

*Civil Rights History Project*  
*Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program*  
*under contract to the*  
*Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture*  
*and the Library of Congress, 2015*

Interviewee: Peggy Jean Connor

Interview Date: November 20, 2015

Location: Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: approximately 2 hours, 21 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

EMILYE CROSBY: This is Emilye Crosby with Mrs. Peggy Jean Connor, and we're at the Oral History and Cultural Center at the University of Southern Mississippi. It's November 30, 2015, and we're doing this interview as part of the Civil Rights History Project, which is co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the National Smithsonian Museum for African American History and Culture. Thank you so much, Mrs. Connor.

PEGGY JEAN CONNOR: You're welcome.

EC: I'm also here with John Bishop and Guha Shankar. Could you start by telling me about your family, when you were born, and about growing up here in Hattiesburg?

PJC: I was born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Then, my daddy, he always wanted a doctor for childbirth. Then the doctors would come to your house. When he

came, when the doctors would come, they delivered all four of us, all four of us, three siblings and I. Dr. Charles Smith. My mother was quiet. I think I was at one time [laughter], and very shy when I was in school. Made good grades, but I never volunteered to answer nothing, you know. I had a teacher, Mrs. R. M. Tademey. I learned later that was Rhodie M. Tademey. She taught me seventh grade. The first semester was citizenship, and in that she really put a lot of emphasis on registering to vote. That was something in that day. In the second semester we had literature. But I remember her telling us, "When you get twenty-one years old, you go to the courthouse, to the circuit clerk's office, and register to vote." That stuck with me, and I started trying to register early. It took me about ten years to get it, to become registered.

EC: Did you try the first time when you were twenty-one?

PJC: I did, mm-hmm. And another thing, you had to pay poll tax, two years, I mean, for two years, two dollars. Poll tax. I would pay poll tax, and I would collect poll tax in my beauty shop for patrons that wanted and was afraid to go themselves. Now you paid poll tax during the time between January and April like you paid your taxes, before you have to pay penalties on your taxes. So I would take a list up there, and it would just do me all the good in the world. When I get there, I was standing. People behind me had to wait until I turned all those poll, those names in and had receipts for everyone. [Laughter] I just loved that.

EC: I bet you did. So was this before or after you were in the movement?

PJC: This was before, mm-hmm. And after even the movement, well, I don't know how--I'd like to tell how I got in the movement.

EC: We'll come. I don't want to rush you ahead, but when you were collecting [5:00] poll taxes, did a lot of black business owners do that?

PJC: No.

EC: Who else did you know besides yourself?

PJC: I didn't know nobody, and I didn't, and I just told my customers. I didn't tell--.

EC: Where did you get the idea to do that?

PJC: Well, I'd been talking and telling them I was going to pay my poll tax, because you had to pay two consecutive [consecutive] years, and if you miss a year you had to start all over again. I would tell them, you know. I talked to them, and they would tell some people and get a list and take them down.

EC: They must have been unhappy to see you coming.

PJC: [Laughter] I didn't go every day, but they knew me.

EC: Who? You said that's the circuit clerk's. Which office was that?

PJC: That was the voter registration office.

EC: So was it like Mr. Theron Lynd?

PJC: Yeah.

EC: It was the same office where he was?

PJC: Yeah, same office, mm-hmm.

EC: Did they ever try to intimidate you about doing that?

PJC: No, nobody. Nobody really bothered me. I guess I looked like a little girl, you know, and they never felt--.

EC: Looks can be deceiving.

PJC: [Laughter] Mm-hmm.

EC: They didn't realize how much trouble you could--

PJC: I didn't know how much trouble I could.

EC: What did your parents do for a living?

PJC: Well, my mother, at that time, she was just a housewife and took care of the kids, and my Daddy worked at a lumberyard, Tatum lumberyard. Then he got kind of elevated, and he got where he could work at the house and drive the owner to town and out, down on the coast or wherever he was going. So he was like a chauffeur.

EC: Was that a good job?

PJC: Well, it was OK. It wasn't paying a whole lot. I don't think he made much more than he was making when he was working in that lumberyard. Then he would get up early, go to bed early, and then get up like about two o'clock and go wash windows all downtown. He had them all, just about all the business downtown, he'd wash windows for them. So he made a living you might say. But after I got larger, well, I start--. My aunt had a beauty shop. In fact, she gave me her beauty shop when she left Hattiesburg. That's how I become owner of my shop. I was the actual breadwinner for our home.

EC: So you contributed?

PJC: Uh-huh. Of course, I didn't consider myself that. I just was doing my part, I thought. But my sister told me once that, she said, "I wanted to go to Alcorn, and I asked Daddy, could I go with the group that was going from Hattiesburg, and he told me, 'Ask Jean.'" That's when both of us kind of found out. [Laughter] So I helped take care of my siblings.

EC: So your father was recognizing your contribution and letting her know that it had to be OK with you?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Was that usual at the time?

PJC: I didn't know nothing about it. He would tell them. Like I say, it's been, maybe about ten years that I know, that she told me that.

EC: So you didn't know about it at all?

PJC: Uh-uh. I didn't know he had told her that.

EC: How young were you when you started working at your aunt's?

PJC: Eleven. And I got ten cents a shampoo. I was a shampoo girl. I got [10:00] ten cents for every shampoo, and she was a tough sister. She would make me think what the lady had on or what she talked about. [Laughter] I had to tell her. Well, she would give me a ticket, and she'd write her name on it, and I'd give it back to her. She had the ticket. She'd give it to--.

EC: Yet she still needed you to do that?

PJC: I didn't say a word. I'd just go on and do it. So she gave me the beauty course. She had a beauty school, and I graduated from the beauty school in 1946.

EC: It was her school?

PJC: Her school.

EC: So she had the shop and the school?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: So she didn't charge you for going to the school?

PJC: Uh-uh.

EC: So I guess even though she was tough on you--.

PJC: Yeah.

EC: She recognized your contribution. [Laughter]

PJC: I guess so.

EC: How did you feel about your work when you were eleven? Did you enjoy it?

PJC: I enjoyed it. Uh-huh, I did. I didn't get a chance to go to a lot of school functioning, because I was working, but it didn't bother me.

EC: Did you listen in on what grown folks were talking about?

PJC: Yes. [Laughter] But she was married to a minister, and she was kind of, I think, headed on out. She was going to be one, one day, herself. So it wasn't too much gossiping went on. She had a lot of magazines and things that people could read. There wasn't too much gossiping.

EC: Did she really? At that time there wasn't many women that were ministers.

PJC: No. But she was a missionary that was--.

EC: She had that idea.

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Was she--. Oh, you just told me she was married to a minister.

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: What kind of work did he do?

PJC: Carpenter. He was a carpenter. He decided, well, some of his members-- he was from a place called Farmhaven, Mississippi, out from Canton, Mississippi. They

were Holiness people. My grandmother was of the Church of God, my mother's mother. He met my aunt, who was in Houston, Texas, and they got married there and moved back to Mississippi.

EC: Is that your mother's sister?

PJC: My mother's sister. My mother's brother owned a beauty school, Franklin Beauty School, in that day.

EC: So it's really a family business in some ways.

PJC: Yes, mm-hmm. Oh, it's a lot of beauticians in here. [Laughter]

EC: In Hattiesburg?

PJC: I have a picture at home. It was taken in the [19]70s, and all sitting at the table, and I say, "A family of beauticians." [Laughter]

EC: Was everybody kin to you?

PJC: Yeah, everybody. It was family.

EC: Was it different shops, or were they all in Hattiesburg?

PJC: Oh, no, he had them; it was all over Texas, a lot of them.

EC: Oh, OK.

PJC: Mm-hmm. We called, we thought he was rich. [Laughter]

EC: He probably was.

PJC: He was. We found out when he died.

EC: So did you ever think about doing any other line of work, or did it just seem natural to follow your aunt?

PJC: It just seemed natural. Because if you'd work in the homes, you wasn't making no money. A lot of people were making two dollars a day. Then when I worked

in the shop, I wasn't like people that stayed at home. They didn't get the--. I got the fair price, because she told me, "You better not let nobody come in here." So I had--.

EC: So she taught you how to charge what you were worth?

PJC: I was getting the same thing she was getting.

EC: Even when you were younger?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Did she let you set your own price while you were, like, when you started doing your own? [15:00]

PJC: No, uh-uh.

EC: OK. So whoever came in the shop?

PJC: They paid what was on.

EC: On the board?

PJC: Uh-huh.

EC: What were your parents like?

PJC: My daddy was a strict man. We walked the line, I tell you that, three girls. He was going to make a boy out of that one son he had, so he had to mow yards, and we would get out there and help him. [Laughter]

EC: So he tried to be, this is what the boys do, and this is what the girls do, and you're just mixing up. [Laughter]

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: You did say that you three girls spoiled your baby brother?

PJC: That's right. Spoiled him rotten.

EC: You enjoyed that?



PJC: Yeah, I really did enjoy it.

EC: Did your mother ever work outside of the house?

PJC: She did. My daddy took sick, and she did work some out of the house when he got sick. She would work for people, and they didn't have no more than we had. When she'd get through working, "Well, Esther, I don't have any money. Do you want this radio?" or "Do you want this?" or "You want--," you know. That was her way of paying, and we were glad to get the radio.

EC: Were you? This is white families?

PJC: Yeah. Yeah, white families.

EC: What did your parents teach you? You mentioned the teacher who taught --. I'm trying to think, I didn't know Mississippi allowed the black schools to teach citizenship.

PJC: We had it. A young lady that was ahead of me, Daisy Wade--she died back, not too long ago--she don't even remember having citizenship when she was. She was a grade ahead of me. But we had citizenship.

EC: Do you know if your teacher was registered?

PJC: She wasn't. That's one thing she did not tell us is she wasn't. She wasn't registered.

EC: Did she try, do you know? Was she one of the people who tried?

PJC: After I got registered I went to her--she had retired then--and asked her about going. She said, "No, I'm not going to fool with that."

EC: Did you remind her?

PJC: I told her, uh-huh. She said, "Well, I did do some good, didn't I?"

[Laughter] She was a good teacher, in literature, too, she was really good.

EC: Did she say why she wasn't going to?

PJC: I knew why.

EC: Was this in the early days?

PJC: This was, no. Well, see, I didn't get registered until, I want to say it was in [19]70 or [19]72. I'm not sure. But it was way after that.

EC: After you'd been trying for a while?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Was it after the Voting Rights Act? The Voting Rights Act came in [19]65.

PJC: Sixty-five.

EC: It's a year after the MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party].

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Did you register around that time?

PJC: It might have been. I don't remember.

EC: That's when a lot of people did.

PJC: I'm going to tell you what. A lot of them question that now. My daddy did file suit, and the courts ordered Theron Lynd to register people, some people that they had names and all. I got--I never got a card, a registration card. He wrote me a letter, Theron Lynd, and told, asked me to come and register.

EC: Really?

PJC: Yeah. He say--. And I never got a card. All I got, had is the letter.

EC: And was that because of the court?

PJC: That was because the court was on him, mm-hmm.

EC: OK. So your father was one of the people?

PJC: In [19]64, yeah, yeah my daddy. My daddy, he was something else in the movement, in all of it.

EC: You'll have to tell me what he did.

PJC: Mm-hmm. I got registered, [20:00] and it's coming to me now, in January, twelve days before Freedom Day.

EC: OK. So that was in [19]64.

PJC: That was in [19]64. That's when I got registered. I never got a card.

EC: I didn't know how it worked. So did they, when you passed the test, did most people get a card?

PJC: You get a card.

EC: Or was that for the poll tax?

PJC: Oh, no. You'd get a receipt for your poll tax.

EC: Poll tax. And you'd get a card for registering. Does it say, like, where your district is and everything?

PJC: No, it doesn't.

EC: Just that you passed it.

PJC: Mm-hmm, that you'd get. Because when we went to the primary meeting in [19]64, we--it was eighteen of us went to the library precinct. It was downtown where the Cultural Center is now, on Main Street. When we walked in, it was eighteen. My mama and my daddy was with me. I had been teaching citizenship classes, too, and I had

some of my members in the citizenship class. But it was a total of eighteen. When we walked in there, see, they had just been doing things by sham and all, you know, just right down. Because they've always been Republicans, but they went in the name of Democrats, but they always voted or stayed at home, voted for the Republican. So.

EC: That library meeting, when would they ask that of you?

PJC: That's right. Mr. Curry was the chairman of the county then. I don't, I can't--. He was a lawyer also, a lawyer here.

EC: So was that the white meeting that you went to? Or was that the MFDP?

PJC: I went to the white. No, no, no.

EC: So you took eighteen people to the white meeting?

PJC: That's right. We didn't call ours until about, in summer, when we got to-- we went to the white people's meeting.

EC: You took eighteen people?

PJC: We had eighteen people, and I think it was about three of them there, Mr. Curry and two more men. Oh, I can't think of his -- But it was three. They just didn't know what to say. They wanted to run, but they didn't. [Laughter] So they call Theron Lynd. This was in the public library, so they had a telephone there. People didn't have, you didn't have cells and everything then. So they called Theron Lynd and told him the situation. It was supposed to have started at 10:00. About 10:30 they got a good number to come. He was calling everybody that he could call around there, right around town, and a lot of them, I'm sure didn't vote in the library precinct. So.

EC: So they didn't know you were coming.

PJC: I was the only one that was registered, and he--they called, and he took their names, called them down there to Theron Lynd, and Theron Lynd asked him, well, "That Peggy Jean Connor, she's the only one can participate in the--."

EC: Was that a real rule, or did they just make that up at the time?

PJC: What?

EC: That you had to be a registered voter to participate in the Democratic primary?

PJC: Yes.

EC: You had to be registered?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: That wasn't one of the ones that you know?

PJC: Uh-uh. It wasn't one they made up.

EC: How did you feel going into that?

PJC: Just stuck my chest out and went on in. [25:00] I felt good. [Laughter] So by me being the only one that attended, the prim[ary], could participate with the primary convention, I guess just for peace sake or whatever, they voted me to go to the county.

EC: So they did, in [19]64?

PJC: In [19]64.

EC: So I know that, I mean, I've read.

PJC: Then when you have elections, we would count ballots, you know, paper ballots. After the poll closed, I'd be the only one there to help count the ballots. Then when you have to go to the courthouse to certify the ballots, I was the only one. I got, when they had the county meeting, I was voted to go to the district.

EC: That's still in the white Democratic party, the regular.

PJC: This is the regular Democrats. They took me through that, mm-hmm.

EC: When you were talking about certifying, watching the vote count, is that for the regular elections, or is that for the party?

PJC: That's for the regular election.

EC: Election.

PJC: Mm-hmm, regular elections. A lot of them, I could out-count them, you know. Boy, it was--. But I didn't get elected to go to the state.

EC: And this is in [19]64?

PJC: No, this wasn't in [19]64.

EC: OK, this is in [19]68.

PJC: Sixty-eight, mm-hmm.

EC: OK. When you went to the library meeting with the eighteen people, the library district, I'm sorry, the library precinct, was that [19]64 or [19]68?

PJC: That was [19]64, because after they turned--a lot of people all over, they'd turn them away. We say we'll name our own, get our own party, and we also named it Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That was in [19]64.

EC: Then the one where you got elected to the district, that was in [19]68?

PJC: Sixty-eight. I was a Freedom Democrat in a regular Democratic party, they said.

EC: Yeah. Well, maybe we can come back to those.

PJC: OK.

EC: You said that your father, well, not everybody could get their parents to get involved, and you said you had.

PJC: Well, see, when we were small, my daddy belonged to the NAACP, and he also rode with the men of one hundred or something, but it was all political.

EC: The governors, though, that one hundred, the ones that--was that after the *Brown* decision? There was a Committee of 100 after the *Brown*--.

PJC: Yeah.

EC: Governor White, I think, and he tried to see if he could get them to go along with segregation, if they had more resources for the schools? Or was it something different?

PJC: I don't remember that. But I know my daddy was secretary of both of the organizations.

EC: The NAACP?

PJC: And we used to have to write letters, where they were going to meet. They'd mail them through the post office and all, yeah.

EC: So you were writing letters?

PJC: You know, real young. Joyce would help, too. So we come up. My daddy, he'd talk about it now. We would be sitting around the dining room table eating, you know, and all, and Daddy was reading the paper to us. [Laughter] We come up with him reading the paper to us.

EC: Is that part of that strict, kind of?

PJC: Yes.

EC: Which paper was that?

PJC: It was the *Hattiesburg American*. And he finally got a job working for the *Hattiesburg American*.

EC: Oh, yeah? What was his job at the time?

PJC: He was a porter, they called him. But he helped get the press set and all that, and he learned a lot working up there.

EC: Did he talk to you about the NAACP and why he belonged or anything, when you were young?

PJC: No. No, he didn't. He doesn't, no. He never did talk. Because he found out that a lot of the NAACP, well, I won't say a lot, [30:00] some of them were going, telling the whites what they were discussing at the meetings. He just didn't trust them.

EC: Did he worry about that?

PJC: Yeah, he did, and he got mad about that.

EC: Do you remember how old you were when this was happening?

PJC: Well, I was still in school.

EC: So you were still young.

PJC: Yeah, that was before, because I graduated in [19]50, so that was going on before, before Emmett Till and all that. Mm-hmm.

EC: Was he registered to vote?

PJC: At one time, and they took him off the roll. He and my mother both were registered voters.

EC: Were you ever involved in the NAACP Youth?

PJC: Uh-uh.

EC: They didn't have them at that time?



PJC: Not at that time.

EC: So do you think your parents' attitude about registering to vote and the NAACP, do you think that influenced you?

PJC: That did a whole lot of it, uh-huh. I know one, another thing. If I had stayed married, I couldn't have been out there, because he wasn't going to have that, I'm sure.

EC: Do you want to tell us about your marriage and the end of your marriage?

PJC: Well, he was a, what do they call it now? He was brutal. He loved to fight and cuss, and he was an alcoholic, too. I didn't know that when I first married him, because he, we were in school together, but he went to the Korean War. He joined, stopped school and went to the Korean War, and he was a different person when he come back. This was all before we married. We got married when he came back.

EC: But you still thought of him as the person he had been coming up?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: And so you were, you married him. Did you all stay in Hattiesburg?

PJC: Well, he was stationed in Greenville, South Carolina. We stayed up there a while. That's when I really found out. [Laughter] And my son was born, and so I talked him into letting me bring the baby home, and I didn't go back. Then he kept calling and talking, and I did go back. That's when little Joyce come along. [Laughter] Right behind each other. And so I just couldn't take it no longer. It was when he came out of service and to come here, and his mother lived in Gulfport, and he started fussing one night. [Laughter] This is going to all be in the thing. [Laughter] He had started fussing one night, and my daddy told him he couldn't do that in his house. He was

cussing and going on, too. So he called his mama, and she come and got him. That was the last of him coming to stay in their house. She came. I don't know where he went to call, because we didn't have a telephone at that time. But he did go call her, and she came after him. She was knocking on the window, and she said, "Come on, baby. Mama come got you, come to get you." [Laughter] And we all laughed at that, and he went on down there. But we never went back together.

EC: Was it hard to--

PJC: I would. I would--huh?

EC: Was it hard to end your marriage?

PJC: No, it wasn't really, uh-uh. My daddy tried to talk me out of it. Then he say, "Every family needs a man. Give him another chance." [35:00] I say, "No, he had all the chances he's going to get. You can be the man for a while then." My daddy. And they call him daddy. That's what they called him. [Laughter] They didn't hardly remember.

EC: That's all the daddy they needed.

PJC: He got us--we got a divorce, and he got married again and had about six children. My second daughter had polio.

EC: Really?

PJC: Yeah. It must have been--she was two years old. She took polio. It was kind of an epidemic around here. A lot of people's children died, but she did kind of come around, because she couldn't--she was in an iron lung. We got where she could stay out some, a while, and then she had to go back. That happened for about two years. One night she was at home, and I had the best pediatrician you could think of, and that

was Dr. Temple. I could call him any time of night, and he answered the phone. His wife didn't answer the phone, he answered the phone. And he told me, he say, this time, he say, "Well, Jean," everybody called me Jean there, he said, "Jean, that's a long trip over there." I had to take her all the way to Vicksburg. Jackson didn't have an iron lung at that time. So it was a Catholic hospital over there. I think it was Mercy. But anyway, we'd take her over there, and on our way he would call the highway patrol and notify every time we was coming through there, we were coming through with a very sick baby.

This time he say, "You know they got an iron lung in Laurel now, so you want to go there?" I said, "It will be closer to home." So we went up there. We took her in the car. We had been getting the ambulances to take [her]. It wasn't--it was the same thing they used for the dead, you know. So we got up there. They had an iron lung and didn't nobody up there know how to work it. That's right. I had to show them how to work it. But she had an aneurysm to burst in her head. That's what--then she just had seizures until she died.

EC: I'm so sorry. How old was she?

PJC: She was smart. [Laughter] She was a smart little sister. When, I got bunk beds then, after she got sick, and her brother slept in the bottom and she was up top. She wasn't going nowhere [laughter] because she was paralyzed, you know. *Young Dr. Malone* was on. Wasn't a television in the house, and somebody brought her a television. So it had to go in her room, and she was laying there watching television. She say--and she's laying on this side, on her left. She could kind of feed herself some. But anyway, she got to wiggling. I said, "What's the matter?" "Get out of the way! Get out of the

way! I got to see this woman have that baby!” [Laughter] Oh, me. She was something though. Smart. She could read.

EC: So you had a really hard time with your early family.

PJC: Mm-hmm. [40:00] Had a hard time.

EC: Was her father around at all?

PJC: Uh-uh. He didn't come to see her the whole time she was sick. But he came to the funeral and cried like a baby. He say, “Jean, you know what happened to me?” I say no. “When I got worried about that baby had died,” say “I took”--took one of his children by another woman, “and I put her, him on the block to chop his head off.” Now that's what he told me.

EC: How did you respond to that?

PJC: I don't-- I don't remember saying nothing. I don't remember. But anyway, he just lost it I guess.

EC: Were you living with your parents then?

PJC: Yeah.

EC: Or did you have your own?

PJC: Yeah. When he left, that's when I started staying with my parents. Mm-hmm. Like I say, my children all called my daddy “daddy.”

EC: So they grew up with a good father figure.

PJC: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. He hadn't been that way.

EC: So did--.

PJC: Didn't pay no child support, no nothing. I was just as big headed as I could be. I say, "Well, if he ain't going to pay it, I'm not going to make him." Because I was doing pretty good in the beauty shop then, too.

EC: I guess if you had tried to make him, you'd have to talk to him.

PJC: Huh?

EC: If you were trying to make him, you'd have to.

PJC: Yeah. Yeah, mm-hmm.

EC: So is this in the [19]50s then?

PJC: Yes. She died, let's see, she was born in [19]54. She died in [19]50--

EC: Is that, which daughter?

PJC: That's little Joyce.

EC: You said [19]53 when we were looking at it. I don't know if that was exactly right.

PJC: It might have. It's [19]53 I think, because they were real close, real close. Before they could talk good, her brother and her, they would sit down and hold conversations.

EC: You didn't know what they were saying? [Laughter]

PJC: And she died in [19]59 I think it was. Mm-hmm.

EC: Were you running the shop then? Had your aunt given you the shop at that time?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Yeah. So you were running the shop and taking care of your [family].  
How did you get involved in the movement?

PJC: The COFO office was across the street from my beauty shop. I should have showed you all that when you were coming up Mobile Street.

EC: You want to show us going back?

PJC: Yeah, I can. It's a park there now. That's where the COFO house was. It caught fire and just burned up. It was a brick building.

EC: Was that in the movement? Was it burnt down?

PJC: This was after, because I remember when Dr. Tusa went down there and got some bricks and brought them.

EC: Did he have them in the archives? ... So you were saying that the COFO office was across from your beauty shop?

PJC: Yes, mm-hmm. It was 57 ½. This lady had the down[stairs]. It was a two-story building, and she gave that to COFO to use. They didn't charge no rent, no nothing.

EC: Was that Miss Woods?

PJC: Miss Woods. She lived upstairs. All antique furniture and stuff was up there. It was real nice. She kind of took care of the young men and the people who-- she'd send them away. But then my shop was kind of diagonal like, across from there. I was standing in the door of the beauty shop, and I had been seeing [45:00] a lot of commotion going on over there. I didn't know how I was going to find out what was going on, because I wasn't the type to walk over there to ask what's, you know. [Lawrence] Guyot came across, and he was telling me about this is the COFO office, and they were SNCC fellows. They had mass meetings down in Palmers [Crossing]. He said, "It's one tonight." I say OK. So he said, "Why don't you come down?" I talked a

friend, a girl of mine, she had a car, and we went down. And who but Fannie Lou Hamer was the speaker that night.

EC: You didn't have a chance.

PJC: That woman set me on fire. [Laughter] She did. Oh, she just, I don't know. So, after that, Victoria Gray asked me about going to the workshop on nonviolence, and that's where I--. Dorothy Cotton and Andrew Young were teachers there.

EC: Was that in Dorchester?

PJC: Dorchester, right on the line of South Carolina and Georgia there. That reminded me. But anyway, we were there a whole week. It was really good. When I left there I went, I know, I know, all of us that were there, we were supposed to go home and start citizenship classes where we could. If you can't get in a building somewhere, have it at your house. So I came back and Reverend Ridgeway, pastor of True Light Church, I went to him and asked him about having citizenship classes, and he told me, he said, "Sure." He say, "How about after prayer meeting on Wednesday nights?" I said, "Fine." He said, "Whoever stay." I had about twenty in my class.

EC: How many people came from Hattiesburg to the workshop in Dorchester?

PJC: Well, when I went it was just, it was Helen Anderson, Ruth Campbell, and I. It was just three of us.

EC: Did other people go other times?

PJC: Reverend J. W. Brown went, I know. That's all I can remember. But he had gone before I went.

EC: Did the people that came to your class, did they go try and register?

PJC: Yes, they did.

EC: Was anybody able to do it right away?

PJC: No, uh-uh. They were in the number that was ordered by the court.

EC: So they were a part of that group thing he had to--.

PJC: But, see, when I got the letter, he didn't tell me that the court had ordered me. He said he was. I thought, I said, "Well, I'm something special." [Laughter]

EC: Did you think he had converted?

PJC: Glenda Funchess said, "No, he didn't do that, because he [laughter] didn't love you."

EC: Did she tell you that recently?

PJC: Yeah.

EC: You thought the whole thing was you?

PJC: Yes. She passed out some papers that I got registered in June. I said, "No, this is not right." I said, "I was a registered voter before Freedom Day in January." She said--but he registered, he wrote me and said I was registered to vote. But the court, she said, when she told me, she said, "Well, the court ordered him to." [Laughter]

EC: He wasn't doing it out of the goodness of [his heart]. [Laughter] So what did you think of Guyot?

PJC: Oh, Guyot didn't, wasn't afraid of nobody. Uh-uh. He was a good leader, he really was.

EC: What made him a good leader?

PJC: He listened. He really listened, and then he could tell [50:00] you why you think this and why you think this. He was really, he was good. He didn't step back



for nothing. I remember we marched to the courthouse one night. This was before we started the MFDP. And all of a sudden he attacked Washington for the Korean--it was the—Vietnam War, wasn't it, Vietnam War. It was unconstitution[al]. A lot of people didn't like that.

EC: In the community?

PJC: Yeah, uh-huh. They didn't want him talking about the war.

EC: Did they disagree with him, or they just didn't want him talking?

PJC: Disagreed. Mm-hmm.

EC: So he was doing that at a mass meeting?

PJC: No, this was--.

EC: On the march?

PJC: On the march, on the steps of the Forrest County courthouse.

EC: So were they just worried about him talking in public like that?

PJC: Yes. Yes. That's what it was, uh-huh.

EC: Did they disagree with him?

PJC: Like I say, it was always somebody that went and told people what was going on. They were supposed to keep it down.

EC: Did you know who was doing that?

PJC: I found out when Daddy did. Mm-hmm.

EC: What did he do when he found out?

PJC: He told the guy. It was a friend of Daddy's, he thought. I hate to call--I'm not going to call that name.

EC: You don't need to call it.

PJC: But he was also very high with the NAACP. The NAACP was one piece, you know.

EC: So I know you started trying to register to vote when you got twenty-one. Did you join the NAACP?

PJC: Yes. And I told-- [laughter] oh, man. I have a reason for doing something. I tell people I joined the NAACP for insurance. Because I had that son coming up, and my brother, and me, but the first thing they ask you when you go for help, "Are you a member of the NAACP?"

EC: You mentioned your son and your brother. Were you more worried about them, you think?

PJC: Yes, mm-hmm.

EC: Why?

PJC: Well, my daddy had a shoeshine parlor in the front of my beauty shop. My beauty shop was at the back of it. And the police would pick at him, you know.

EC: Your brother?

PJC: And my son.

EC: Your son?

PJC: One Sunday morning they were up there shining shoes before time for church so men would come by to get their shoes shined, and the police come up there harassing them and all. Johnny said something to them. I don't remember. But they took Johnny and arrested him. My son ran all the way out--he was out of breath, he and the dog. We had a dog named Spot. He stayed in that shop a lot of times at night, you know. But he took out and run with Denny. So when we went to court the two policemen

couldn't tell the same story. One told one thing happened, and another, the other one told. And the jury told my daddy, he say, "I can," say, "This is police court." He says, "I cannot find nothing on the police. I just got to bill your son." [55:00] I think Daddy had to pay \$150 or something, just a little something.

EC: That's a lot of money though, isn't it, in those days?

PJC: Yeah. He told Daddy, told my daddy, "And get him away from here." So he left here.

EC: Was the judge trying to be helpful?

PJC: He was trying to be helpful, at least we think he was. He said, "I can't let him go. I have to charge him something." My sister was living in California at that time, Joyce. Some other family was here. I can't remember what month that was, but anyway, they--Johnny got in the trunk of their car, and that's how he left Hattiesburg, until he crossed the Mississippi River, Louisiana, between, you know, up near Louisiana. And he stayed. He didn't come back until--in the [19]70s.

EC: So you wanted to make sure you had that NAACP card in case you needed some backup?

PJC: That's right.

EC: And that was before you got in the movement?

PJC: [Laughter] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

EC: Were you aware of Mr. Kennard trying to go to Southern?

PJC: Yes, uh-huh.

EC: Did you follow that?

PJC: I followed. He would be on Mobile Street up there at Fats Kitchen. That's where he would stop and get some coffee and all. He's a humble guy, just as humble as he could be. I really don't think he thought--nothing was going to happen to him.

EC: He thought it was just reasonable?

PJC: He was determined though.

EC: Did you ever go to any of the court for him, you know, when they were trying him?

PJC: Uh-uh. I didn't go.

EC: Yeah. Did you ever know when Medgar Evers was coming through? Did you ever meet with him?

PJC: No, I never did. I know he came here. But I don't remember.

EC: He would be in Palmers, I know.

PJC: He would come to Palmers, down at St. John.

EC: I don't know if he would go to the church, but in the [19]50s he would come through, trying to organize as much as stuff. I don't know if these were mass meetings.

PJC: No.

EC: Guyot talked you into coming to that mass meeting?

PJC: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. She was there just as proud as she could be, you know.

EC: Miss Hamer?

PJC: In her starched and ironed dress, yeah, boy, woo.

EC: Do you remember what she said that night?

PJC: She was calling us nervous Nellies. [Laughter]

EC: Did you tell her no?

PJC: I'd say no, I'm not going to. [Laughter] Yeah, she could say that, nervous Nelly.

EC: What did she sing that night?

PJC: "Go Tell it on the Mountain."

EC: So this must have been in [19]63 then? Because it was before Freedom Day?

PJC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, it was before Freedom Day. This must have been after they had gone to Washington. You remember the march?

EC: Oh, after the March on Washington?

PJC: Mm-hmm. This was after that.

EC: That was late August, [19]63.

PJC: It must have been, like, September, because I'm thinking it was before Christmas that I went to Dorchester.

EC: So you pretty quickly went to Dorchester, and you were teaching the citizenship class?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Do you remember Jean Wheeler?

PJC: Jean who?

EC: Jean Wheeler. She stayed at Miss Williams.

PJC: Yes, I know Jean!

EC: Yes.

PJC: Yes. [1:00:00]

EC: Tell me what she was like.

PJC: With those little short skirts. [Laughter] Oh, boy, she could wear those short skirts. Yes, I remember her. Mm-hmm.

EC: Do you remember [her] organizing the MFDP? Was she doing that?

PJC: Oh, yes. Then she soon moved away.

EC: I don't know everywhere she went, but I know in the summer of [19]64 she was in Philadelphia.

PJC: Well, that's probably where she was, because she was here before.

EC: She said she wanted to make sure that the Klan knew they weren't going to win in Philadelphia. They were going to be there. Was she a good organizer?

PJC: Yes, she was. Mm-hmm.

EC: So how did you manage to keep up your beauty shop and your children?

PJC: I wonder that. I wonder that, too, and my daughter talks about, she say, "I never missed nothing that went on at school."

EC: She said that?

PJC: See, I'd be in the shop, and I would leave people in the shop. They would wait until I go to her programs or whatever, and they'd be waiting until I come back. [Laughter] She said, somebody would tell her, "Your mama ain't coming. She's working." "My mama will be here." So she's standing in the street, looking up. So she'd say, "Here she comes now." Yeah. I wonder. I don't know how I did all I did.

EC: Did you have help in the shop?

PJC: Uh-uh, I worked by myself. I didn't have any. I was the only beauty operator. I was having problems with the other beauticians and all.

EC: What kind of problems?

PJC: They would tell some of my clientele here that "You're going to fool around, and you're going to get burned up in that shop with her." They killed my business, because they didn't mind waiting on me. That's when I went to work at the handbag company.

EC: Because you lost so many customers?

PJC: Mm-hmm. I would still catch some when I'd come, get off from work and all.

EC: And were they afraid because of the movement? Were they afraid that they were going to have--.

PJC: They must have been. [Laughter] Yeah.

EC: Did your business come back after?

PJC: I wasn't wanting it back. I lost my thought.

EC: We were talking about your customers.

PJC: Yeah, uh-huh. And one customer, her boss's husband was a Klansman, and she would tell me things about them, when they were going up there to fight up there at Oxford.

EC: So when Meredith--you say a fight up at Oxford. Was that when James Meredith was there?

PJC: That's right.

EC: So she knew about the Klan going up there?

PJC: Oh, yeah, she knew all about that. They didn't pay. They would talk in front of you as if you weren't there. They didn't think you had sense enough to tell nobody or nothing. Because that's what I was telling one of the women that would go up to the precincts. See, we worked the precinct, because the COFO workers would get us a thing saying that we were supposed to be there.

EC: A poll watcher.

PJC: Yeah, mm-hmm. They would just be talking. A lot of stuff, they would just talk about. One lady said, "They don't mind talking all in front of us," see. I said, "Honey, they don't count us. All they got to do is say, 'I didn't say it,' and you're going to catch it for saying that." [Laughter]

EC: Did that change when people were able to vote?

PJC: Hm? [1:05:00]

EC: Did that attitude, did it change at all after voting?

PJC: No. Uh-uh. Uh-uh. I worked a long time on the poll, helped them count the vote. I never--nobody never bothered me, never.

EC: You were telling me before--.

PJC: I worked. I want to say, I worked for nothing. But they weren't getting but three dollars.

EC: But they weren't paying you anything?

PJC: Everyone's paying me nothing.

EC: Were they working for the Democratic party, the regulars? Or was that working for the election?



PJC: For election.

EC: Commission?

PJC: Mm-hmm, yeah. I've often wondered about this. They must didn't have election commission back then, because the people that worked the polls were the ones that counted the votes and certified and all. I don't remember anything about election commission until a few years later, and some blacks started campaigning for--.

EC: I don't really know how it worked, but I know in Claiborne County there were white election commissioners until after the Voting Rights Act, and then they got beat, a couple of them. So then it was an integrated group. Then, eventually, I think African Americans won four out of the five. But they did have it before, but I'm not sure how it would have worked.

PJC: I think it was just on the book.

EC: That could be. That makes sense. They didn't really need it, because, you know, yeah. You were telling me before about how you got arrested, and you knew you were going to get arrested.

PJC: Oh, yes. We went up there. We made around the--not around, you were going from one end on the--round by the jail, come up by the Masonic Temple to the furniture store and turn in. And the line was going--

EC: So this was in front of the courthouse and around, kind of?

PJC: Hm?

EC: So in front of the courthouse, kind of back and forth in front of the courthouse?

PJC: No. We went all around.

EC: So almost all the way around the building.

PJC: You couldn't. There wasn't no sidewalk on it, next to the furniture store there, Strickland Furniture I think it was. So you had to turn. But it's a line going and a line coming.

EC: So you got it completely. [Laughter] Was this before Freedom Day?

PJC: Oh, no. No.

EC: It was after.

PJC: Mm-hmm. After Freedom Day. That's when the ministers came down and a lot of other workers in other states, and we had a lot of people.

EC: For Freedom Day?

PJC: Uh-huh. Dick Gregory came the night before.

EC: Did you hear him? You were there?

PJC: Right there. You know, when you're going to church you would think some people would have some respect. He didn't have. He put his foot up on the--. Everyone, woo, woo, woo, woo!

EC: I've heard some of the things he used to say.

PJC: [Laughter] He was terrible. He was OK. I like him.

EC: You did? I was going to say, did you enjoy it when he was there?

PJC: [Laughter] I like him.

EC: Did you hear him talking back to the officers?

PJC: Oh, yeah, mm-hmm.

EC: What do you remember? What else do you remember about Freedom Day?

PJC: Freedom Day, it was pouring down rain. The police didn't have no rain gear. One of the stores downtown gave them all raincoats. That's how they stayed out there all day in that rain. But it was, I--you just felt like you was free. I was talking to one writer. He say, "Well, why were you out there?" I said, "I was getting my freedom." [Laughter] [01:10:00] Jerry Nash. He thought that was the funniest thing. "I'm getting my freedom."

EC: Did any of the people coming into town, did any of the ministers, did they stay with you or any of the--.

PJC: Oh, yeah. It was a lot of people came through. John Conyers, he'd stayed at my house. I was told afterwards there was a couple of FBI men staying . [Laughter]

EC: I guess they wanted to make sure nothing happened to the congressman.

PJC: [Laughter] So, anyway, it was fun. I didn't have sense enough to be straight scared. My daddy would take shifts, he'd stay up. My mother would go to bed early, and he would get up and stay up. He had been paralyzed, but he started walking, and he had a cane. The cane was laying across his [legs], and people put out that old man's sitting there with a shotgun across his legs.

EC: He was probably happy they put that out.

PJC: Uh-huh, mm-hmm. Yeah. That was the word; he was sitting there with a shotgun.

EC: Did you get threatened? Were people threatening you?

PJC: Nobody threatened, but when I--after we come back from Washington, from New Jersey, you know where we went up there to.

EC: Atlantic City.

PJC: Atlantic City. I lost my [thought].

EC: I had asked if you were threatened, and then you said when you came back.

PJC: Oh, what I was going to tell you. I had never been on an airplane before in my life, and we were campaigning for John Paul-- Lyndon Baines Johnson. I went to New York. Johnny Cameron went to Philadelphia I think it was, just different ones of the delegates, where we went to other states campaigning for him. My telephone bill, I had gotten a telephone about that time, so it must have-- But anyway, they knew I had got on the phone, somebody, I mean, had got on the plane. Daddy answered the phone, and they told, said, "Her telephone bill is due and it have to be paid by five o'clock, or we're cutting it off." That's the only thing. My daddy just went and paid the bill.

EC: But other--

PJC: I don't think it was about fifteen dollars.

EC: And they thought that was going to be the problem, they were going to get you with that?

PJC: I guess, I don't know. So I couldn't call back, you know.

EC: Right, yeah.

PJC: But I wasn't threatened. And my daughter, Felicia, when they desegregated schools, she was one of the first of twenty-six to integrate.

EC: Is that freedom of choice?

PJC: Yeah, freedom of choice, mm-hmm.

EC: Did she want to do that?

PJC: She didn't know. Back then children did what you said do, and they didn't question. I said to myself, I had been out to California where my sister was, and Watts happened about that time. So Daddy told me I needed to come home. I got home like two days before the registration would end. She was a little plump girl, and she was just skipping all the way. I said, "Lord have mercy, baby don't know what I'm getting her into." [Laughter] We went up to the--they had to--over Hattiesburg High [School]. It burned, and it had a lot of--they haven't got it fixed yet. [1:15:00] But she went up there, and I didn't even know the school name. I know it was on Seventh Street, across from Hercules [plant]. It was named Jeff Davis back then, but I had never paid no attention. So he said, "What school? What school do you want to send that gal to?" I said, "I don't know the name of it," I said, "but it's located across from Hercules." He said, "Jefferson Davis." [Laughter]

EC: Were you ready to change your mind then? [Laughter]

PJC: I said, "Well, OK." She didn't know. She just know she was changing school. And she's talked to some of the white kids later, after they graduate from high school and all, and they said they didn't know what was going on either and wonder how come these strange children are coming into our room late, see. All the kids were in their classroom, and then they take the children to [class].

EC: They go to the black school first, and then they carry them over?

PJC: No, no, no. The parents had to.

EC: Parents had to bring them?

PJC: Had to bring them. But they would hold those kids until all the white kids get in their class, in their seat, and then the teacher would walk them in.

EC: Were they trying to make sure they were safe? Is that why they were doing it?

PJC: I don't know.

EC: Make sure there wasn't any fighting?

PJC: It wasn't nothing going on, I tell you, in Hattiesburg. Nothing happened during that time.

EC: So what did she think about going to the white school?

PJC: She didn't.

EC: She didn't notice?

PJC: Didn't pay it no attention. She knows she was the only spot in there. Her teacher say, "She won't let you ignore her. They might try." Said, "She will not let you." And she was in everything.

EC: She had the personality for it.

PJC: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And she's still that way. Yes, she is.

EC: So we started to talk about when you got arrested, when you were picketing at the courthouse.

PJC: We picketed. They'd let us march around one time and come back, and he say, "And we'll stop it right here. You are marching mighty good, looking mighty good, and marching good. Let's see how you're going to march back there to that house behind you." [Laughter]

EC: And he's talking about the jail?

PJC: The jail. I wasn't in that jail long, because they try to keep people with leadership away from the other people in [jail]. They moved me from the jail to the farm out there where they put people and work them, you know, work your fine.

EC: Out on the farm, the work.

PJC: Uh-huh. It was in the city though. It's not far from where the police station is now.

EC: So they knew you were a leader and they wanted to make sure you didn't organize everybody in jail?

PJC: Yes, uh-huh. So I was out there. It was quite a few of us out there. They arrested sixty-some people that morning, and then some come that afternoon. They arrested them. We ended up having about a hundred people I imagine.

EC: What was it like in jail?

PJC: Oh, we sang songs. We told stories. The men were on one side, and the women were on the other side. They put a dipper and water in the middle of the floor, and that's how you'd drink your water. Then you had to--I don't even remember going to the bathroom there at all. I don't remember it.

EC: But you were there a week, right?

PJC: Yeah, I was there a week. I went, but I don't remember that. They cooked.

EC: Were you worried about your children when you were in jail?

PJC: No, I didn't worry about them, because I know Mother and Daddy's going to take care of them. [Laughter]

EC: What did your parents think about you being in the movement?

PJC: Well, my mother, she wouldn't have said nothing no way, because if John Henry was for it, she's for it, too. But we've been thinking here lately [1:20:00], she died in [19]86. I don't think she ever attended a mass meeting. She stayed home. And my children, they never attended a mass meeting.

EC: So she would stay with them.

PJC: Just me and my daddy.

EC: But she came to the precinct meeting with you.

PJC: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

EC: That's interesting.

PJC: Mm-hmm. But it's a different thing. Precinct mainly was-- meeting was in the daytime.

EC: So you think she didn't want to go out at night?

PJC: At night, mm-hmm.

EC: Now would your dad picket with you? Would he go on the line?

PJC: Oh, yes, he'd picket. Mm-hmm. He always came.

EC: So you were a team?

PJC: Uh-huh.

EC: You told me before that when you went to march in front of the courthouse that you knew you were going to get arrested.

PJC: Yes. When we left the COFO office, we all gathered at the COFO office, we walked up Mobile Street to Batson Street. See, Batson Street runs right in front of, it runs out in front of the courthouse. We didn't get in the street; we walked on the sidewalk all the way. Then we spread out and started.



EC: How did you know you were going to get arrested? Why did you think that?

PJC: Because they had told us, "If you come up here, you're going to jail. The last group there was up there the day before. So you come again, you're going to jail."

EC: And you weren't worried about that?

PJC: At nine o'clock we were ready.

EC: So they thought that was going to be enough to stop you?

PJC: Yeah.

EC: The threat, you know?

PJC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's what they thought.

EC: How did you end up getting out?

PJC: Mr. and Mrs., oh, what's the name? I thought I'd never forget that. But anyway, they put their house up, a thousand dollars. We got, all those people got their money back. See, if we had given them cash money, we wouldn't have."

EC: But you were able to go through the [court]. Did you have to go to court for that?

PJC: No, our lawyers went.

EC: Your lawyers went? Did they get it thrown out?

PJC: Yeah, uh-huh.

EC: Can you tell me about organizing the FDP?

PJC: Yes. When I was in Dorchester, Dorothy told us that we were to go and try to attend the primary meetings. And then, after we couldn't, it's SNCC is--there was some smart people. They knew all along that we were going to try there. [Laughter] So

here we went to the, tried to go to a primary meeting, and we didn't have poll tax. I was the only one that had really paid a poll tax and all. They shouldn't even be asking that at a precinct meeting. We didn't talk nothing about who we were going to vote for or what, you know, nothing. They ended up that eighteen didn't have but one vote, and that was my vote. So I don't know what they were doing for peace sake or not, but I was elected to go to the county meeting, with the other group. And then when we got to the district meeting, it was held at the courthouse, too. I didn't get no vote, so that's far as I got. But I would be the only black, and no fear, no fear at all.

EC: You just wasn't worried about it?

PJC: Wasn't worried at all.

EC: Do you know why?

PJC: I know the good Lord was taking care [1:25:00] of me, that's [it]. I just, he had to have been, because it was all kind of Klans up in there, Klansmen.

EC: Did you ever--were the Klan ever out when you were marching? Would they be in town, too?

PJC: Yeah, but they weren't dressed out as.

EC: Just coming as themselves?

PJC: Mm-hmm. There was one guy that I kind of think he was kind of off. He would come and try to meddle with you. We didn't try to integrate nothing, the business, until that summer.

EC: So summer of [19]64, after the Civil Rights Act--after the court--after the Congress had already passed the law?

PJC: Yeah, that's right. He would go to the Kress's and Woolworth, where they had. When I went down to Owl Drug Store, I had a customer that cooked there, been cooking there for about twenty or thirty years, and she just kept after me, "Jean, why don't you come down to the store?" I say, "OK." I made my mind up to go, and my brother's wife was pregnant, very pregnant.

EC: Did you bring her with you? [Laughter]

PJC: She went with me, and my brother had a fit. "Jean, you're going to get my wife killed!" But anyway, we went in Owl Drug Store, and it was full. There wasn't a seat. So we decided we'd just walk around. They sold different stuff in there. I couldn't think of nothing to buy but Vicks VapoRub. I looked up and saw Vicks VapoRub, and this was in July. I brought them up. She say, "They act like that. But they're not together." I said, "I don't care." She hopped on one stool, and I hopped on another one, but we weren't together. All those men, it was mostly men sitting around it, they went running to the kitchen with their plates in their hand. Then here comes the man that owned it, Owl, and he said, "May I help you?" I say, "Do you have a menu?" He say, "No," he say, "we can't serve you here. No, we cannot serve you here." He say, "But I'm sorry, but we can't." I said, "Well, what is your name?" and he told me his name, and I can't even think of it now. But anyway, he said, "I'm the owner." We left, and I filed suit.

EC: Do you think he really was sorry?

PJC: I don't believe it. He might have been, but if he had let us eat, they would have got him. I don't know.

EC: What happened with your suit?

PJC: It went for about, oh, in courts, maybe about four years or so, and he wrote me a letter.

EC: You must have a whole box of letters. [Laughter]

PJC: He wrote me a letter. No, flood. Down where I live we have a problem with flooding—rivers. Not a flash flood. It's the kind that stayed two or three weeks. I don't have no letters. But he wrote me a letter and asked me to come. I haven't been there yet. I never did it. I told him I never did.

And she told me, she say, "You know that man was sitting right next to you?" She say, "That's the manager of Butler's shoe store." I couldn't wear Butler's shoes, because then I was a skinny Minnie, you might say, and little narrow feet, and they didn't have nothing that fit me. So I went on in there. He asked me, "May I help you?" Then they would get down and measure you. You didn't go and [1:30:00] buy shoes without [that]. What was I going to say? I say, "It's a little wide." He went and got another pair. I say, "Aren't you the man that I sat next to at Owl Drug Store?" He says, "Yes, I am." I say, "I was just thinking, you couldn't sit on the stool next to me and eat, but you can sit between my legs and measure my feet," and got up and walked out. I say, "I was in here, nonviolent." [Laughter]

EC: Miss Connor, you are something else. [Laughter]

PJC: I just got up and walked out. I went in there by myself. Mm-hmm.

EC: Did you plan that? You just was like, "I'm going to go do this"?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Did they start to look out for you, see you coming?

PJC: No, that's the only one I went to. I always said, and I knew my son would never do it. I said, "If we ever be in Woolworth, or Kress's," or one of those stores that sells your lunch, if they--people would spank their kids if they got up on the stool. That made them feel good, the waitresses and all. I said, "If my daughter decides she wants something up there, after she gets on that stool or I'll get up there next to her." But I know my son would never have done [that]. He wouldn't have tried it. Uh-uh.

EC: But your daughter, she would? She'd take after you?

PJC: She said, "Mama, the only reason I didn't sit up there, did nothing look tempting that I wanted." [Laughter] She told me that about three or four weeks ago. She say, "I saw the people at this counter." She say, "But wasn't nothing there that I thought I wanted."

EC: Now didn't you tell me at the beginning of the interview that you were a shy person?

PJC: I've always been shy.

EC: I'm not sure--.

PJC: But that movement brought me out of there. It really [did].

EC: How did it do that?

PJC: I'd never talked--. When I did my first, what did you call it, the interview. What did they call them?

EC: Oral history interview?

PJC: Oral history. It was 9-11, September to 9-11. Dr. [Richard] Conville did it. I talked two hours. I told that man I ain't never talked that long. So every 9-11, we

always called. He'd call me or I'd call him. We didn't know 9-11 was going on until we got--.

EC: You were just in doing the interview and don't know what's happening. I guess now you probably wish you'd stayed in that interview for even longer. [Laughter] So how did the movement get you over your shyness?

PJC: I don't know. I don't know. I was shy, and I would always be secretary. I made a, one time, my beautician club, they thought they'd change up about it. The lady had been in a long time, and they would make me president. They were glad to get rid of me. I'm a secretary. I couldn't do all that. Uh-uh, all that talking and all. I don't know what happened.

EC: So would you go around and talk to, well, you said before you had talked to your customers about the poll tax. Did you talk to them about registering during the movement?

PJC: Well, see, they were kind of on their own by that time. They were going themselves.

EC: So you had already kind of worked them up to it?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Yeah. Did you canvass? Did you go around asking people to register?

PJC: Oh, yeah. Sometimes--.

EC: How [did it go?]?

PJC: Some people would just say, "I'm not interested," [1:35:00] and then some wanted to. But when the students got there, it was a different thing. They got them out.

EC: Do you know how?

PJC: Talking to them I guess, I don't know. When we registered for the party, we had better than three thousand votes.

EC: Of course, with the party, they didn't have to go to the courthouse.

PJC: Mm-hmm, yeah. That's right, because we'd go to their houses. When we got to Atlantic City, the country people we got had come to town. A lot of us had never, hadn't been out of the state of Mississippi. They took pictures and had rollers in our hair and all. [Laughter]

EC: What the trip to Atlantic City like? Were you on the bus?

PJC: On the bus.

EC: What was that like?

PJC: It was three buses. Because we took all our papers and everything, you know, when we was organizing our party and all. We thought we were going to be the ones. We really did. But Lyndon Baines Johnson, he stopped Fannie Lou.

EC: What did you think of the compromise, the two seats?

PJC: Well, no way. No way. But to tell the truth, the men in the group wanted it. It was the women that saved us.

EC: Why did the men want it?

PJC: They say we're listening to Adam Clayton Powell and all the other big officers and whatever. They say that politics is like you give and you take, and that was, we were supposed to give that.

EC: What about the women?

PJC: Fannie Lou. I didn't come all this way from Mississippi for two noncom

votes. I mean, they're going to give you two seats, and you couldn't vote. No, we wouldn't have it.

EC: Why do you think the men and women looked at it different?

PJC: I don't know. I really don't. But they did. I guess men--the man was telling them that you should take it, and so. The whites, they left and went home. They didn't even stay.

EC: Oh, the regular party? Yeah. Yeah. So Mississippi seats were empty, and then you all went on the floor?

PJC: Yeah, but we didn't sit in those seats. Some delegates from other states gave us their credentials, and that's how we got in.

EC: Did you have any trouble on the floor? Did people try to get you out of there?

PJC: No, uh-uh. Nobody tried to get us out.

EC: Did you work with Mrs. [Victoria] Gray?

PJC: Sure.

EC: What was Miss Gray like?

PJC: She was OK with me. I was like her -- she drove, and I just--I would go with her a lot of places. Been all over the state, just me and her, in her car. I don't know. I'm kind of concerned, because she got married, and her husband was in the service, and so she got a chance to go overseas and all. But every time she would come [1:40:00] to Hattiesburg, she would come by and see me, or I'd go with her somewhere, like we went to WDAN one night after ten o'clock, and she was being interviewed. But when they started organizing in Jackson, she never asked me to come. She never asked. She would



always come by, and she'd say, "Oh, we have a good time. The young people are really interested," and she was just telling me. Didn't nobody know nothing about me until it's--Herbert Brown had sent those pictures. Then they started circulating it. And they say it was people in that delegation don't even remember me, because I was quiet. [Laughter]

EC: When she was talking about in Jackson and organizing and that, what organizing? Organizing what? What was that?

PJC: That's when they'd start organizing where they had an anniversary, every five years. They started one year, and to five, and then they go on.

EC: So you sort of got left out of the history for a while until those pictures. It's been about, what, fifteen, twenty years?

PJC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it's been just about that long.

EC: You were one of the key people in the MFDP.

PJC: At the beginning. See, I can remember I went to Mount Beulah for something and come back by the COFO office, and when I went in the COFO office a lady told me, she said, "We got some papers for you to sign." I heard somebody say--I didn't look around or nothing--and they say, "No, she doesn't do that anymore." But I didn't question it, because I wasn't going to do nothing to hurt the movement.

EC: Do you know what that was?

PJC: What?

EC: When they said that you didn't do that anymore?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: What was the--why were they saying that?

PJC: Because they had put Annie Devine as the secretary of the party. See, I-- they couldn't say she was executive, but she's the secretary to the party. I know they didn't hold no meeting to do that. I think I was too young for those other two women there, and they wanted the kind of--. I never asked her nothing about it. I never asked Guyot. I never. I walked out of that COFO office that day, and I haven't been back since. They've been trying to get me to come up there and all.

EC: The COFO building up in Jackson?

PJC: COFO building, mm-hmm.

EC: Do you remember when that was? Was that like [19]65 or [19]66?

PJC: It must have been.

EC: Was it after the challenge?

PJC: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

EC: After the congressional challenge, when Miss Hamer and them challenged the representatives?

PJC: Yeah, it was after that.

EC: It was after that?

PJC: Mm-hmm. We all went to Washington. I went with them.

EC: Were you in that group going the whole way?

PJC: That's right. I was in that group.

EC: So tell us about that.

PJC: Oh. Some of them would wave at you and some speak, and some, they'd want to know you. [Laughter]

EC: So this is when Congress was getting ready to start?

PJC: Start, uh-huh.

EC: You were going to have to see if it--.

PJC: That's when Annie Devine and--.

EC: Miss Hamer.

PJC: Miss Hamer and Miss [Victoria Gray] Adams got on the floor. I was there.

EC: So all of the Congress people, they were walked through the hallway from one building to the next?

PJC: That's from the representatives to the big building, wasn't it?

EC: Yeah, I think it was to where their offices are to where they meet.

PJC: Oh, and it was so pretty down at the meeting [1:45:00]. All bright, bright, bright. But they saw some pitiful people. [Laughter]

EC: Did you ever meet--do you remember Michael Thelwell? He was in SNCC. He was mostly in Washington, but he worked on that, and so he was telling me about when you all were in the hallway. He said he thought that made the difference on some people's vote.

PJC: Mm-hmm. That's what it was supposed to do.

EC: Well, he thinks it worked. So would you go to regular meetings for the statewide COFO and MFDP? Would they have state meetings?

PJC: Oh, yeah.

EC: Actually we haven't talked about, so how did you get elected a delegate for that MFDP to go to Atlantic City?

PJC: I don't know how I got elected. Well, I was the first one. It was a heated thing going on in that meeting. People were all excited. They had acted up in Alabama, and the police had beat up a lot of people. We were just--. They had a petition or something that we signed. I went up in, I was the first one to sign the petition, and somebody nominated me to head the party. But those people didn't know me. I just, I don't know. I think God had a lot to do with it and just put me in. But they voted for me.

EC: Who else went from Hattiesburg to the Jackson meeting?

PJC: Let me see. George Harper.

EC: Is it in this one?

PJC: Pinky--no, their names are not in there, but let's see if I can--yeah, Henry Aaron. This is Schwerner. What's her name?

EC: Rita?

PJC: Yeah. [E. W.] Steptoe, George Harper. It was--you're talking about from Hattiesburg?

EC: Mm-hmm.

PJC: I'm trying to think. It's people who went--Johnnie Mae Walker. It was about fifteen or twenty. I can't think of them, calling them right now.

EC: So a strong group?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Can you tell me about some of the SNCC people that you remember that stand out for you?

PJC: That what?

EC: Can you tell me about some of the SNCC people that you remember, people that stand out?

PJC: Oh, Doug Smith, and we can't get him to budge no kind of way now. Doug Smith. Oh, what's his--Bailey. Pinkie Hall. I can't think of them. But it was quite a few.

EC: Ella Baker spoke in Hattiesburg at mass meetings.

PJC: Yeah.

EC: Do you remember her speaking?

PJC: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. Yeah, she's another Fannie Lou. [Laughter] Add another. She got more of an air to her. They were some strong women.

EC: Did you ever talk to her?

PJC: I might have talked with her twice maybe, though I didn't, back then I didn't hunt nobody to talk. They had to.

EC: What about Miss Hamer?

PJC: Miss Hamer? Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm. Had a lot of talks with her. She's real [1:50:00]. I didn't know when she died, because my daddy was sick at that time, in [19]77 I think it was. I didn't know she was that sick. When Mrs. Adams died, I didn't realize she was that sick, but she was. They brought her back here.

EC: Did they?

PJC: She was funeralized at Parkway Heights over here. Yeah. It's not far from [Highway] 49 there.

EC: Did you know Mr. Dahmer?

PJC: Yes, I knew Mr. Dahmer. Mm-hmm. Mr. Dahmer, I don't know whether I ought to say this or not. I don't know how Mr. Dahmer would think about it. But you know the NAACP, they had put him out, took his--.

EC: The national?

PJC: You had heard that? Maybe she'll talk about it. I have never asked her about it, but I saw the letter that they wrote him. We were in the ministerial alliance's side of the building where the ministers stayed in the bunk beds, and Mr. Farrell had his radio, and Mr. Jackson, on the other side. I was sitting on one of the bottom, lower part of the [bunk bed], and when he died they come and took over, so they could--. But I was told that they promised to build that house back up, help, and they didn't. There were boys and girls. They suffered to get that house back.

EC: What was the reason that the national gave for putting him out?

PJC: They did not want him working with SNCC. You know, he had SNCC people in his house before Miss Woods opened up her place for them. He just wanted some help, and he was glad to get it.

EC: Did many people know about what was--the national and their conflict with SNCC and COFO?

PJC: I don't think too many people knew.

EC: What was it like when they bombed his house?

PJC: Oh, I could not believe it. We went out there. Ann Taylor, she was one that went to the convention in New Jersey. But we went out there, early that morning. It's still smoking. It was still smoking all night. Oh, I just could not believe. Just caught them off guard, that's what it was. I went to see him in the hospital, and I say to today

the man wasn't dying. I guess he just--. They moved his daughter in the bed in the room with her daddy, but they say he died from smoke inhalation. But he was talking, when I left. I guess I might have been home about thirty minutes when I [got] word was he died. I still believe they gave him something. He was talking. [1:55:00]

EC: What was he saying?

PJC: Well, just talking about how they were trying to get out of the house and all that.

EC: Did that make you afraid?

PJC: No, not then, uh-uh. You know what? I don't know. I believe me having my daddy there at my back.

EC: Did you all have weapons in the house?

PJC: We had a shotgun, and Daddy had a .38, but it stayed locked up.

EC: Was your neighborhood safer? The white people, they didn't come in your neighborhood?

PJC: Well, you see, Mobile Street is a busy street. And that's all, that's day and night. It's just busy. A man that was a carpenter, he was working on one of the houses up, about three blocks up, about three houses up from my house. He say a man came down, wanted to know where that beautician lived, and say he told them, "I don't know nobody down here. I'm just doing some carpentry work here at this house." Then he came straight home and told Daddy that he was trying to find out where I lived.

EC: My understanding is that some of the whites in town wanted to try to help with the house, rebuild the house.

PJC: Do what?

EC: The Dahmer's house.

PJC: Yeah, uh-huh. He was a professor at the college, Carey College. Some men were supposed to be giving him money, but it didn't come up like it's supposed to have. He did do what he could I guess.

EC: What made him do that? Why did they?

PJC: I don't know, but all along, when the movement first got started, it was some whites would call and ask them to send somebody out to wherever. It wouldn't be at their house, their home, and they would meet them, and they would give them money. It was--it's always been somebody in the white community that contributed.

EC: Did you ever have a sense of who those people were, or was he--.

PJC: No, uh-uh. Now, if anybody can get an oral history from Doug Smith, but he won't give one.

EC: Where is he now?

PJC: He stays in something that starts Clarendon, Tennessee. It's out from Memphis, something that starts with a "C." Clarendon?

EC: But he won't talk?

PJC: They sent him--they called him in and sent him to Vietnam.

EC: Was he from the community?

PJC: Oh, yeah, born here.

EC: And joined the movement and got drafted?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Did you work with the freedom schools?



PJC: No, I didn't work with the freedom schools, because I was trying to make some money back then.

EC: Was that when your business had dried up?

PJC: Yeah. [Laughter]

EC: Did that upset you to lose all that business?

PJC: No. It didn't. Because, see, I'd been fooling with hair ever since I was eleven years old, and it was time for me to move on.

EC: What about Head Start?

PJC: I did work hard with Head Start. That might be the reason that they changed from executive--I've been trying to find, figure this within me. Because, you know, we talked--it was CDG--.

EC: CDGM [Child Development Group of Mississippi]?

PJC: Yeah, CDGM. The delegates, when we went to Washington and all, we got a chance to talk with [Sargent] Shriver, and he told [2:00:00] us about it. We would get the first one in the United States, and it was another one going to follow ours, to see how it comes, because Mississippi had turned it down, didn't want it. Then after we got it going and doing, they took it away from us with the help of some of our other people.

EC: I don't know how you feel about talking about that, but I was wondering about, well, there's that, and then also the difference between the delegation in [19]64 and the delegation in [19]68 that went to Chicago. Do you want to talk about what happened between the two?

PJC: I don't know.

EC: You don't know.

PJC: I wasn't even going then.

EC: You weren't?

PJC: I was just--no, because in Head Start, it was earlier than that.

EC: It was I think like [19]65.

PJC: Yeah, mm-hmm. I believe. I got a job, assistant community worker, that's what it was. Miss Gray had a friend, Helen Anderson, and she had already made arrangements that she would be the community. I told them, I said, "Well, I'll take anything, because I need some money." But anyway, all that.

EC: If you worked for Head Start you had to be--they didn't want you to do political work.

PJC: That's right, mm-hmm.

EC: So you think, you suspect maybe that's why you got moved out of several [duties?]?

PJC: But [seems] like somebody would have talked to me.

EC: Told you? Yeah. Did that hurt you?

PJC: It did, it really did, when that, somebody, I didn't even look around, said, "No, she don't do that no more." Uh-uh. And I didn't ask no questions, and I still haven't.

EC: Is there anybody around from those days to ask?

PJC: Uh-uh. I think I'm about the only one still living of the delegates, I think.

EC: Dr. McLemore?

PJC: Oh, Dr. [Leslie B.] McLemore and Unita [Blackwell]. Is she still living?

EC: As far as I know.

PJC: Unita. And King.

EC: And [Ed] King. Yeah. Small world. How did your name come to be on the lead, on that lawsuit, *Connor v. Johnson*?

PJC: Because I was executive secretary of the party.

EC: What was the case about?

PJC: You know, I didn't know until then, they say some people think if you're president, you're important, but it's the record keeper. That's who the government goes after.

EC: Did they go after you?

PJC: No, uh-uh. I didn't. I didn't do nothing for them to go after. You can believe, with Sandy around, you're going to keep good financial records and things.

EC: That's Sandy Leigh? What was he like?

PJC: Like some sergeant in the service. [Laughter]

EC: He's a drill sergeant?

PJC: Yeah. Yeah, he was real good though.

EC: Did you like him?

PJC: I liked him, mm-hmm.

EC: You told me before that he took you down to the bank.

PJC: Yes. I had never opened an account. He took me down there.

EC: So even though you had a business?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: You didn't have a--you had never had an account at the bank?

PJC: Uh-uh.

EC: It was just a cash-in, cash-out business?

PJC: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

EC: So that was your first checking account?

PJC: That was the first.

EC: It was for COFO?

PJC: Mm-hm.

EC: Did he stay for a while? Was he for, what, about six months? Was it longer than that?

PJC: Who?

EC: Sandy Leigh.

PJC: He stayed a little while longer, maybe, not quite a year, uh-uh. [2:05:00]

SNCC started fighting with each other and all, so he [left].

EC: Was it hard when they left?

PJC: Huh?

EC: Was it hard when they left town?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: What was that like?

PJC: Oh, a good friend, like I lost a good friend. He never got in touch with us either.

EC: Do you--is he living?

PJC: Uh-uh, he's dead. When we had our thirtieth anniversary, I think it was the thirtieth, at Southern, he came, and he didn't know nobody. He and his, the people, the woman that took care of him.

EC: Oh, I think somebody--did he have an accident with a head injury maybe?

PJC: Well, somebody beat him up real bad in New York. I think Sheila found him or something.

EC: Sheila Michaels?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: She had worked with him here.

PJC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, she was our secretary, honey. Yeah, she was good. She took care of that office. You can call and ask about anybody that was down here, she knew where they were staying.

EC: Really? You said you had people at your--did she stay with you? You had people staying at your house.

PJC: Sheila didn't. She stayed with a friend of mine, Mrs. Wallace, on Seventh Street.

EC: Did you say that you had the first white female?

PJC: Yeah, and I can't think of her last name. Mary something.

EC: It wasn't Mary King, was it? She wasn't in Hattiesburg.

PJC: Uh-uh. I think it started with a "B" or something. She was little, little, like me. I was little then. Her hair was down to her waist.

EC: I wanted to--so what would you want people to know about the movement?

PJC: We opened doors, for sure. Nobody thought they were better than anybody-- you just--our lawyers, I'm trying to think. [William] Kuntsler and somebody.

EC: [Arthur] Kinoy?

PJC: Kinoy, uh-huh. When we would have board meetings, at Reverend [R.L.T.] Smith's house, I can't think of his other name.

EC: In town?

PJC: Huh?

EC: Reverend Smith in Hattiesburg?

PJC: No.

EC: In Jackson?

PJC: In Jackson.

EC: R. L. T.?

PJC: R. L. T. That's where we would have a lot of our board meetings, at his house.

EC: Is that MFDP board or COFO?

PJC: MFDP. We were all sitting in chairs, and they were sitting on the floor in khaki pants.

EC: The SNCC? The SNCC students?

PJC: No, the lawyers, honey.

EC: The lawyers were? Oh, OK.

PJC: Our lawyers were sitting down, like they were--and we're sitting on [chairs]. [Laughter]

EC: Your New York lawyers, right?

PJC: Yes. I said, "Uh." Because down here, well, they was in suits. They're getting kind of casual now.

EC: What did you think of them?

PJC: Smart. If they told you something, that was it. That was going to happen.  
Mm-hmm.

EC: What happened with the--have we talked about what the *Connor* case was, what that case was about? *Connor v. Johnson*.

PJC: It was about getting some black elected people in offices. It was two suits, and people don't mention... One--I signed two. One for local and one for the state and I think they kind of put them together, but that's where [2:10:00] we got a lot of black elected officials in Jackson.

EC: Did it change the district lines?

PJC: Yeah, they had to. That was it. That was what the suit was about.

EC: So that's how we got a congressman, a black congressman from Mississippi?

PJC: Yeah, the cause. In that particular district, it was fixed where it's going to be--it would take a miracle.

EC: That's Ben Thompson's district.

PJC: And that's the only one. That's the only one. My representative from here, from Hattiesburg, Percy Watson, I voted for him every time he ran, and he hadn't recognized who I was until about four years ago. And still--.

EC: What happened when he recognized you?

PJC: He made out a proclamation or something and presented it in Jackson. I got a copy here. It's in a frame and all.

EC: Were you there for it?

PJC: No! I didn't know nothing about it until he invited me. He had a Christmas party every year, and it's the first year I got an invitation to the Christmas party.

EC: So what do you think about that, the proclamation? Did it make you happy?

PJC: Uh-huh.

EC: What did you think about it?

PJC: I didn't think too much of it. And I can see him now. He might pass right now. He won't say a word. He won't say hi.

EC: So he did the proclamation?

PJC: But I found out a lot of these elected officials, they don't want to be associated with me, period.

EC: Why not?

PJC: They don't. I don't know.

EC: They know what kind of--?

PJC: They get that office and all, and they just--.

EC: They forget how they got there?

PJC: Yes. Mm-hmm.

EC: So what do you think are the biggest successes of the movement?

PJC: Well, I think getting these black elected officials.

EC: Does it make a difference in people's lives?



PJC: No. It's just a number they got, you know. They don't--I was told this--half of them that live in Jackson, they hardly attend the meetings and things. They just be there when they can and when they will.

EC: I was going to ask, what are your disappointments? What are the things that you hoped would be better than they are?

PJC: Well, there's not too much I can say about that, because the main thing we need, we don't have, and that's to love each other. As long as we keep bickering and fighting, we'll never get any better.

EC: Are you hopeful?

PJC: Oh, I'm not going to give up on that love yet. [Laughter]

EC: So are there things that I should ask you about that I haven't?

PJC: I can't think of anything.

EC: Arrested in Jackson?

PJC: When I was arrested in Jackson I was put on the third floor up there, away from the majority of the people.

EC: What was the protest about?

PJC: Oh, and one funny thing during that demonstration. Charles Evers was just there, just to see, and he flew [2:15:00] right in and got arrested. [Laughter] He wasn't demonstrating. Now that tickled me. Um, um, um.

EC: He came into Hattiesburg after Mr. Dahmer was murdered, didn't he? Charles Evers?

PJC: Yeah.

EC: With the national?

PJC: Yeah, mm-hmm.

EC: So why did they put you on the third floor?

PJC: I don't know. I was up there. I'm trying to think.

EC: They tried to make sure you didn't organize everybody up?

PJC: [Laughter] I don't know. Monica went, too. Monica, Guyot's wife, went to jail then, too.

EC: Up in Jackson?

PJC: Mm-hmm. We had to pay money to get out, though, but we got it back.

EC: So it was a bond?

PJC: Uh-huh. Her--some people, some of her people, sent money to my daddy, and my daddy got both of us out the same day.

EC: So was she working in Hattiesburg? Is that where they met?

PJC: She came here. When she first come to the state, she worked here in Hattiesburg, and then she moved to Jackson. Mm-hmm.

EC: So did she come in Freedom Summer?

PJC: Yeah, uh-huh. She stayed at my house.

EC: Oh, did she?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: All right. I didn't know that.

PJC: Mm-hmm. She said Daddy was like a daddy to her. [Laughter]

EC: Yeah.

PJC: And Guyot was on the coals, and they ended up there.

EC: In Washington?

PJC: No, in Jackson.

EC: Oh, and then eventually Washington when--.

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: So they were both working in Jackson?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: What was that protest about in Jackson where you got arrested?

PJC: It was something about, I'm trying to think. They were in session.

EC: The legislature?

PJC: Uh-huh, was in session. It's something that they was planning on voting on, would stop demonstrations in Jackson, and we went to the capitol. We didn't get a chance to do no kind of picketing or nothing. We had our little things, but I got out of the car and got in the paddy wagon. That's right. So, they didn't--whatever it was, I don't think they ever passed it. It was a special session called for that. And, see, I seemed to think, and a lot of us seemed to think, really nothing was done too much here in Hattiesburg, because our governor was from Hattiesburg.

EC: Johnson?

PJC: Paul B. Johnson. I was in Hattiesburg. So that kind of kept it down, because most of the people here in Hattiesburg, they didn't want the news to get out if something happened in Hattiesburg.

EC: So they tried to keep things under control to keep down the violence?

PJC: Yeah, and that's the same way when we integrated schools. They weren't going to have no demonstrations in front of the schools, like parents and everybody else come out. Nobody come to that school but the children.

EC: So they tried to keep, so the white leadership tried to keep the violence down?

PJC: That's right. That's right.

EC: Keep out of the news?

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: You think it's because it was Johnson's hometown?

PJC: And he lived, yeah, this is--I do believe that. Mm-hmm.

EC: So here we are in Southern, which was segregated until the [19]60s. Has it changed?

PJC: Oh, yes. We have--I was told [2:20:00]--we have more black students on this campus than any other--I was told--school in the state. That's including the blacks and the whites.

EC: It's a big school now, isn't it? It's a big campus here.

PJC: Yeah, uh-huh. It's got a lot of--most of the people are black.

EC: Is it? I knew it had changed a lot.

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: So does that make you, are you happy about that?

PJC: Well, yes. I'm all right with it. [Laughter]

EC: Nice to have a college here that you can actually go to.

PJC: Mm-hmm.

EC: Can you think of anything else?

PJC: I can't think of anything.

EC: Well, it's been a very good interview, so thank you very much.

PJC: Well, thank you.

EC: We appreciate it.

PJC: You're not disappointed?

EC: Oh, no, ma'am.

F1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF RECORDING

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