampshire and took me with them. And on that trip, after lunch, I was lying in the backseat and they and our minister were in the front seat. And all of a sudden, I went into a total panic that we were going to die. I don't think it had anything to do with what was happening in that car at that moment, I think that was finally coming out of Mississippi. And the question you asked at the beginning about were you afraid and of dying? No, I'm not afraid of dying. All of a sudden, I think it just was there. And that's when it happened. And so it remains, it is the slight anxiety and I don't want to drive. Then I had, where we were going, I had an extremely unpleasant experience around white racism. And so I think that underscored it. But I think in my case, I don't think it was literally the car, I just think that happens to be where it happened for me that I panicked. And I think it was old, just all the old fear and trauma of the whole summer. And the people I cared about still there may be going to be killed. And being alone and being isolated.

Simona

So that still affects you to this day?

Chude

Yeah, I don't drive much. And, of course, now that I'm sheltering in place, I don't drive much at all. I would say more for me, because I've been doing memoir writing, that I've healed a lot, that I've been able to go back. It's a real gift of doing a memoir when you're older is going back and really looking at the issues that had been there. Because remember, in the '60s, I came out of the South in the summer of '64, in August of '64. And I'm already organizing against the war in Vietnam this next year. And then I'm organizing women's liberation. That's just me. But I mean, things happened so fast then. The Movement's happening, Black Power is happening, struggles for women's liberation, gay liberation, all this is happening. The war in Vietnam was huge. My husband refused the draft. My brother when he was drafted, decide to go in as a medic, and then they talked him into going to Officer Candidate School. And he was going to be in artillery. And he decided he didn't believe in killing went and said, "No, I don't believe in killing," and went back to being a medic. But these things were all happening, there was a level of... we didn't have time to sit around thinking about the last thing that happened because something else was happening. It was a very vital time for those of us and we were changing and growing.

And there's a poem I wrote that I asked Sam to see that you read and I don't know if you did, called the [Delois](#), about the young woman that I knew in Mississippi who, being young, means she was two years younger than me. She was a senior in high school, and I was going to be a senior in college – I guess it was three years between us. That poem when I wrote it was mostly about an experience with her. But I found myself at the end writing about how change, it was about visiting her family and having dinner with them and thinking about her mother looking at me and just wondering how her daughter was changing because of this experience, and realizing that all change, even when you want it, is hard. Change is hard. So in that poem I finally, I think, admitted to myself, all these things they're very important, they made me who I am. And I'm happy I had them and I'm happy to be who I am. But it wasn't like it was always easy. I went through an incredibly long period in my early '20s of dealing with the fact that nobody was like me. That we can connect on this point, we can connect on that point. But you're still you, and you're still you, and I'm still me. And there are ways in which nobody quite is like me. And I can guarantee you, marrying interracially during the Black Power Movement meant that much of the Movement was against our marriage as well as the dominant society. And it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy.

And now, I'll also say, Sam, asked about growing up, one of the things that I've looked back at, as I had a teacher in ninth grade, who loved something I wrote, and told me, she had to see me. And I was doing really well in her class, I was getting A+ on the paper, and I wouldn't go see her and I started getting C's because she was this weird little old lady. I mean, she was weird. We'd always say, "Little old lady with sensible shoes." Well, that's who I am. But at 13, I wasn't quite willing to accept that I was going to be a weird little old lady. You know. What I'm saying is that being in a movement changes you, and it changes you for the better. But any kind of change requires a hell of a lot of work on your own part, to change, to grow, to root out the things in ourselves that have been there. We're inculcated with racism, it's there and we have to work at it and pull it out. And again, naively, I used to think, "I'm against it, that ends that. I'm against sexism. I'm against homophobia that ends that." But it doesn't work that way. The culture is constantly reinforcing things and we're constantly having to correct behavior, correct thinking, just because we're human beings.

And, yeah, I can give you a whole speech about how we need to be kind and loving to each other, but I can guarantee you, in these years in these 50-plus years, since the Southern Freedom Movement, I have not always been kind and loving to the people I was working. I've been at times critical, and nasty even, and certainly arrogant. But over time, I've gotten better. You do get better at these things. You do mellow. If you work on yourself, you do start to learn how to be able to hold who you are in balance, and at the same time, allow other people to be who they are, in a loving way. And if they're vile, terrible, people, I tell you, I can't love them. I just can't. But I do have a friend that says what she does is she puts them in her mind on the far side of the circle and asks God to love them. And that's what I would say now is that it's hard to believe that some people are children of God, but they are. And I have an incredibly hard time accepting that everything that's happening is God's Will or something because some of it is so horrible. But I do believe that there is spirit here

in the world and that my job is to bring in as much of that kind of love as I can.

Simona

Do you have any artifacts from the Movement that are with you?

Chude

I only remembered that I was supposed to do that afterward, so I don't have my SNCC pin that I used always wear, which has the black and white hand together. But you know, I didn't bring a lot out, I didn't do that, that I can remember. I didn't think, when we were young, I didn't take it all seriously. I used to have all the posters and I only have one now. And I used to have a lot more than I have because we would sell them and raise money, or you'd tack them on the wall with thumbtacks. We didn't have money so we weren't going to frame them. So we lose things. So at the moment, I can't think of any artifacts. I brought out a couple of books, but they're not from the Movement per se. But I did want to say, learn about women.

One of the key ones is "Hands on the Freedom Plow," all women that worked in SNCC, of various women, and some of the things are quite wonderful. And two others. Anita Blackwell, it's a strange name, *Barefootin': Life Lessons from the Road to Freedom*. She was in this small, small town in Mississippi and got recruited to the Movement, and really changed her life, became the first black mayor of a city, and got an education, and did wonderful things. And the thing I like about this one is that she so much gives credit to the summer of '64. That's when her life changed when those workers came in and started to organize and encouraged her to begin to try to change her life.

And the other one is, *From the Mississippi Delta*, by Endesha Ida Mae Holland. And this is out of print. But this is a story about a woman who was raped when she was 12, on her 12th birthday. She went to a white home where she did housework. And it was the white wife, who took her up to the bedroom and opened up the bedroom door and pushed her into being raped by the husband. When I learned that is when I understood the historical anger and distrust of white women, that someone could do such a thing. So those are just some of the ones of the many ones of the books we have now. We didn't have those books then, but you have them now. So you can read a lot by the women who were involved. Other than that, I can't think of any artifacts as such.

But I will end with, because you asked, this is a photograph of Sojourner Truth. I found it in my grandparents' desk. It's an actual photograph that she herself sold. My grandmother's mother's people were abolitionists. And I found it and I brought it back and she is for me a spirit guide. The idea that she touched it, and now I can touch it, has been just very important to me. And she's been important to me and helping me believe in myself. She was someone who was a slave in New York State. And then she was an abolitionist and also believed in women's rights. And one of the things that she's quoted as saying is that God insisted that she love white people, not just black people. And so I write things. And so one thing she once said to me was, "You have to love everybody, Chude. You even have to love white people." And that's hard. Whites who got involved in anti-racist work, it's one of the key issues I think, that we have to deal with is learn how to love white people and love ourselves.

Sam

Thank you very much, Chude. It's been such a pleasure listening to you. You're a very good speaker about things, and I'm very glad that you can go very detailed into the things you're talking about. Unfortunately, we have to end now. We went a little over time, but either way, regardless, this was a great, great time talking with you. This will definitely go down in the history archives for future students, researchers, and historians to look at. It's been a great pleasure listening to you Chude. You can, you can leave if you'd like. We sure do.

Chude

Great. I'll just end with one thing. There was a cartoon the other day in the paper where somebody's come into heaven, and there's a cat sitting on the throne and, "What a cat is God?" And the other person says, "That makes a whole lot of sense." Take very good care and thank you. Bye, bye.

Sam

Thank you so much.