

Interviewee: Margaret Herring

Interviewer: Tim Tyson

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Length: 1 disc, approximately 56 minutes

Tim Tyson: I guess since we've got [0:02] you should say your name and where you're from.

Margaret Herring: [Laughs] My name is Margaret Herring, and right now I'm living in Wilmington, North Carolina.

TT: So, were you born in Winston-Salem? Do I have that right?

MH: No, I was born in Ashland, Kentucky.

TT: Ashland, Kentucky.

MH: But I moved with my – my parents moved to Winston-Salem when I was about three months old in 1936, and I was the youngest and only girl-child of my father, who was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.

TT: How many of you were there?

MH: I had three older brothers, so there were six of us altogether. And my father is from Pender County, North Carolina, and my mother is from Arkansas.

TT: So, what was it like growing up a preacher's daughter, a Baptist preacher's daughter in Winston-Salem?

MH: [Laughing] Well, you know how it is. You feel like you're always on. My brothers – I had three older brothers that picked on me mercilessly and teased me. And

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that always gave me a sense of what it was like to be the underdog, so it was a gift really.

But we went to church whenever the doors opened.

TT: [Laughs] I know about that.

MH: And I spent a lot of time at Sunday School learning the Bible stories and Sword Drills. Remember those? Did you have them?

TT: Um-hmm.

MH: And then my father would preach.

TT: That was the Bible verse thing, right?

MH: Yeah, you had to find the Bible verse.

TT: Um-hmm, yeah.

MH: And then he would preach, and then we would come home and have Sunday dinner. And that's kind of the way it was.

TT: Where did you go to school?

MH: I went to Reynolds High School, R.J. Reynolds High School, and graduated in 1954. And then I went to Wake Forest when it was in Wake Forest.

TT: Right.

MH: But I met my first husband there and left in my second year and got married.

TT: And where did you go?

MH: He was in the Army, so we lived in East Baltimore. He was in the CIC. And then later he was transferred to Washington, and we lived in Alexandria. We had two babies, Gus and Jack, and so I took care of them, and he had his job.

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TT: What's your first memory of race, because I know you became very much a race person, among other things? But when is – or what is – or if that's the right question?

MH: I think I first became aware of it as a child, because we always had domestic help in the home, and my mother would drive – we had a wonderful lady named Virginia Williams, and she would come and do the ironing and the cooking and the cleaning, and then my mother would take her home. And I remember asking my mother, “Well, why is it that in Virginia's neighborhood, as soon as we get to her neighborhood, the pavement stops? And why does she live in a house without any electricity? And why does she have to use an outdoor bathroom, and we have so much?” And I can't really remember her answer, but it was like a question that I had: Why is this happening to her?

TT: Do you remember when you first started getting an inkling of being able to answer your own question?

MH: [Laughs] Well, I think it was at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City.

TT: Oh, my. So, you –

MH: It was always wondering about it, but in terms of answers, I didn't get that.

TT: Yeah. So, how did we get from Baltimore to Atlantic City, which is a long way and a long time?

MH: It's a long time, isn't it? Well, my first husband decided that he would go to medical school after he was in the Army. And I said, “Well, okay, if you go to medical school, I'll put you through medical school. And I'll be a doctor's wife, right? [Laughter]

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But if you do, I'll have to go to work, so please go to a school that's in a city that would be interesting and where I can get an interesting job."

And so, we went to Washington. And there's kind of a story about how I wound up working for a newspaperman by the name of Drew Pearson.

TT: Oh, yes.

MH: And my job for Pearson was to open his mail, answer the fan mail, and transcribe his diary, his personal diary. So, in the mail were all these press releases from SNCC. And it told about the voter registration drives and the intimidation, the harsh intimidation that came down on the people in Mississippi.

And so, I kept trying to get Mr. Pearson to write something about this. And I'll just say that we had a relationship outside of work. Anyway, so he didn't want to write anything about it. He *did* write about the churches being burned, because I guess that was a safe topic for him.

TT: So, that's like '63 or something?

MH: This would be '63. And during this time my first husband – we split up. And we would go to fund-raising parties for SNCC, and I met John Lewis and Mr. Steptoe there at one of these parties.

And then, you know, I kept bugging him. And his friends were Hubert Humphrey, Lyndon Johnson, Earl Warren, Averell Harriman, Wayne Morse, people like that, so I was typing up all these conversations that he was having with these powerful men. But anyway –

TT: He had a lot of influence.

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MH: Yeah. But he wouldn't do what I told him to do. [Laughter] Anyway, so I kept bugging him, and he finally took me with him and Mrs. Pearson to the convention in Atlantic City. And after work I would go out and sit in with the people from Mississippi, because SNCC had brought people up for the convention as a challenge to the seating of the regular Democrats.

TT: Because you knew some of them from the fund-raisers?

MH: I knew John and Mr. Steptoe.

TT: Yeah.

MH: Okay, so, one day – I can't remember what all I said – he said, "Okay, if you want me to write something, you go out and interview some of these people, and I'll put it in a column." So, I was out of there. And I went over to the Gem Hotel, and there was a crowd milling around.

TT: The Gem Hotel?

MH: It's called G-E-M.

TT: G-E-M. So, are we still in Atlantic City?

MH: Atlantic City. And there's a crowd of Mississippi people milling around, and I saw Mr. Steptoe, and he asked me if I had had enough to eat that day. And that was like, "Woo, if he's asking me that, that means there are some people who haven't had enough to eat." And I really began to take a look at myself and the life I was living. And I met up with this guy named Jack Minnis. I don't know if you know who Jack is.

TT: Um-hmm. He's an attorney, isn't he? Wasn't he an attorney?

MH: He was the research director of SNCC.

TT: Okay, yes.

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MH: And he's the one that did all the demographic analysis and the economic analysis of the communities. Wherever a field secretary and staff would go to organize, they would have this information before they got there: how many people lived there, the median income, who owned the land, and who owned what little industry was there, the cotton gin, that kind of thing. Anyway, Jack explained to me the relationship between racism and capitalism. So, that was like a [TT coughs] – that's when I began to have an answer to the question I asked my mother. So, I thank Jack Minnis for that.

TT: Tell me a little more about – I'm very curious about your experience at Atlantic City. What did you see and experience there with the SNCC folks?

MH: I saw all these people from Mississippi up there demanding to be treated equal to the regular Democrats, who were these racist Congressmen and Senators and other officials, and it was just so inspiring. They inspired me tremendously. And I also saw the SNCC staff with their walkie-talkies, and they knew what – they appeared to know what they doing, and I was so impressed.

I was really inspired, because Jack got me into the Credentials Hearing, and I heard Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony about how she was beaten mercilessly in prison, in jail, for organizing people to vote. And I just took this look – I looked at myself and I thought, "Well, I can do better than what I've been doing, and I would like to go down there. I want to be a part of this. I don't want to be a part of that anymore."

And so, I began to spend some time with Jack, and Mr. Pearson got really mad at me. Anyway, so, [laughs] that's kind of –

TT: Was he mad at you because things were ending between you?

MH: Yeah, they were ending, and he didn't like that.

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TT: What about – did he have sort of sharp political differences with what you were doing?

MH: He thought I was – that was too much, you know. He thought the main story of the convention was whether Hubert Humphrey would be chosen the vice president. And I thought it was the Mississippi Challenge.

TT: Yeah.

MH: So, anyway, so I got to the Credentials Committee, I was in the room when the people voted against accepting the compromise that was presented to them by Bayard Rustin and Martin King and Joe Rauh. And I heard Ms. Hamer say, “No, we didn’t come all this way for no two seats.” And it was just riveting to me. So, there was a big change in my life. I just changed.

TT: Let me ask your opinion about something. What do you think of Rauh’s position in all that is? I know he was the legal representative, the spokesperson for the MFDP.

MH: Right.

TT: But in the compromise, I’m murky on what his actual role is.

MH: He came to present the compromise.

TT: So, he spoke in favor of the compromise?

MH: Yes, he was the spokesperson for the Democratic Party.

TT: He kind of fudges that.

MH: The Democratic Party was very embarrassed, and they were looking for a way to save face for Eastland and Jamie Whitten and the people from Mississippi, the regular Democrats, and yet not appear to be – they thought, “Well, okay, we’ll give you

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two seats and we'll work on it down the road." And they said, "No, we want the whole thing right now." [Laughs]

TT: So, that was a pivotal experience for you?

MH: Yes, definitely. And so then, after the convention, I went back and I still worked for Pearson for another month. I found my first husband and I said, "I really need to go and be a part of this. Can you take care of the boys?" He was in medical school and he did.

TT: How old were your boys?

MH: They were six and seven.

TT: Oh, my.

MH: So, that was rough.

TT: That's hard.

MH: But I looked around and I said, "Well, men do this all the time. [Laughs] Men go off and save the world, and by golly, I'm going to – why not me?" [Laughter] So, he took the boys and he found another woman and – you know. I always felt guilty about that, but that's what happened.

TT: Yeah. Well, I guess these things always come at great cost.

MH: Yes.

TT: To somebody, and lots of times to lots of people.

MH: Um-hmm.

TT: So, where'd you go?

MH: Well, Jack got me on a project in Panola County, which is Batesville, and I went there and I met Penny Patch, who's being interviewed.

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TT: That's Batesville, Mississippi.

MH: Mississippi, in the Delta. And I stayed with a black family, and they made me sleep behind the chimney, because they were afraid the house would get bombed. And we had to be very careful about not riding in an integrated car, you know, not provoking violence. And let's see. I remember seeing some children who had running sores on their legs, and they had no running water and they were out in the dirt and working in the cotton fields with all the chemicals. And that's one of the awful things that I saw.

A funny thing that I saw was that we went to the Laundromat in the black community to wash our clothes, and the white women would come over to the black Laundromat because they thought that clothes would get cleaner in the black Laundromat. [Laughs] And it was like – this was bizarre. Did you –?

TT: I have never heard such a thing. I'm having a hard time imagining what could have been in their minds.

MH: They'd cross over where there was no pavement, dirt road, and use the black Laundromat. And so, at that point, the MFDP was supporting Lyndon Johnson, and there was no campaign material for Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey in all of Mississippi. So, one night, Penny and I and a guy named Chris Williams, three white people, drove to Memphis, Tennessee, to the Democratic office and picked up posters for Lyndon Johnson for president. And so, we came back and we almost got run off a road. I'm not sure. I think we might have run out of gas or something. So, we kind of hid in a ditch, but after some cars had passed, we got back in the car and made it back to Batesville.

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And so, a couple of days later, we decided to try to put these posters in the stores in Batesville. And so the three of us went to this little shop. I think it was a shoe shop or a dry cleaners or a little café. These three white kids – I wasn't so much of a kid, but we went in there with these Lyndon Johnson posters. And I said, "Ma'am, would you like to put a poster for Lyndon Johnson in the window?" And she said, "We don't put pictures of Communists in our windows." [Laughter]

And I said, "Well, thanks anyway," and we left and we went right back to the project, because we were scared. But there were funny stories like that.

TT: [Laughing] That well-known Communist Lyndon Johnson.

MH: Yeah. [Laughs]

Anyway, after that, they asked me to work in the Washington office for the MFDP because they were getting ready to challenge the seating of the Congressmen. Before I went to Washington, I helped collect affidavits at all the different projects because, as you know, the National Lawyers Guild sent volunteer lawyers into Mississippi to document the repression that people suffered when they tried to go to Democratic Party meetings and when they tried to register to vote. And so, they formed the party, MFDP, based on the legal – what the law said about how to form a party. And so, they challenged the seating of these Congressmen. But I got to drive around to all the projects. And I think they sent me because I was [2-second gap in recording] Mississippi, like the third district and Jamie Whitten's district and maybe the one south of that, Yazoo County.

TT: So, you kind of got a good picture of what SNCC was doing in that whole region?

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MH: Yeah. And I got to meet the lawyers, Mort Stavis and Arthur Kinoy and William Kunstler, plus a lot of other lawyers, Ben Smith and guys from all over the country that came to help. And I don't think they've talked about that; maybe Guyot talked about that.

TT: What's your memory of them?

MH: They were idealistic and professional. They knew what they were doing. They really cared about the people of Mississippi. It was a good memory. They did a good job with the affidavits. [Laughs]

TT: So, after you collected the affidavits –?

MH: Took them to Jackson. And then, we knew about the Dombrowski case in Louisiana, where the local police had raided the SCEF office. And so, Jack thought that this was about to happen to the MFDP in Mississippi, so they asked me to take the documents to Washington. And they rented a trailer and hooked it on the back of my car, and I drove from Jackson, Mississippi, to Washington, DC, pulling a trailer full of the affidavits that would be used in the Challenge. [Laughter] I think I drove by myself, because it was too dangerous for anyone else – you know, it could not be an integrated car.

TT: Yeah. And so, when you arrived in Washington, then you went to work in the MFDP office?

MH: Right. I drove up to – Len Holt was a lawyer in Washington, and I parked the trailer out in front of his house. And he comes out and he said, "I'll take care of it." And that's the last I saw of it, but he took care of it. [Laughs]

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And then I went to work in the Washington office with Mike Thelwell and Jack Minnis and, I think, Theresa Delpaso and other people who worked in that office, Sharlene Kranz, people like that.

TT: What kind of work were y'all doing?

MH: Well, we – Ruth Howard was there, too – set the stage for the Challenge on the floor of Congress on the opening day of Congress, which would have been January twentieth, or in January, and that would have been 1965. So, there had to be housing – Ruth worked on that – press releases, interviews set up. There was a big logistics – not problem, but logistics of transporting people, again, from Mississippi to Washington to be witnesses at this seating, we hoped, of Ms. Hamer, Ms. Devine, and Victoria Gray, who had been elected by the MFDP.

TT: So you were trying to get the MFDP [4-second gap in recording] who had all supported Goldwater, no doubt, anyway.

MH: Yeah.

TT: So, what was the work of that? So, you had to get those folks up and housed?

MH: Um-hmm, and housed, yes.

TT: And then, the idea was that they – were there hearings then?

MH: No. There weren't hearings. They were going to go and go into the floor of Congress. Meanwhile, the people from Mississippi lined the tunnel from the House office buildings to the Capitol on both sides so that as the Congressmen came – and also on the street, the sidewalks from both buildings – as the Congressmen came, they passed

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through a line on both sides of poor people from Mississippi exercising their right and wanting to be able to vote.

TT: So, it wasn't just the delegation, but you brought a lot of folks up from Mississippi?

MH: Several busloads. It was – I don't know exactly how many. When you interview Gulot, he has all that information. But it was like they could not have come over to the Capitol building without passing through a tunnel of black Mississippians staring at them.

TT: Where did you put all those folks?

MH: The churches in Washington put them up. All Souls Unitarian and the black churches and other churches invited them to come stay in the church and people's homes all over. The night before this, a Congressman came to the office, and he was very nervous. He was worried that Mrs. Hamer and Miss Devine and Miss Gray were going to chain themselves to the door of Congress in the Capitol building. And we were shocked, because that never crossed our minds! [Laughs]

TT: [Laughing] Sounds like a good idea.

MH: Yeah, good idea! [Laughter] So, it was like, "Okay, Congressman, thank you," like we will consider what you said. And after he left, we just rolled on the floor laughing. It was not what we were going to do, but it was like a little negotiating.

TT: Do you remember who the Congressman was?

MH: Yes.

TT: Who's that? No tell. [Laughs]

MH: Well.

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TT: It's up to you. I'm not trying to get you to tell things you don't want to tell. I'm just curious.

MH: I'll tell you later.

TT: Okay.

MH: I don't want to embarrass him, because he's turned out to be a very good Congressman. But this when he first – they sent him. He's a black Congressman, so they sent him to go over, "See if you can find out what's going on." It was just one of those funny stories.

TT: So, how did the Challenge go?

MH: Well, they were not seated, so we were defeated again. And everybody went back to Mississippi. And, as you know, there was kind of a big letdown: Where do we go from here?

TT: Did you go back to Mississippi?

MH: I went to the Atlanta office. I worked in the national office.

TT: So, you worked with Julian Bond and those folks?

MH: Julian and Betty Garmon and Judy Richardson and Ruby Dorris and Mildred Foreman and Laverne Lily. I worked with Betty mostly in the Northern Support Office and I also helped Jack in the Research Department.

TT: And all that was in Atlanta?

MH: Um-hmm.

TT: How long were you in Atlanta?

MH: I left about – I stayed a year, because this would have been 1965. And that was an important year because that was the year of the Selma march. Were you – I told

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that story about – Jack and Foreman asked me to go to Selma and interview the mayor and the sheriff and the judge and the chief of police to see what I can find out about how the march was going to go. So, I went to Belk's or someplace and got me a dress – it was the first time I'd had a dress on in a long time – and some stockings. And I got in my car and drove over there by myself and checked into this hotel. And all the national news people were there, from CBS and NBC.

And the next day I went out and I interviewed the mayor and the sheriff and the chief of police. And I told them that I was a freelance writer from *Parade* magazine and I just mostly listened. And they talked about how well they got along with their Negroes, and there was no problem, and – you know. I remember walking down the street and seeing Worth Long. We passed and he looked at me like, "I know her from somewhere," but then he looked away, and I was glad he didn't recognize me.

So, then I went back, and while I was at the hotel, that was the night that Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot in a bar outside of Selma. He was a soldier, home on leave, and it was like the story focused on that. But it was bad. Anyway, I left the next day.

TT: So, you were just in Selma sort of overnight?

MH: Yeah, two days.

TT: You were a secret agent in Selma.

MH: [Laughing] Yeah, right.

TT: So, why – I'm just struck by how much nerve it would take and how much intelligence and all that.

MH: See, they thought I could talk Southern.

TT: Why did they pick you? You know? Because you could talk –

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MH: I could talk Southern and I could say [speaking with slight drawl], “Well, I’m a freelance writer from *Parade* magazine.” [Laughter] And, you know, you spoke their language, and so they understood me.

TT: Sure. They must have had a lot of confidence in your ability to keep your head, because that’s a complicated situation, obviously.

MH: Yeah. I knew –

TT: That’s a tough town.

MH: Um-hmm.

TT: It’s still a tough town.

MH: The hotel that we stayed in was this beautiful red building that had a loggia and arched walkway. You can see it if you ever see the movie “The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.” It’s in that movie, but it’s since been torn down.

TT: They filmed that in Selma?

MH: Um-hmm.

TT: I didn’t know. I’ve seen the movie.

MH: It’s a beautiful building.

TT: So, you drove back from Selma to Atlanta?

MH: Um-hmm. And filed my report. I don’t remember exactly what I said, but I do remember it was very, very tense in the city.

TT: What was the political environment like in SNCC? What was the atmosphere like there in ’65 when you were there? It was kind of a pivotal year, a lot of stuff.

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MH: Um-hmm. Well, I always felt welcomed. I didn't feel out of place. I felt appreciated. My work was appreciated. Just my being there was appreciated. So, I always felt very close to the people that I was – I didn't have any problem. Let's see, I worked in the office and I guess you know the whole story of that march, because SNCC recognized that it was going to be a very dangerous situation.

TT: Yeah.

MH: And they wanted to call the march off, or not to have the march, because they were afraid people would get hurt. And SCLC said, "Oh, no, we're going to have the march. Martin Luther King is going to lead it," and blah-blah-blah. And then, on the day of the march, King decided to remain in Atlanta, fundraising, and it was too late to stop. So, John – all the SNCC people were there, and they said, "Okay, we'll be with you when we march." And they did, and then they got beaten up really bad. It was a bad scene.

And I remember feeling so helpless standing in the office, watching the TV and seeing John getting beaten up and other people and how senseless that was. So, that was a – there was a lot of anger around that. But not from John or anybody, but just – this should have been prevented. It kind of disrupted the organizing. But, you know, there's good and bad that comes out of things.

TT: Yeah. What was the relationship like with the SCLC in that time? I know that was not exactly a high watermark.

MH: It was a – well, I don't know if I'm a good person to speak about that, but to me it seemed that there was a – I'm looking for the right word. It wasn't – it was a parallel organization, but we felt that our theory of organizing from the grassroots up and

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remaining with the people and sustaining, developing local leadership was the way that it ought to be done. And my impression of SCLC was that we do mass marches, and you have an important person come and lead a rally, and then they leave town and leave the people there. We preferred to take it slow and steady, was our way of doing things. So, there was a different way of approaching things.

TT: Yeah. What –?

MH: It was a comradely relationship, though. They were not seen as the enemy, by any means.

TT: Sure. What was the effect of the MFDP Challenge, of the failure, if you want to call it that? I know there was a certain sense of –

MH: Well, there were several staff meetings in Waveland, which is near Bay Saint Louis, about where we should go.

TT: Did you go down to Waveland?

MH: Yeah, I was there. Staff would write position papers, and Cortland and Charlie Cobb, they wrote really good position papers about where we should go and how much longer should white people stay. I remember that issue was being raised. And gradually people would leave, and then they'd go back to their projects. It was discouraging. It was very discouraging on the projects, I must say.

And then, that spring the Watts riots happened, and then the Meredith march. As I remember, chronologically that's kind of what happened, which was another occasion that we didn't feel that it was safe, but we went along with. And it was on that march that Willie Ricks first talked about black power.

TT: Were you on that march?

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MH: No. See, I stayed.

TT: Okay.

MH: I did the background. People got arrested. We had to call, make sure that people in the North would call the jails, we had to raise money, that kind of thing. I didn't go out and do that, because that was my contribution. I felt like black people should be leading those things, and I didn't want to go out and get in front of the cameras and all that stuff. That wasn't my role. It was their gig.

TT: What was at issue at Waveland? Was that the main issue at Waveland, sort of the role of whites in the movement?

MH: It was one of the issues was what is the role of the Northern white people that came in. And there were other issues. I don't really remember them. I just remember being there. But you've interviewed other people that wrote those papers, so you can find out.

TT: I've read a lot of books about it.

MH: Okay.

TT: But you know it's different having somebody's own experience, which is really the human side, because everybody – you can be a historian of Gettysburg and study the battle of Gettysburg as long as you want to and learn all sorts of things about it, but that's different from being one of those soldiers in those holes or marching up that hill. And every one of those soldiers can tell you their own story. It's a piece of the whole thing, and that in some ways transcends what you can learn out of charting the troop movements.

MH: Yeah.

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TT: So, how did you feel about your role? Well, I have two questions. Real quickly, you said, “Northern whites.” Did you get the sense that “Northern” and “white” were both important words in that?

MH: Well, there weren’t that many Southern whites. But I knew that – well, you see, the whole concept of Black Power came, I understood, to mean that black people needed to run the organization, and why not?

And Stokely would talk about what our role was, as white people, to go back into the – go home and talk to your family and your neighbors about racism. And that was a pretty heavy thing to think about, because when you’re down there in the Delta, the white people were the enemy, my own people. [Laughter] So, you’re going to have to go back and do a little reversal in your head about who were your friends and who were your enemies. You can’t organize people against racism if you see them as an enemy and you hate them. So, it was a big change that had to take place in us.

But as they began to talk about this whole concept of Black Liberation Movement and self-determination and whatever, to me it made sense that this was what ought to be. And so, I planned to leave at the end of the year. So, I did. And there was kind of a going-away party; everybody came. It was always collegial, cordial relationship. I didn’t feel like I was kicked out. I felt like it was a privilege to go and work – to form a coalition down the road with the Black Liberation Movement, that this would be a poor and working class movement with mostly white people, but never a hundred percent white people, but I would like to try it out and see what happened.

TT: So, where did you go from there?

MH: Well, I wound up back in Washington.

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TT: Was that '66 or '65 that you left Atlanta?

MH: I think I left in –

TT: It was after the Meredith march, so that would have been – June '66 was the Meredith march.

MH: Was it?

TT: Um-hmm.

MH: Okay. Well, that'd be I stayed – yeah. Okay, yeah, you're right. Anyway, I left. [Laughs] Yeah, that's right. I came back to Washington in '67, so I was there longer than a year. Two years. It's all jumbled together. [Laughs] So, I got a job at the United Planning Organization, which was the anti-poverty war. And, by the way, during that time the Civil Rights Act of '65 and the Voting Rights Act were passed.

Anyway, in January of '67 I went to work at UPO and I met Al. He was working there, too. And so, we went to – we had gone on a trip across the country together to visit old SNCC people in different projects across the country, kind of looking for places to work. And he was invited to speak or be a part of a workshop in Appalachia, in the mountains. And so, we went there, and they offered him a job. And then I went to work for SCEF, and he went to work for the Appalachian Volunteers, which was the OEO, Office of Economic Opportunity group. So, that was in April of '67.

TT: And on your trip, where did you go visit?

MH: We went all the way to San Francisco in a VW bus. [Laughter] We went through Louisville, Chicago. We went out the northern route, went to San Francisco, and came back the southern route. And we stopped and visited Mike Miller in Kansas City

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and people in Chicago, the people in San Francisco, Los Angeles, back through Houston, New Orleans, back through Atlanta.

TT: So, there were SNCC people in all those places?

MH: There were people all over that were doing organizing in those places.

TT: So, you went to Louisville. I suppose you must have gone to see –

MH: We visited the Bradens in Louisville.

TT: Was that the first time you met them?

MH: No, I had met Anne and Carl at SNCC meetings. They would come, so I knew them and I wanted Al to meet them.

TT: Oh, okay. So, Al hadn't met them at that point?

MH: No. See, when I met Al, he was – he thought so much of Bobby Kennedy and he wanted to work for Kennedy. I said, "No, no!" [Laughs] Anyway.

TT: So, you were recruiting Al from the Left? [Laughs]

MH: That's right. Come over! Join the revolution!

TT: How'd that go? [Laughter] I guess pretty well!

MH: It went pretty well.

TT: So, that's how you got to Kentucky?

MH: Yes, the Appalachian Volunteers invited Al to be on the staff, and we went down there, and he went to work for them, and I went to work for SCEF. And Braden said, "Oh, we've got a mountain project going." That was where they had the anti-strip mining movement. It had already started, so we were just kind of getting to know people. I got pregnant with Victor.

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And Al wrote a position paper that he distributed to the AV staff – has he told you about that? – and it called for redistribution of resources, that the poor and working class people should have equal opportunity in the Appalachian Volunteers. He wanted to democratize it, because they had these volunteers, these young men, and then they had so-called interns among the local people. And these guys got paid a really good salary; the local people didn't, and they had no real voice in the organization. So, he wanted to democratize that staff, but at the same time democratize the whole mountain region, right, to tax the coal companies, the whole ball of wax. So, he distributed this position paper at an AV staff meeting.

And then we attended a SCEF staff meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, where Stokely came to speak to the SCEF board about what Black Power meant to white organizing, to people who were white allies. And he explained the whole deal about working with poor and working class whites to form coalitions in the future. And it was kind of a hard thing for some of them to understand, but I think they did. So, that was an interesting meeting. I don't know if you've heard much about that.

But we walked outside the building. This was at the national headquarters of the United Methodist Church.

TT: Oh, my.

MH: And so, we walked outside and we walked past this van, and we could hear people from our meeting in the van. [Laughs] They were recording the whole meeting, the Nashville police. So, there were these kinds of things.

And at night some of our staff people had gotten drunk, and it was embarrassing to the Bradens to have to apologize to the officials of the Methodist church for their

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behavior. [Laughs] But anyway, she explained that we worked hard and we played hard. It wasn't me, but some other people, [laughs] who will be nameless.

Anyway, on the way home, we left that meeting and then we came back through Knoxville and East Tennessee and met with the Appalachian Volunteers again, and then we went back to Pikeville. And shortly after that, Al got fired for this paper that he'd written. So, he joined the SCEF staff, too. And that happened over the summer.

And then in August is when the sheriff and [commonwealth] attorney of Pike County and about twenty armed men raided our house with us in it and arrested us for sedition. They went through all the papers in the house.

TT: Now, is that before or after the dynamite goes off?

MH: That's before.

TT: Before, okay. So, you were arrested before the dynamite?

MH: Yes, this was August 11, 1967. On that day in the U.S. Congress, Senator McClellan was authorized to investigate the causes of riots. Now, when we left that SCEF staff meeting and stopped by the AV meeting and then we got home – we would get the *New York Times*, the mailman would deliver the *New York Times* – and I was reading the *Times*, and the paper was two or three days old. But I said, “Oh, my goodness, there was a riot in Nashville after our meeting. Isn't that interesting?”

Well, the McClellan Committee, on the day that he was authorized to investigate the riots, it was the same day that our home was raided. And they came and they went through all of our papers and books and took them to a jail cell in the courthouse and began going through all of our address lists, my diary, my love letters, personal papers,

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all those SNCC position papers, those address lists of SCEF and SNCC and friends – it was like a horrible invasion of privacy. So, they did that and shortly after that –

TT: Did they surprise you?

MH: Yeah. I didn't expect *that*. [Laughs] I knew they were bad. An investigator from the McClellan Committee comes and looks at our papers and takes a lot of them back to Washington to show them to Senator McClellan. Now, in those letters were love letters from Drew Pearson to me. McClellan and Pearson hated each other. So, anyway.

So, after we were arrested and we were in jail, and Al was in the men's cell, and I was in the women's cell, I knew that we would get – the same lawyers that I had worked with in the Mississippi Challenge would come and help us. So, sure enough, the Bradens called those lawyers. They called the press. All these newspapermen came to Pikeville for this case. Wherever we went to court, there were TV cameras.

My parents, who lived in Nashville, opened up the newspaper, and they saw this headline, "Three anti-poverty workers arrested in Kentucky," and there was Al and me, our picture, and Joe Malloy. So, it was the first they knew, and they were shocked. [Laughs] It was bad.

So, while I was in jail with these other women, I realized that they were very poor. They had nothing. One woman was in there – she had been arrested in May for attempted murder because she lived in a rooming house, and another man there had accused her of pushing him down the steps. That was the attempted murder, which I don't think she really did. But the Grand Jury adjourned shortly after she was arrested, and so her case could not go before a Grand Jury until the fall, and she spent the whole

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summer in jail. And then, when the time came for the Grand Jury, he didn't show up, so she was let go.

There was a woman in there who was arrested for adultery, and she had been having an affair with another guy, and his wife had had her arrested for adultery. There was a woman arrested for swearing. And these were women that didn't – when they went before the magistrate, they got a twenty-five dollar fine. They didn't have twenty-five dollars.

So, anyway, my parents came to visit me in jail. And I remember this woman asked my father would he please go let her chickens out, because they were cooped up and they needed to get out to eat the grasses. So, he said that he would, and so that was a comfort to her.

My mother – I was five months pregnant, and she wanted me to have a new mattress. [Laughs] She was a middle-class preacher's wife. So, she went down and told the jailor to get me a new mattress. And, sure enough, he brought up a new mattress. And so, I said, "Pearl, you've been here the longest, and it's your mattress. I'll take yours, and you take this new one." And she appreciated that. It was like – it was pretty heavy.

So, anyway, so the lawyers came –

TT: How'd your parents take that?

MH: Well, my father said, "You're making the right sacrifice but on the wrong altar." In other words, I wasn't doing it for Jesus the way he thought Jesus – what that meant, where his –

TT: Right.

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MH: I didn't – I just said, "Well, okay, Dad. [Laughs] Here we are."

So, while we were in jail, the lawyers filed a petition to get the case removed from state court to federal court, and there was a hearing in Lexington, Kentucky. And the Bradens came to Pikeville to put their house up for our bond to get us out of jail to go to the hearing. And meanwhile, *they* were arrested for sedition.

So, once we all got to Lexington to this hearing, Kunstler was the lawyer, and we made our case, and he talked about the constitutional issues. A man who was a law professor at UK had his law class come. The courtroom was packed to hear this hearing before this federal judge, whose name was Bert Combs. So, he heard both sides and then he retired to consider. And then about two hours later he came back into the courtroom and he ordered the marshals to lock the doors, he said, "because –"

Female voice: Excuse me, I'm going to have to pause the tape and replace it.

MH: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Sally Council

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