

Linda Wetmore Halpern

November 06, 2020

SUMMARY

Linda Wetmore Halpern was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1944 and grew up in Hanover, Massachusetts, 30 miles south of Boston. While attending Beaver College in Philadelphia, she joined SNCC as a volunteer during the 1964 Freedom Summer project in Mississippi. She worked closely with Stokely Carmichael, then a SNCC field secretary in Greenwood, MS. Early that summer, she had a frightening encounter with white segregationists who tied a noose around her neck as she ran behind the truck to avoid being killed. She also witnessed the shooting of Silas McGee, rushing him to a nearby hospital while he bled in her lap. She finished college, joined the Peace Corps in West Africa, earned an M.A. in Education at New York University, and moved to Oakland, California where she taught English at Castlemont High School in the Oakland Unified School District. She continues to coach Oakland teachers while in semi-retirement. She is the mother of 2 bi-racial children and lives with her husband, Elliott Halpern, in Berkeley, California.

LOCATION

Recorded via Zoom teleconferencing system. Linda Wetmore Halpern was at her home in Berkeley, 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: **Sarah Barnes** ('21),
Support: **Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña** ('22)
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 Sarah Barnes '21). Howard Levin completed editing (11/21/2020). Please report additional suggested edits to: howard.levin@sacredsfs.org

Notes:

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

Introductions

Jean-Luc

Hello, my name is Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña and I'm in San Francisco.

Sarah Barnes

My name is Sarah Barnes. I'm in Marin County. And today on November 6, 2020, we are interviewing Ms. Linda Halpern in Berkeley, California. Ms. Linda Halpern. As you know, we're here to record our conversation with you with the intention of publishing your story as part of Convent and Stuart Hall's Oral History Production

class. We are recording video of this interview and intend to publish this on our school website as well as other nonprofit educational websites, including a written transcript. This means your story will be available once published to anyone via an Internet connection. If you agree, please say and spell your name, the date, and if you agree, allowing us to publish your story.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I will start with the last first, as I do agree that you can publish it. My name is Linda Halpern, Linda Wetmore Halpern, and I'm in Berkeley.

Sarah Barnes

And the date?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Oh gosh, the day after the night before (a reference to 2020 Presidential election). This is the fifth, sixth, eighth.

Sarah Barnes

Close enough.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I don't even know what day it is.

Jean-Luc

It's the sixth.

Sarah Barnes

The sixth.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

2020. I got the year right.

Sarah Barnes

Is this your birth name and if not please state your birth name?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

My birth name is Linda Lee Wetmore.

Sarah Barnes

What is your birth date? And how old are you now?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

December 16, 1944. I'm 75

Sarah Barnes

Now, the first question is for you to give a one to a two-minute overview of your entire life.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Real quick. I was born, I lived, and I will eventually die. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1944. I lived there for six weeks. My father was there working in an ammunition factory during the War. He is from Quincy, Massachusetts. My mother is from Duxbury, Massachusetts. And I am really from Hanover, Massachusetts. I'm in Berkeley, California now, and I've been here since 1970.

Sarah Barnes

So you said you're from Hanover, Massachusetts. So if you could give us a little walkthrough of the town you grew up in?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Oh my god. It's got Trump signs all over it. It's a very conservative part of Massachusetts. It's odd. It is called The Gateway to the Cape. My brother still lives in the house we grew up in and he says he can't believe how conservative the place is, because he and I both got out as soon as we could. Now he's back.

Sarah Barnes

Can you walk us through your earliest childhood memory?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Wow.

Sarah Barnes

Or one of your earliest childhood memories?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

My, that's great, you didn't get me that one. My earliest childhood memory, I think, pleasant memory anyway, is going to the drive-in theater with my mum and dad. Every Friday night, we went to the drive-in theater. I used to sleep on these – the Plymouths and stuff, they had these little hatches. And I would pretend to be asleep so my father would carry me in. I remember seeing Clark Gable and his big ears all like this, and my mother was in love with him. I'd say, "How? He's got those big ears, how can you be in love with him?" That's a childhood memory. She said one day I would understand, and I do now.

Sarah Barnes

Do you remember what was your favorite movie that you saw?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I used to love Charlton Heston, so anything he was in, I loved. But can I think of anything he was in. In [Nora ?] and the little [????] dog. I can't remember any of these names, but I do watch Ted Turner classics, so they come back once in a while. I have a hard time with them because they're so white. I married a black man, and my son is biracial, and he married a biracial woman. Our grandson is biracial, and he's in Arizona right now. He's having a hard time with some of the people in Arizona. The struggle is through me, in me. All over.

Sarah Barnes

You mentioned in your pre-interview that your parents weren't really religious, but you went to church with your neighbor. Can you talk about how you got involved with that and how that played a role in your childhood?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

My mother never wanted to go anywhere because she never thought she had the clothes to go anywhere. So when the neighbors said, "I'll take her to church, " she said, "Yeah, okay." My uncle Griff was a severe alcoholic. He was very violent and lived right next door to us. I never realized it because they never talked about it, but my father was frequently called up to their house and I'd say. "Where is daddy going?" My mother would say, "Don't worry about it." But he was up there trying to stop my uncle from beating the shit out of my aunt. Those are, those are negative memories, aren't they? But a good memory is that we had a big field and we used to play baseball. My father would hit the high flies and I would catch them.

Sarah Barnes

Can you talk a little bit about your middle school or your primary school?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I sunk bad in the fourth grade, that's when I started needing glasses, but I didn't know it. And I was sitting there looking at the board, and I turned around to ask this kid, "What's on the board?" I got caught for talking and was sent out of the room and had to stand in the hall. I will never forget how humiliating it was to be in the hall because I couldn't see. I remember my feet freezing to death in the fifth grade, and going to school, and just standing up against the heater and wiggling my toes because we never had really good shoes or anything. You just had what you needed, and I needed boots, but I didn't have them.

Sarah Barnes

Did you remember hearing about the murder of Emmett Till? I know you were eleven at the time, so you might not have, but if you did, then can you talk about that? And if you didn't, maybe you can talk about the first time you did hear about it.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I don't think I heard really about Emmett Till until college because I used to get Jet Magazine, and his picture was in the Jet Magazine. I didn't personally hear about it really until I went to Mississippi and saw him there. But again, how I got to Mississippi was really through the church.

Sarah Barnes

We'll get to that later. What was the perception of black people in your town growing up? Do you remember being taught to think a certain way, or just the subconscious bias that people had or anything about that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think it was more subconscious because people have a real nice way of hiding it if it's not in their face. And because there was only one African American family in our town, they didn't need to face it very much. I do know a classmate of mine went to the prom with a kid who was biracial. I could just hear the parents talking about it. "Why did she go with him?" Connie was strong. She was bold, and she liked the guy.

Sarah Barnes

Is that the first time you kind of experienced second-hand accounts of racism? Or do you remember times before that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think I heard it because my parents were in the South for a while, and when their friends came to visit, I remember sitting there in the small house. I was in the kitchen and they were in the living room, but they were side-by-side you could hear everything. I heard the woman say that she would "Never, never have a nigger" live next to her. When they left, I remember saying, "Mom, what's a nigger? She said, "Well, it's a licorice candy." It was an answer, but it wasn't an answer that I could make any sense out of. I was Republican, I think I told you this, and I was handing out flyers for Ed (Brook). He was Republican, a black Republican running for Congress. God, I know his name. I was getting out flyers, and I went up to the police chief's house – his wife was a mother of one of my classmates – and she said, she really did, she said, "It'd be a cold day in hell before I vote for a nigger." I'm like, "Jesus, what is all this about?" Then when I got to college – I was an English major because I love literature – but my favorite professor was a sociology professor. I taught English in the prisons there, in the woman's prison in Pennsylvania when I was a sophomore in college. I just got all involved in the prison system. It was a trajectory that I was going to follow, getting involved with, I guess what you'd call "The Other," or the ones that are disenfranchised, and they're put down. I remember teaching poetry there.

Sarah Barnes

When you experience second-hand accounts of racism, did it confuse you or did it bother you? What was your reaction to it when you were younger?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I always felt, and I still do sometimes feel like this, I feel like a coward. Maya Angelou said, the thing is not to have courage, it's to have constant courage. That's what kind of makes me feel bad about myself. I do have courage, but I don't know if I have constant courage. Like if you're in the ladies room, and you hear these people talking, and I want to say, "That's wrong, you're a racist." I can't say it. I don't say it. I don't want to get all involved in that. I think if I had a wish it would be to have constant courage.

Sarah Barnes

I think we can talk more about that at the end of the interview. Right now we can move into your experience in the civil rights movement. How did you get involved in going to the South?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I was in college. I played all the sports. I played field hockey, I played basketball and softball. The only club I belonged to was the Young Women's Christian Association, the YWCA. During that timeframe, they were, and they still are, they are always working on getting out the vote and registering voters. They came to Beaver, my college, and came into the Y meeting and said they had scholarships to go south to Raleigh, North Carolina during the spring vacation and register voters and was there anybody that wanted it. I raised my hand and I got the scholarship. I went to Raleigh, and that's where Bob Moses, Julian Bond, and Al Lowenstein, they all came to that meeting at Raleigh and talked about the summer project that they had planned in Mississippi. The application, oh my God, it was like a term paper to fill out. I had to take it home, and I had to get my parents' permission to go because I was only 19. I had to get \$200 to pay for room and board. I went home, I filled out the application. My grandmother was (saying), "Where is she going? She needs to work this summer, she needs some money." My mother was, "This is what she wants to do, this is what she's going to do." My father was secretly very proud of me because Howard Zinn came out to the house, to interview them, to see what their views were. That's how I got to the South.

Sarah Barnes

When you were in class, and they were offering you that scholarship, what made you raise your hand?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It's kind of a negative trait, I think, that I have of trying to feel the same when I'm among different people. And when I'm among different people, I'm always trying to feel like I'm the same as them. If I'm among the same people, I'm trying to find the difference in myself. And when I'm among different people, I'm one and the same. These girls at Beaver were so posh, and they were so wealthy, I just felt out of place all the time, and I wanted to do something that distinguished myself, I think.

Sarah Barnes

I remember reading something that your parents told you to do what you think is right when you asked them if you could go or if you should go. What was your response to that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

My father was always writing letters to the editor of the newspaper if he saw a grammatical error, which I didn't think was particularly important. He was very, very concerned about the race issue because he played ball, and he would go into Boston and Roxbury particularly and he'd find a group of guys to play ball with and they were always mixed people, always diverse groups. His thing was, the way to solve the race problem is to have sports and have everybody play sports. He didn't see any kind of institutional kind of racism. He didn't see systems of oppression, he just saw, "Let's all get along Kumbaya. Let's hold hands. We can all get along here." I will give him that, that he was trying to think of ways to solve the race problem. When I told him I wanted to go to Mississippi, he had my back. He was okay.

Sarah Barnes

I'm assuming you took a bus to North Carolina then to Mississippi. Can you talk about that experience?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It actually went through Oxford in Ohio. There was a week's training in Oxford. That's where you learned how to go limp. You had things thrown at you. You had hate spewed at you. Because they wanted to make sure that we weren't going to go off. Some people left at that point because that's when Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were killed. The day they told us about that was the day – there were probably 1400 that were there – 700 left. There were about 700 of us that hit Mississippi. I can remember the people on the phones because there were no cell phones, of course, but people were on the phone all night long, calling home and asking parents who were calling and saying, "Don't go, don't go, don't go." That's when my father said, "Do what you think is best."

Sarah Barnes

Why did you decide to stay? Because of that? It was worth it?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It was worth it. It was like, "If they can be brave, why can't I?" And also, going back to the church, "We are all equal in His sight. Red, black, yellow, white. We are all equal in His sight." When I started dating, my first boyfriend was an African American and he used to say, "It's black, black step back. Brown, brown, stick around. Yellow, yellow, you're a mighty good fellow. White, white, you're all right." All the racial, all the colorism that exists it all has been a gradual recognition of how racist white people are, to tell you the truth.

Sarah Barnes

I read something also that you were talking about the Bob Moses orientation that you did about registering people to vote. You said that's when your fear started, and from there on, it never stopped. Can you talk about the experience of fear that you had when you were down there?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I was scared every second I was down there. I had never known white people who were so vicious and vile. I was hooked up with this guy, we always went out in partners, and I was with this guy, Mark Winters. Never been able to find out where he is to this day. He was a pacifist. He was a gentle, gentle, gentle spirit. We went into a store together and this father came up and told his daughter to spit on us. She looked at her daddy like "Why?" He goes "You do what I say?" And so she spit right on us.

Sarah Barnes

Where were you at this time?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We were just in a store, a local store. I don't know what we were buying, some water, I think. I'd never seen such vile people, so hate ridden. And in truth, it's coming out now all over the place. I don't know what kind of superiority white people think we have but, it's kind of there. Ironically, the Supremes were African American.

Sarah Barnes

Where did you stay when you were in Mississippi?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

In a home. That's what the \$200 was for, to pay them.

Sarah Barnes

With people who live down there?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yes, black people. My partner was the daughter of an FBI agent. And he called down to the office and he told

her, "I want you to come home. This is not going to be a good summer for you. You come home right now." So she left and I had to walk home and to the office by myself. Stokely (Carmichael) told us to take a different route every day so people could never figure out which house we were going back to. This family, they had one bedroom, and they had a pullout couch. They had, I think three kids. The mother, the father, and the three kids all slept on the pullout couch, and I slept, even after this girl left, I slept in the big bed by myself. We took baths in a tub that you bob for apples, and it was in the kitchen, and she would warm up the water in the stove and make sure it was just right for me in the morning. And I would crawl in. And this one time, the little girl came in, and I was sitting in the tub and she put her hands right around my neck like she was gonna strangle me. And she just looked at me. And I thought, "Oh, my God, there is so much hate. So much everywhere. Fear, hate curiosity." It was just a weird moment to me. So then when I was going back to the office, I went up on the main road and there was this old black guy just sitting there and he was going, "Get off the road, get off the road." And I couldn't hear him. I thought he was waving to me. So I went, "Hi." The next thing I know, they traveled – and I won't call them the White Citizens Council, the youth, the kids – the young white men, they all traveled around in these white big trucks with guns upfront, the rifle rack upfront. And they got out. They rolled up behind me. They got out of the car. And they put this rope around my neck. And it was a noose. It wasn't just a rope that you pull something, it was a noose that you lynched people with. And they just kept pulling me slowly, slowly. And I started walking, slowly. And then I grabbed like this (gestures as if to hold the rope), and I got to where I was really running. And they just dropped it and started laughing, and sped off. And I just peed all over myself. So I had to go back to the house and change my clothes, find my way to the office again. And all I could hear was Stokely saying, "You're late! Why are you late? You know being on time is already being late in this place." And he was screaming at me. I couldn't even get out an excuse.

Sarah Barnes

Were you scared to leave the house again after that experience?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. I just kept getting up earlier so if anything like that happened, I would still get to the office on time.

Sarah Barnes

So your priority was always getting to the office?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Always to obey Stokely. I never wanted to disobey.

Sarah Barnes

Did you ever see those boys again?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, but I had another incident that was kind of equally scary. When we were being trained in Ohio, we were learning how to fall, like the smallest one goes down, and the bigger one and if it's a mixed group, then always the white person goes on top. So if they're going to hit somebody they're going to hit the white person. That's the way we would train. The three of us, there was Mary, and – I can see her but I can't pull out her name right now (June Johnson) – but Mary was tiny, tiny, tiny, and she had been beaten so much by the police. What they did to her was they put her – they had an ice bucket and they had a flaming hot bucket, and they put her leg from ice to heat, from ice to heat, from ice to heat. And she was just skinny, skinny. And then June – June Johnson – June was big but she was black, so I was still supposed to cover her. So when we saw these boys coming at us, Mary went down first, June went over her, and then I went over June. And these guys came up, and they had a billy club, and they were stabbing all over. They were just poking, trying to get... And I was trying to cover everybody and protect them. And I looked up, and there was [sp? Honey Stiles], the Sheriff and his deputies right across the street, laughing, hands folded like this. "Yeah, go at it boys."

Sarah Barnes

Where was this?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

This was in Greenwood, Mississippi.

Sarah Barnes

What were you guys doing at the time?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We were just walking down the street. I don't think we were registering voters. We were just walking. She wanted to show me her town. This was the town they lived in.

Sarah Barnes

With experiences like those, did you ever question if you're doing the right thing? Or did you ever want to go back home?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No. The more that things like this happened, the more I wanted to stay. I would have stayed. I don't know how many, but volunteers did stay. But because I was on a college break, if I didn't get back to college – I didn't know how I was going to get back to college. I didn't know if my life was going – if I was going to be a college-educated white woman or I was going to be a poor white woman. And I opted out for college thinking that in the end, I could do more. And I had a natural teaching thing in me. So when Stokely – one night Stokely was saying, "If you want to understand what it is to be black, you have to go to Africa. That's the route. Go to Africa." And I could not figure out how to get to Africa other than by joining the Peace Corps.

Sarah Barnes

You keep talking about Stokely, Stokely Carmichael. Can you talk about how you met him? I remember you telling me that he was the person that affected you the most that summer? It's the summer of '64. Right?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

U-hum (yes).

Sarah Barnes

Just to clarify. Can you talk about how your relationship developed with Stokely Carmichael and what kind of insight you might have gotten from him?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

He was the field secretary and he was my leader, and he was one of the organizers of the entire summer project. Howard University was his school, but he was from Trinidad, the West Indies. He was a real rabble-rouser. He was the one that got Black Power, that symbol, he created that symbol. And he too ended up back in Africa. I stayed in touch with him because I had him come out to Castlemont (High School) and speak here in Oakland when I was teaching. And I saw him at Laney College when he was speaking there. He was high-fiving – not high-fiving, we didn't have that then – he was always waving to me. I have a book signed by him actually that he wrote to my son. In it he said, "Dear Jamie", that's my son's name, he said, "You should have been mine." That was so cute.

Sarah Barnes

Was your relationship with him more like teacher-student or friend? What was your relationship with him like?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It was intense. That's all I know. I was so innocent. At 75 it's a hard thing to see what I was like when I was 19, but I was really innocent.

Sarah Barnes

How old was Stokely Carmichael at the time?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

27. I just know it was really intense. I think he may have felt the same way, that there was an attraction, but it wasn't anything we were going to get settled. When I was in Philadelphia, he wrote to me, and he said, "I'll be in Philadelphia." And, "Do you want to meet up?" I said, "Sure." I got to Philadelphia and he was called to Lowndes County because of a racial uprising. That was not meant to be in any way. He was down there working on civil rights.

Sarah Barnes

You were talking about Stokely Carmichael. Was he teaching you voter registration? Or what was he teaching?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, he was the head of the whole program there. There were different things we could do. We could work in the schools, in Freedom Summer's schools. I tried that one day, and he said, "I want you to talk about Douglas today." And I didn't even know who Douglas was. He goes, "Can you talk about Douglas or even Booker T. Washington." (I said) "I don't know who these people are." And he goes, "So what do you know?" And I am like, "Well..." He said, "Okay, can you talk to people?" And I said, "Yeah, I can talk to people." He goes, "Okay, I want you to go register voters." I said, "Okay." That was really interesting because I didn't understand institutionalized racism myself to be able to go down and explore how it worked in Mississippi. So that was actually a good move, and it got me really way out in the boonies. You'd sit down and the porch had so many holes in it, going up you just thought you'd fall down when you were there. Flies all over the place, people swatting, after a while you just don't swat, just let the damn things lie. But I was like, "Shoo fly, don't bother me and get out of here!" It was really good, and I brought in a whole lot of folks on registering voters. That's how I met Fannie Lou Hamer. Oh God, what an amazing person she was. She was in Greenville, but she would come to Greenwood all the time and tell her stories. Then one day – can I keep going with another experience? So Stokely comes in, and he says, "We have somebody up in Memphis that has a fleet of cars for us, and I need six people to go up and get them." And five guys raise their hands. And he goes, "I need somebody who knows how to drive a stick shift." I raise my hand, and he goes, "You know how to drive a stick shift?" And I said, "Yeah." And he goes, "Okay, you're on it." So I was to be the third one, and the fourth one would follow me, five, six, and we'd go. We got to Memphis, okay. And then it started getting dark when we left Memphis. And these are city streets, and there are lights on the city streets. So I've lost the person behind me. We were supposed to keep an eye on each one, so I kept an eye on the guy in front. And we went down. We had these – I've forgotten what they were called now but there was a way that everybody kept in touch with each other down there – I'll think of it in a minute – the WATS line (Wide Area Telephone Service) – and they were calling the office and getting directions. So I followed the guy in front of me, and he was from Mississippi, so he knew what he was going. We went way into the boonies and to this house. And this woman, she was like Fannie Lou Hamer, she wasn't Fannie Lou, but she and I stayed up all night talking. And she was telling me, she goes, "You know, girl, they think we carry these umbrellas so our skins won't get darker." She goes, "Let me tell you, I'm proud of my black skin. I carry this umbrella so I can whip any white boy that comes up to me and tries to mess with me. Because I'll stab them right with you know where!" And, you know, she was just this feisty lady, and I liked that. Then there was Silas McGhee. Did you get to read the book, *Freedom Summer*?

Sarah Barnes

I did not get to read the book, but we watched the documentary.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Silas McGhee was a leader there.

Sarah Barnes

Real quick, the story that you just told us when you drove out to the middle of nowhere, what exactly were you

doing again?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We couldn't make it back, so we decided to stay the night. It wasn't good traveling at night. It wasn't safe. So mainly that was the reason. Silas McGhee got shot and got sent to the hospital.

Sarah Barnes

Can you talk about that story a little bit?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We would go to these little joints to celebrate. Silas had just gotten out of jail for picketing.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

McGhee, he was a local leader in Greenwood, Mississippi. We were celebrating. I didn't drink beer, but I was there celebrating with them. And he came out to get something out of his car, and I heard this "pop!" It was raining. We all ran out, and he was on the ground, he was out the door and his head was on the ground. Blood was going into the puddles. We picked him up. And there was a social worker from New York. He drove. And then he said, "Get in the backseat, Linda!" And I got into the backseat. And they wrapped his head. The boys, all three of them, took off their t-shirts, and we wrapped them around, Silas' head and put him on my lap. The other guys got in the car in the front.

Sarah Barnes

Who is he to you, Silas McGhee? Do you know who shot him?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, to this day, we don't know who shot him. Well, I don't know who shot him, maybe somebody does. The guy who shot him knows for sure. We got to the hospital and we went in and got the stretcher, put him on the stretcher, and they were carrying him in up to the door. And they all had their shirts off. The sheriff was there, [sp? Honey Stiles], he said, "You can't come through this door, you can't come through this door." Why? It's the white section of the hospital. So we had to go back to the car. We didn't realize there was a black and white section. We drove around to the black section. The same thing got out, went to the door, got the stretcher, got up to the door. And the sheriff was there, he went through the hospital. And he said, "You can't come in with your shirts off." And the guys said, "The t-shirts are wrapped around his head."

Sarah Barnes

Do you know if that was an actual rule or if they were just being difficult and didn't want to let you guys in?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Probably being difficult. So the guys put the stretcher down. I took it up like this, and I just dragged him. They walked to the door with me. I said, "I'm fully dressed, can I come in?" And they said yes. So I pulled the stretcher in over, and there was one black doctor in the hospital. He was called and came over and took him in. He was operated on, I don't know, a couple of hours. I was in the hospital, and I could hear the nurse and the police in the corridor of the hospital going, "Oh, they got that nigger Silas tonight. He's not going to get out of here." So they called Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte. And they found a plane and flew down from New York. Harry Belafonte, he's an actor, singer. Sidney Poitier is an actor. Harry Belafonte is from the Caribbean. He sings a lot of Calypso. Sidney Poitier is an actor. They flew down and got him.... they paid for his health services. And then they flew him down to Jackson, Mississippi, where the real hospital was, and all I could hear all night long was, "Oh, he's not gonna make it through the night. We got that nigger Silas. He's not gonna make it, not if we have anything to say about it." That's why they flew him.

Sarah Barnes

Who are these two people? Were black doctors only willing to operate on him or were there white doctors as well?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Only black doctors.

Sarah Barnes

How did you come out of that experience? Obviously, that's traumatizing in so many ways.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think I went down full of love and came back full of hate. This still hasn't really dissipated. Life has a way of putting these experiences in the back of your mind. This election has brought them all back up, for sure.

Sarah Barnes

I think the next place to go if you don't have anything else to say about what we just talked about was the time that you got arrested.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

That was another...

Sarah Barnes

The time in Mississippi, not recently.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Right, thanks. There's been others. That was another connection was Stokely that made me feel [special] for him because he was behind me. When we got arrested, they put all of us in the paddy wagon.

Sarah Barnes

Can you back up a little bit? Where were you when you got arrested?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We were outside the voter registration, where you vote. They arrested us for trespassing. We weren't. We were on the sidewalk. We were picketing up and down. We had these signs. "Vote Now." "Register." I think mine was "Register to Vote." We were standing there and the sheriff got us out. I got in the wagon, and I turned around, and I saw the Sherrif with the cattle prod, those have an electric shock in them and how they prod the capital to keep on moving. And they took the cattle prod and just put it to Stokeley's genitals. I saw that and I went, "Oh God!" And he went limp. We all went limp. They had to drag us into the paddy wagon. No, I don't think the women went limp. The men did.

Sarah Barnes

How many of there were you that got arrested?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

30. There were 30 white. 300 locals got arrested.

Sarah Barnes

In that same moment?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

That same day, yeah. We were all out there. There were nine of us white women in one cell and 30 black women in the other cell.

Sarah Barnes

Was that overcapacity?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Oh, yeah. There were eight beds in each cell. We had an extra bed, an extra bunk in our cell. They were all sleeping on the floor, sleeping with each other on the bed. The guys were downstairs in the other area. It was like 100 degrees in the shade down there. The police – sheriffs came in, and they lowered all the windows, closed the windows so there was no air whatsoever. But we sang, we just sang all night long. Every freedom song you can think of.

Sarah Barnes

What were some of the songs that you remember singing?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

"Paul and Silas are born in jail," that one, and "We Shall Overcome," of course.

Sarah Barnes

Did you have a favorite one?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I do think my favorite was – I think we sang "We Shall Overcome" every night. We sang all the time.

Sarah Barnes

Did that bring you guys together?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. "I ain't gonna let nobody turn me around, turn me around." I can't sing. That's why I loved being with them. We went to church every night and ended it with freedom songs. And the Freedom Singers, one of whom died in Oakland, he ended up in Oakland, and he died a few years ago. (Cordell Reagon)

Sarah Barnes

Jean-Luc had an interview yesterday where a man that he interviewed was also in jail, and he mentioned that jail was easier for white men and it was harder for women and black people. Did you find that you had a similar experience to that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We were only in there a week. I think we were in there eight days. We went on a hunger strike. Eight days with no food.

Sarah Barnes

You were on a hunger strike for eight days?.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yes. What happened is they fed us. We were debating whether we were going to go on a hunger strike or not. I took up some red beans. They had so over peppered it that I had to spit it out. I said, "Oh, I can't, it's hot." So we decided to go on a hunger strike. I kind of said, "You go and I'll just keep eating." It was dramatic enough being down there without like, overdramatic.

Sarah Barnes

What was the hunger strike for specifically?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

To draw attention to the whole thing. Everything we did down there was to draw attention to what was going on.

Sarah Barnes

Did it work, the hunger strike, did you get attention?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We got a doctor who came.

Sarah Barnes

That's something.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

Sarah Barnes

The police officers and the people running the jail, did they try to keep what was happening in the jail a secret for people outside? What was that like?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

The whole town knew we were there because we were singing so loudly. It's funny because there was a teacher that I worked with in Oakland that was from Greenwood, Mississippi. She remembered all of that history of it. It was just interesting. She was white, and she had come home and said, "Daddy, I really want to go to Europe. I really don't want to be here this summer because it's so hot. You think I could go to Europe and my home will still be here?" She lived on a big plantation. He said, "Yeah, we'll take care of it." So she left. but she actually came to the SNCC office and asked if we would not destroy her plantation, anybody else's but not hers.

Sarah Barnes

So you were in jail for a week, how did you end up getting out of jail?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier sent money for everybody. My mother sent some money. I think most of us sent money, but there were 300 locals. They paid for it all.

Sarah Barnes

So you all got out at a week. Did you have a sentence that was longer for that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, we said we weren't leaving until everybody could leave. That was the decision of the whole folks because if we got out and the black folks stayed in, called them negros in those days if they stayed in they weren't going to get treated right. So it was to keep an eye on everything and to keep us all together.

Sarah Barnes

Is that one of the first times – and obviously when Silas McGhee was shot – was that your first time kind of experiencing more systemic aspects of racism and police brutality and racism?

Jean-Luc

Yep, because you got it in the hospital. You got it with the police. I was sent down there to track how the money went to the schools right, and the money from the federal government would be sent to Greenwood but it would only go to the white schools. They wouldn't send any to the black schools. I got a sense of the school, that institution. Churches, the church institution. I went to church one time with my roommate before she left to come back home. We went to church, and everybody knew where we were. We went in, and we listened to the

whole church thing. The verses were, "How can you love your fellow man?" "How can you love God whom you haven't seen, when you can't love your fellow man who you have seen, who you do see?" We listened to that, and I'm thinking, "These people aren't so bad." Then we went out on the church steps, and they were all congregating out there saying, "What are you doing here? Go back to nigger town. Get over where you belong." And the minister came out, and he goes, "You guys better go because I cannot protect you from these people. Every institution. When you felt this idea that a lot of people around you weren't, like law enforcement or even doctors at hospitals, weren't willing to help you. How did that feel? Did that make you feel a sense of overwhelmedness? What what did you feel when you realized this?"

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I felt the depth of racism. It's so deep in this country. It's just so fundamental to who this country is. I mean, we stole the land from the natives. And then we stole the slaves from Africa, and that everything is built off of bad energy. I really don't know if we can overcome it, although, my favorite song was "We Shall Overcome."

Sarah Barnes

How did you feel leaving Mississippi at the end of the summer? Did you feel that it was unfair that you were allowed to leave and other people weren't? Did you feel like you had accomplished something, or was there something that you felt left undone?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

We didn't have to leave. I went to the Freedom Democratic Party, to the Democratic Convention.

Sarah Barnes

Where was that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

That was in Baltimore (Atlantic City).

Sarah Barnes

In '65 or still in '64?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

'64. That's where Fannie Lou Hamer made her big speech. We were all there outside watching. I mean, then you see how it plays out in politics. The Democratic Party from Mississippi was all white. The Freedom Democratic Party was black. So it kind of highlighted the fact that whatever the news is telling you it's not the whole story.

Sarah Barnes

What was it like outside of the convention while she was giving her speech?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Very active, very active.

Sarah Barnes

Were there a lot of people?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yes, yes, it was the Democratic Convention. And it was pre-COVID. Everybody was out there with their signs and their pickets.

Sarah Barnes

You talked about how you kind of grew up Republican but you went to that convention. Did something change in Mississippi for you? What was the motive behind going to that convention?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Oh, it was en route home. (laughter) From the south by I went down by bus. I came back by bus to Washington and then home from there. But I did want to go to the convention because I wanted to see how it played out. Would Fannie Lou win?. The depths of racism in this country is immeasurable. It's like quicksand, it just goes deep, deep, deep, deeper. What was your question?

Sarah Barnes

Can you take us back and describe the scene of the Convention? What was it like?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

On the floor, you've got the Democrats, you've got the Republicans, you've got the Freedom Democratic Party. it's very live, it's pre-COVID. There was a lot of action there.

Sarah Barnes

Was there any retaliation against the Democratic Party or any violence that happened there?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

There was no violence. But I think having the Freedom Democratic Party there, made the rest of the people understand that the Mississippi delegation, the white delegation, did not represent everybody in their state. And we are about representing everybody and the right to vote.

Sarah Barnes

Your autobiography on the Civil Rights Veterans website says that you signed off every letter after Freedom Summer, "Yours in the struggle." Can you talk a little bit about that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

That's the way we used to sign off everything. I continued it for many, many, many, many, many years. I still do.

Sarah Barnes

When you say that "we" signed off everything like that, do you mean SNCC?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

SNCC. Yeah. Yeah.

Sarah Barnes

After the convention in Baltimore (Atlantic City) you went back home, you went back to Massachusetts, right? How did it feel like being home for the first time in a while?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Too weird. Too weird. I had the most unusual – I had the most fundamentally important summer of my life. And everybody else was going to the Cape and going swimming and getting tanned and just having a good time. And I just could not talk to anybody. I ended up going to my friend's house in New Jersey. Because at least they understood.

Sarah Barnes

You mentioned in your pre-interview that one of your brothers was pretty conservative? Did he have anything to say when you got back?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Oh, yeah. He still thought it was crazy. He's military. And he...

Sarah Barnes

But so was your dad, right?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, my dad wasn't in the military. My dad was a salesman. If you want to know my dad read Death of a Salesman. That's my dad. And my mom, for that matter.

Sarah Barnes

And your mom was the cook in your high school. Right?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Uh-hum (yes). Yeah, I couldn't talk to my brother. I couldn't talk to anybody at the house or in the community. I just got back to school as soon as I could.

Sarah Barnes

Was there something you learned in Mississippi that you brought back with you and implemented into your everyday life, like consciously?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Since I was the teacher in Oakland for 40 years, every student who went through my class got a dose of Freedom Summer. I managed to weave it in somehow. And as an English teacher, the books you choose – Toni Morrison. I just kept life going in my classroom.

Sarah Barnes

Can you talk a little bit about when you joined the Peace Corps?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah, as soon as I could, back in those days, you could join, you signed up as a junior in college. So when I went back, I signed up. My training was in... to get to know Africans, they sent us to New Orleans for a week, and we lived in a family's home down there.

Sarah Barnes

This is when you were with the Peace Corps?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. And then, because we going to French West Africa. They sent us up to Quebec. So we were teaching in a Quebec school.

Sarah Barnes

How was New Orleans?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I go there all the time because my husband's from New Orleans. New Orleans was very, was racially divided. It still is. But it's more integrated than Berkeley, I must say. It feels more like an Oakland setting, except that in Oakland, you have people in the government, young mayors and politicians, city officials that are all African American. You don't have that in New Orleans. You had a mayor or two that was black. Tremé highlighted some of that. The flood. You have to worry about the environment down there because you could be flooded out.

Sarah Barnes

When and why did you decide to move to Berkeley?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It's funny because I lived in Oakland, I taught in Oakland. But Berkeley was always presented as this place of freedom, free-thinking, free-thinking individuals. I moved here because I met my husband and we bought a house here together. Now, why did we want to live in Berkeley? It was the same kind of reason because we thought it was going to be integrated. It wasn't very much.

Sarah Barnes

Was your son in Berkeley?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

My son and I at that time were in El Cerrito (CA). I was renting a house in El Cerrito. But my son and I grew up. I told my students Castlemont that I grew up in Old Castlemont, but I had my son while I was still teaching at Castlemont. He's 44 now.

Sarah Barnes

I was just going to ask since you mentioned your son is biracial. What was it like for you as a white woman raising a biracial son in a pretty racist country?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Because my – this is awful – my friends are mostly black. And I was in a black school with a few of us white teachers. Most of the teachers were black, the students were black. My colleagues were all black. They have become my best friends there. I have a very integrated life. And it's mostly from my teaching and from my husband's work at the ACLU. And my daughter is gay. And her partner is Egyptian, but she's gay also. So we have a granddaughter there that is Italian, Jewish, Black. And my own son. So we have an integrated – my whole life is very integrated at this point. I don't think I answered that question.

Sarah Barnes

Do you want the question again?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Stream of consciousness! Go where the next guy goes! Okay, what was the question?

Sarah Barnes

As a white woman, what was it like raising a biracial son? Did you ever feel like there was something that you couldn't necessarily teach him?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think, in a way, because his dad and I split very early on. Yeah, I guess. I mean, there are things. My husband tried his best. I just remember walking down the streets of Oakland, when Jamie was like two, and this old white guy walked up and said, "Oh my God, what an adorable little boy. Are you babysitting?" And I said, "No, he's mine." And he looked up at me, and this is an Oakland, he looked at me and he goes, "Nigga lover." And he just went on. So this stuff is all over. It's pervasive. And then on the other side of that, my friend's daughter, she's black, her daughter's black. I'm taking care of her. I'm walking down Solano during Solano Stroll. And this black guy comes up and says, "Culture vulture." What the heck? It's like, what am I doing? I'm walking with a little black girl. What does she think? She's not mine. She's my best friend. I'm watching her today. The assumptions that people make is just so, "Makes an ass out of you and me," is what assumed does.

Sarah Barnes

Did you ever worry for your son in that sense?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I worried not about what I could or couldn't teach him, but about his safety. My friend and I we were just talking about this the other day. There was a portable – I used to stay at school long hours after the bell rang and she would too, and we were working in her room, which was a portable that Castlemont. And Jamie was in there with us and her daughter was in there with us, they were the same age. And they were shooting at the portable as target practice – the kids in East Oakland were shooting at the building. And we hit the floor completely, just went down and grabbed the kids. And because they were like two and three years old, "What's going on? I hear a pop-pop." I don't know. Yeah.

Sarah Barnes

Because of your background as a teacher, how do you think is the best way to fight racism and teach people that it's wrong? And not only that but how do you get to someone that is racist? Or can you?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think you can, but anything in these days is going to be slow. I used to be a part of an organization called Education, Not Incarceration. And I do think education is the key. I have always felt that. If you're living in a non-integrated area, which most people do, how do you get to learn about others? I just had a student – I'm still in touch with a lot of my students – and I had a student write to me and say, "You know because you taught literature from every culture," we did Latino, we did Asian, we did African, we did an African American, we did Islamic, we did every, every race, every religion, every ethnicity. I found a book poem, I found something that was representative, so we could talk about it. Philippine. He wrote me and he said, "You know why I get along with everybody, even though I grew up in East Oakland in an all-black area, went to an all-black school?" And he said, "It's because of you. Because you showed us, other people, you talked to us about them. You made it real for us." And I always had speakers come in. I always had projects. Yeah. I think education is the key.

Jean-Luc

Can you talk a bit more about that organization, you're in, the Integration (Education), Not Incarceration, like your time in that organization?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Education, Not Incarceration. I guess I was there for about three years. And then the head of it moved, he's in Jackson now. He's the head of the Jackson project. Kali Akuno. I think it was about three years. We were just trying to make people aware. I don't know if we ever had more people on the board. It didn't last very long. But it was more a motto than what we did. We were all speech, no action.

Sarah Barnes

Do you have any regrets in your whole life?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I'm thinking of Frank Sinatra, "Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention." No, I can't think of anything that I would flagellate myself over. No, I think we – sounds kind of smug, huh? But no, I think I'm a pretty satisfied person, except with the politics of this country. Except for the white folks. Except with this and that.

Sarah Barnes

What do you think is the most important part of activism? And in that sense, do you have any advice for us or anyone of our generation?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Keep on keeping on, because this is the long race. This is never not going to be an issue in this country.

Because the root is so rotten, and we just have to keep replenishing it and hope that someday we can take it further. It's never ever going to stop. So if you can't stay the long haul, I would say, realize that there is probably nothing more important than getting this country, this world, this planet, this environment so that it survives. And then we can take it to maybe a thriving instead of just surviving. But it's not going to stop. And I guess the other thing, although it sounds religious, is to have faith, faith in yourself, and faith that we can do it. Believe in yourself.

Sarah Barnes

You seem to be really emotionally involved in the Movement. What do you think sparks that? Where do you think that comes from?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Even as a teacher in Oakland, as a coach of teachers in Oakland, we're always talking about inequity, equity, inequity, trying to see – especially with this long-distance learning, I mean, the gap is growing, growing, growing. There are kids – how do you even know if your kid is on Zoom? If you're talking, if you're teaching? I see the gap growing. It is racial in the sense that the more kids have to go out to work if you're in a family that you can sit and learn long distance. It's not pleasant. It's not nice. It's not the way anybody really wants to learn. But if you've got parents that can afford it, you can sit and do your work. And you have to go out and work all day – like I have a teacher who is very, very dedicated. He's in the newcomer program so all of his students are either from El Salvador, Honduras, and a few from Guatemala. And he does his class at six o'clock at night, because his students are working all day. That's when he teaches six o'clock, and nine o'clock at night. And he's got a three o'clock for people who get off early. And he's awesome, he's an awesome teacher. But he's not the typical teacher.

Sarah Barnes

I think one thing that I'm always kind of shocked by is how many ultra-conservative racist people we have in America, especially living in San Francisco in the Bay Area, we're a little kind of shielded from that. Obviously, there are people that are like that around here, but it's certainly less than it is elsewhere. It's always hard for me to kind of think about the nature versus nurture thing. If you can kind of teach people against racism, or if they're always just gonna be like that. Do you think you could speak to that a little bit? Maybe your opinion with that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think it is how you are nurtured more than nature. I have to believe that. I have to believe in something. We can't be born racist. I mean, you're born like...

Sarah Barnes

I think you can be born stubborn, maybe. It's how you get through to me. Because I agree, I don't think you can be necessarily born racist.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I think you have to be taught. That's another song from another show. You have to be taught.

Sarah Barnes

Can you sing it?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

No, I can't. I can't remember the lines. I just remember the verse.

Sarah Barnes

You have to be taught?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. My husband probably knows it.

Sarah Barnes

Can we meet your husband if he's around?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Elliott? Can you wait one second?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It's from *The King and I*, the musical.

Sarah Barnes

I'm assuming you've been watching the election pretty closely?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yuck. Yes.

Sarah Barnes

That's where I was coming from the sense that it's hard to watch and see so many people...

Linda Wetmore Halpern

It really does, because it looks like half the country is like Civil War days. Especially because you... I was a Bernie Sanders campaigner, but it just seems to me that you have a dignified human being, a decent human being on one side, and you have a thug on the other side. And how we can be equally divided is kind of beyond me at this point.

Sarah Barnes

Yeah. Is it for you – because you've witnessed second hand a lot of racism in your life – is it frustrating to watch and feel like we're taking steps backward?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. What is it, "For every two steps forward, one step back." Something? I think that's Molly Brown. That's another musical. You can tell I love theater.

Sarah Barnes

Do you have any artifacts? Do you have that book that you sent me? Did you find your SNCC pin or no?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I couldn't find it. Oh my God, I'm so mad. It's just a little one. And it has S. N. C. C. Half white, half black. That's the SNCC pin. You can see this is a little worn. (holds up a book)

That's from *Freedom Summer*, by Sally Belfrage.

Sarah Barnes

And you are mentioned in that?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah, quite a bit, actually. I have all the pages marked that I'm in. She was just a journalist there writing a book. But she was in Greenwood with me. So we did a lot together. Unfortunately, she's passed. But she was from Ireland. I'm going to ego trip here for a while. That's another poem by Nikki Giovanni, Ego Tripping. She's introducing us and she says, "There was Bambi Brown, a still smooth ivory girl from Des Moines, who would be doing most of the community center work. Beside her, George Johnson, a Yale Law student, a tall blond

Peace Corps veteran, fluent in Swahili." You see where I got the idea to go to the Peace Corps because he and I hung out a lot together. "Linda Wetmore, a laughing redhead who looked like a cheerleader or a cover girl, but had a will which dealt with any opposition as though it didn't exist until it didn't. Next to her [Monroeville Shaw], a negro artists from Chicago and Paris, with a smile, missing two front teeth, and a heavy silver medallion around his neck. At their feet flat out on the floor, Eli Zaretsky, who's Brooklyn dose ding and eloquent humor were clung to as tightly as an uncompromised principle, a revolutionary with the temperament of a poet." And he became a professor at, I can't think of the college I think it's, Missouri State or something. But he's a professor at a college now, too, Eli. Yeah. So that's my book. And then I spent some time last night, there are three books that I mentioned, but I couldn't find the page. The way he did it, he mentioned the interview, and then the page, and I was going here to here that yeah...

Sarah Barnes

Do I have the copy of the newspaper article?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah.

Sarah Barnes

That one talks about. Yeah. You are in jail? Yeah. It's pretty cool. Did you have contact with your parents when you were in jail or in the South at all?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. I wrote to them, but this is when we got arrested, they were called to give them money. And my mother had a hard time razing it. My grandmother had to chip in and she wasn't very happy. But they didn't want me to stay in jail, either.

Sarah Barnes

Did they want you to come home after that? Or No?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. But I also wanted to get back to school because again, I always felt that education was my key to getting out of the area where I lived. But it was funny the day we got arrested. I'm, I don't know if I told you this or not. But we're getting fingerprinted. And they were looking at our, at our [??? violets,, an all that stuff]. And he looked at me and he goes, "You're one of us." Because it said Memphis, Tennessee, right? And he goes, "What are you doing down here, you little traitor?" And he kept signaling, "She's one of us! She's one of us!" And it meant, "No. I am not one of you. No way."

Sarah Barnes

What did he mean "one of us" just a white person?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

A Southerner. "You're not supposed to be down here working for the rights of black folks. She's a Southerner."

Sarah Barnes

Do you have anything else you want to share? I don't really have any more questions for you. Jean-Luc do you have anything? Yeah. When you went to jail, was there a memorable story that you remember? Was there something that stood out to you while you were there? What was something that really stuck to you?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

They have trustees that are black, and they would sneak stuff into us. We'd say, "Boy it's really hot." And he'd go, "Do you want some ice cream?" And so he'd go down and he'd slip us some ice cream. So even though we were on a hunger strike, we ate ice cream. And we got messages out, that's how we got messages out to the people was through the trustee. So we would write something and give it to him or tell him and he'd write it

down. That was very memorable.

Sarah Barnes

Was the hunger strike just for show then, it was just for attention? Was it less morally embedded in yourself and it was more just for show?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah. I didn't want to hunger strike. I think [while we were down there,] it's 110 degrees for crying out loud!

Sarah Barnes

Whose idea was it?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

I guess just the other women, they thought it would be more to call attention to it. I guess it did. The news did broadcast it across. The Freedom Summer was kind of a big thing in the news and it wasn't fake news. They were covering the news. I can still remember the reporter that was down there. And he was good. It was legit. I think – I'm gonna contradict myself again, but I do think there's a heart in this country that wants things to be magically right, but not the guts to work for it. But they do want to snap your fingers and, yeah, can't we all get along? That kind of thing. I do think that the Peace Corps was a good idea. I know, we thought it was the arm of the government. And when we were there, I was in French West Togo, we had Nigeria on one side and Ghana on the other side. So English, there was a value in what we were teaching.

Sarah Barnes

Did you teach in English?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yes, I taught English to the Togolese students. But we went to Nkoma was in Ghana at the time. And we went over to see the – Humphrey, he was the Vice President of the United States at the time. And he was over there. And we went over there to see him. But we were also very pro-Palestinian, the Peace Corps people. We were teaching English. We were teaching in Africa. But the general thrust of the people – we were young – was pro-Palestinian. And again, my daughter is gay, but her partner is from Egypt, but she's pro-Palestinian. And just understanding that issue is between Israel and Palestine, it was a big growth for me to understand it. Especially because so many of the people in the Freedom Movement are Jewish. But, the other side of that is, they're also pro-Palestinian, they're not pro-Israel. They're very clear about the brutality of the Israeli government. So yeah, that's a complicated issue. All of this is complicated. Life is complicated.

Sarah Barnes

Do you want to tell the story of when you got arrested in Oakland?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Right now, Oakland – and I'm still working for OUSD (Oakland Unified School District), because I work with new teachers in OUSD. But then the state was trying to take over Oakland, and a bunch of us, the union people – I'm very pro-union – we didn't want the state to take us over. So this one guy, Kali Akuno, who is now in Jackson, he used to come in, speak in my class a lot. So he and I, and this woman, I've forgotten her first name or last name is Weills, and her husband's a lawyer so he was going to get us out. And I called my husband, I said, "I think we're going to get arrested." So we strapped ourselves to the desk in the superintendent's office – Dan Siegel is the lawyer. So we say stayed there strapped, chained to the desk in the superintendent's office. The police came, they snipped the chain, they got us out, they threw us in a cell. This was – I was trying to think of the date the other day, I think it was maybe 1990, 1992, something like that. So we spent the night in jail. And Elliott picked me up downtown Oakland about four o'clock in the morning.

Sarah Barnes

When was this? That's a good, story.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

If you're an activist, you have to be active. There's no getting around it.

Sarah Barnes

Can we meet your husband? And then maybe we'll close it up there.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Elliott. They want to meet you. They want to meet you. This is my honey.

Elliott

Hi, how is everybody?

Sarah Barnes

I'm Sarah.

Jean-Luc

I'm Jean-Luc. Nice to meet you.

Sarah Barnes

Thanks for letting us talk to your wife for a few hours.

Elliott

I could just sequester somewhere else. But it sounded like a very intense great talk. And great that you're doing this project, too.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Yeah, I'm glad you chose it.

Sarah Barnes

Yeah. I'm glad I took this class as well. Any final words before you wrap it up?

Linda Wetmore Halpern

There's a poem by Sterling (Sterling Allen Brown). "Strong men. Keep a'coming. Keep a'coming. Strong men. Keep a'coming." And I've added my own: "Strong women. Keep a'coming. Keep a'coming. Strong omen. Keep a'coming. Keep a'coming." So keep a'coming!

Sarah Barnes

Thank you so much for talking to us. I hope maybe we can stay in contact. I'll send you an email.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Oh, that would be great. Yeah.

Jean-Luc

Thank you so much, Ms. Halpern, it really means a lot. Thank you for everything.

Linda Wetmore Halpern

Thank you.

Sarah Barnes

That would be nice. Okay, signing off. Thank you so much, you.

