INTERVIEW WITH FAITH HOLSAERT BY DEBRA SCHULTZ, MARCH 19, 1994

DS: Is the correct spelling of your name Holsaert? Maybe that's a good place to start. That's a really unusual name. What's your family background?

FH: My dad's family whose name is Dutch were people who settled in New Jersey farm country, some time in the 1800's I believe and he grew up in Matasqua, New Jersey. Manasquan

DS: And where did you grow up? When and where were you born?

FH: My mom's family were Jews from, on her dad's side from Holland and Spain and her mother's side from Poland and Germany. Her parents were not born in this country. She was born in 1909 here.

DS: Was your father Jewish or no?

FH: No. I was born in Greenwich Village. Well, my parents were living in Greenwich Village in 1943. Actually, I was born in a place called Miserecordia Hospital which is Catholic and my parents were very nervous because of the myth and maybe, it wasn't a myth, maybe it was a fact that Catholic hospitals place more emphasis on the life of the baby than the mother, which is considered old fashioned at this point.

DS: Can I ask what your parents were doing in Greenwich Village, were they part of a political culture?

FH: Not really. My father was an editor at Simon & Schuster. My mother was at home. They were liberals but I was not a red diaper baby. They were more in the literary world. My father actually went on to, at the end of his working life, he was working for Kurt Wolff at Harcourt & Brace. They did the copy editing for Helen and Kurt on Dr. Zhivago. They did a lot of European books. He did the copy editing on Anais Nin's diaries so he was certainly part of that world. My parents divorced at the end of the 40's when I was six, five or six, and I lived with my mother and we were, I think, less part of that world.

DS: Do you have any siblings?

FH: I have a sister who was born in 44. She's twenty three months younger than me. She lives in Italy.

DS: Do you have recollections of the war at all, the end of the war when you were young?

FH: I don't remember the end of the war. I do remember stories about a neighborhood grocer who saved milk for my mother and second hand stories like that rather than their actually happening at a time when I had a memory.

DS: Where you close to your grandparents?

FH: My father's father died when I was four or five and I remember that. His own mother, my father's mother, had died when he was in his teens. His father had remarried and my father disliked his stepmother who lived until the 1980's but we didn't have very much contact with her. My mother's parents lived also in Greenwich Village and he had, my grandfather had read law when he was a young man and become a lawyer who worked, a lot of his clients were show business people as I understand it. So he was probably part of that New York Jewish show business kind of world. That probably explains how they ended up living in Greenwich Village. My mother actually grew up on the upper west side. That grandfather had diabetes and was pretty much of an invalid in my early childhood and died when I was about eight or nine. My grandmother on my mother's side, lived until I was probably 15 or 16 and we saw her once a week. She lived within walking distance of our house.

DS: What was she like?

FH: She and my mother, although there was close contact, there was a lot of conflict between them. What I remember is that she was very short and very sort of imperious and judgmental. She taught me how to sew by hand sewing dolls clothes, which was very hard to do because they are so small. We cut out leg of mutton sleeves for dresses and stuff out of newspaper and made these amazing garments. This would have been the early 50's. She had a very nice life style because her husband was a lawyer. She had more money than we did. Somehow I think she saw my mother as the failure of her four children because my mother didn't have very much money. My grandmother got along with Charity, the woman who lived with us. There was also some sense of unease about the fact that Charity was a woman of color and also nobody really knew or would say what the relationship was between my mother and Charity. This is all in retrospect. This is nothing that anybody said to me.

DS: When you talked about that a little bit in our first conversation that was a question that I was going to raise. What was the relationship?

FH: Well, I think that the emotional truth is that they were a couple. They never explicitly used the term lesbian about themselves and the few times they used it when I was growing up to describe other people, it was always as if, those people were different from themselves. In a way, it doesn't matter what their relationship was labeled, they were clearly the emotional center of one another's lives for about a decade. When I was in high school, for a number of reasons, Charity moved out. The reason that was given to my sister and me was that we still lived in the Village and she had begun to teach in Scarsdale and it was easier to commute with people from the upper west side where she moved. She also started dating some at that point and ended up marrying a man who had a young child. Although I can't remember specific instances, I know that one of the issues between my mother, Charity and society was that Charity could not adopt my sister and me. I know that my mother told me that although I can't name a particular time or what age I was and I think probably my mother said that more than once.

DS: How did she come into your mother's life or your family?

FH: Well, actually, that's interesting. I went to Little Red Schoolhouse near the earliest apartment I remember. I started when I was four and actually, you asked about the war. I do remember in the fours at Little Red some of the kids talking about their fathers having been in the service at some point. I don't know how much you know about four year olds but they often get really enraptured with new adults in their lives. Charity was the music teacher at Little Red. She was very warm and really liked children and apparently, I just went home every day saying, "Charity this and Charity that" and sort of drove my parents nuts. When they went to their very first PTA meeting, and I never said anything about her color, I don't think I was really aware of it. When they went to their first PTA meeting, my mother said to Charity, Faith is just crazy about you. She wishes you could come and live with us. Charity had been commuting from Harlem because no one in Greenwich Village she had spoken to would rent to her. I don't know whether it was for a year or a few years but she had been commuting for a while and she just said spontaneously do you have a room and my parents said yes. Which I think speaks of the kind of good liberals they were. They felt that was the right thing to do and they just did it. That would have been probably 1947 or so.

DS: That's really early.

FH: Yes, it is.

DS: What was your family's identification or lack of identification with Jewishness, both while your parents were married and then after the divorce?

FH: Well, what I always remember hearing as that the children inherited their identify through the mother and, therefore, Shai and I were Jewish and I must have thought that was important because there was an early incident. I must have been three or four. Well, early when my sister was a verbal person, around four or five, I apparently really upset her by telling her that she was only a quarter Jewish. I explained that by saying that, my mother had explained to me that I was half Jewish, that she and my dad were two oranges and they were cut in half and each of them gave me half and so I told Shai that when it came to her, there was only a half of each of them left and that had been cut in half and so she had only gotten a quarter of Jewishness. So I obviously considered this a valuable thing to be and she did, too. Then as I grew up, a Jewish household that was headed by a woman in the 1940's or 50's was not really considered a Jewish household. At least, that's how my mother felt.

DS: What do you mean by that exactly?

FH: Well, your entree to Temple and services and having a role in the community really came through the male. I think there were a lot of things in Judaism I think she was uncomfortable with. What she always cited was Isaac and Jacob? I always forget which name is which now but the father being required to say he would sacrifice his son, which ironically ended up being my son's Torah portion for his Bar Mitzvah. But, my mother was dead by then. As I got older, Judaism became much more of an ethnic kind of identity and as I moved into my teens and became more activist, I saw that I was flowing from two traditions. One of which was Charity, who did read the National Guardian and had more overtly political friends. She was a member of the Teacher's Union which a lot of teachers at Little Red were in. And my mother, who I saw as having given me a tradition of Jewish, sort of humanist, activist principles. By the time I got to college I was lumping that with Karl Marx and some other things. At the time, it was kind of vague but it had to do with the fact that Jewish people had suffered a lot in the Holocaust, which growing up in the 50's still affected secular Jewish parents very powerfully in raising their children.

DS: Say more about how that affected you personally. How you came to know about the Holocaust.

FH: I know that I heard at some point that my father's family was very upset that my mother was Jewish. In fact, he had a sister with whom my sister and I spent summers who called my mother the Jewess. I remember my grandmother, Jewish grandmother, saying that you should never call women who are Jewish, Jewesses because that was very pejorative. I don't know when it started, but I remember when I was in late elementary school and junior high school having this really strong identification with people in concentration camps. In a way, a glorification of persecution but also a really deep sense that Jews were not part of mainstream America. I think that was kind of emphasized by the fact that we lived with Charity and we lived, by then in the northwestern section of the Village, up by l4th Street and Eighth Avenue and most of our neighbors were Irish. Although, my sister and I played on the street with the kids from those families, there was a sense that somehow we were less American then our Irish playmates. Both because we were Jewish, of course, because there was no man in our household and also because Charity was a woman of color.

DS: How did this very unusual childhood affect you subsequently?

FH: I think I would also put Little Red Schoolhouse in there as one of the contributing factors. Partly, because I saw the women who were my teachers there, including Charity, but also some of the women who must have been Jewish Socialists at least, if not Communist. I very strongly felt them as my mentors and leaders. My sister felt this less strongly but that definitely was a part of who I was. I also, when I was ten, in our social studies class, half of the year we studied the history of the Negro people in the United States, which in l954 was really unusual. The second half we studied Jewish history so the two histories were explicitly linked there. I think how that all fed into my going south is that I very much identified with women and teachers I saw as heroic. This is, of course, in thirty or forty years retrospect. I also by then had begun to sense that both my mother and Charity had been shaped by a racist and sexist society and that my mother had, like a lot of secular Jews, some very negative stereotypes about more traditional Jewish people and by the time I was out of college, I understood, at least intuitively that she had some pretty negative stereotypes about lesbians. I think Charity had some of those about lesbians and that she had grown up in New England. Her parents had been born in slavery but they had gone to Rhode Island in the l800's. She had some similar negative feelings about stereotypes of southern black people although she, like many people in her generation, like W. E. B. DuBois had spent some time in the South teaching. There were ambivalences in both my mother and Charity that made my going south definitely a product of my upbringing in their household but I think also caused them some pain. Not only because they were afraid for me but also because they were not directly involved by then.

to do w/ feelings re: POC

DS: Tell me what years both of them were born.

FH: My mother was born in 1909. Charity I believe was born in 1906, it might have been a couple of years earlier.

DS: Did you stay in touch with her?

FH: Yes. It's interesting. She did move from our house and eventually married a man and lived in Central Park West with him and in the course of my college years, my mother moved a block and a half away to 410 Central Park West. They all were quite close until my mother's death. Charity lived for about five years after my mother died. My mother died of cancer in 73 and I lived in West Virginia at the time and I didn't have much money but about once a year or at the most, every two years, I would go to New York and two or three times before her death, it was Charity's house that I stayed at. I always saw her when I was there and my children considered her an adult in the family. I had a very small extended family so she was one of the few people that my children met from my childhood.

DS: Can you tell me a little bit about your own family status now?

FH: Sure. I have a son who is 26, John? who lives in San Francisco and he was born in New Mexico in 68. I have a daughter who also lives in San Francisco who was born in 1970 in Detroit. They were mostly raised in West Virginia in a household that for nine years included a woman partner with whom I became involved the last year of my mother's life. After they went to school etc., in 88, I became involved with a woman in West Virginia who had two elementary school age children. I lived with her and in 89 or 90 we were outed in a really unpleasant fashion that, primarily by so-called feminists actually. It was terrible, it's not necessarily something I want to have probed exhaustively in print, but an interesting little development. We moved here to Washington, D. C. Vicki is my partner. She has two daughters, one of whom is 16 who is living in West Virginia with her dad right now and a 13 year old who lives with us.

DS: May I ask were you ever married?

FH: I was married in 66 to a more traditional Jewish man, Hillel Leibert and moved with him to New Mexico at the end of 66. Moved to Detroit with him in 69, where he went to school

in social work and it was at that point my turn to call where we were going to move when he finished school and I really wanted to move to the deep south where I knew people like Dottie and Bob, who were directly involved with people we had worked with in the civil rights movement. It was clear that he was going to have major problems with that so, although we went and visited a lot of places in the deep south, we ended up moving to the mountains where Southern Conference Educational Fund had a project working with coal miners.

DS: So you worked with SCEF in West Virginia?

Malloy

FH: I wasn't staff at that point but I moved there specifically because Joe and Karen Maloney were there and I could work informally or, not as staff but I could work with them. I had actually started fund raising for SCEF when I was in Detroit. I met Anne and then later Carl when I was in Georgia in 1963.

DS: Well, I want to go back and get all of that chronologically but I did want to ask the family question. Since we were talking a little bit about Jewish stuff, I wanted to ask if your own relationship to Judaism has changed over time.

FH: I think it has. For a long time I associated the Jewishness with my activeness, activism. I still see that that my activism grew out of ethical and humanist sorts of principles that I think are inherent in Judaism.

DS: Did you see that at the time? You saw it at the time of the civil rights movement.

FH: Yes. I remember talking with people in rural Georgia who never met someone who was Jewish before about why I felt that.

DS: How did they respond?

FH: Some people were kind of baffled but it was because the movement was very centered in the church in a way; although it was the Christian church, it was easier to talk in terms of moral, religious reasons for doing political things. Actually, if you can look at the last Southern Exposure, it has an interesting brief piece by--I forget what he calls himself--Jabba Jones I think. It's John O'Neill who was in southwest Georgia with me. He has an interesting piece which is memories of an old woman who lived in the country, a black woman, with whom some of us lived, her memories of a Jewish staff member who lived with her.

O'Neal

DS: Do you know who that was?

FH: Yes. It was Larry Rubin who actually lives here in Tacoma Park. He found the piece very painful. I thought it just reflected how little we knew of one another and the fact that relationships across race lines much less across religious lines have all sorts of pain in them.

FH: The other thing that I felt about Jewishness that has changed is my sense of myself as an "other" in American society. I think my twenty years in West Virginia, the years in Detroit and New Mexico finally taught me that I was not other than mainstream American. I'm much more comfortable with myself talking with very rural working class people and just assuming that I belong here as much as they do. In a way I think that sense of otherness was a source of pride for a long time in me.

DS: How do you relate to the identity of white?

FH: It's odd. I still think of myself as Mediterranean rather than strictly speaking, white. I'm more comfortable or I'm more accepting of the fact that's how people perceive me and it also gives me an opportunity to say some things that---or to be myself in that context and that makes people think, especially if they are white people about the assumptions they make.

DS: So you use it consciously?

FH: I don't know if it's consciously exactly.

DS: Can you tell me a little bit about your educational past and then how you got involved in politics?

FH: Sure. As I said, in some ways it's one and the same. I went to Little Red Schoolhouse through what they call the elevens which is like sixth grade and then actually my sister probably had a fairly serious learning disability. She hadn't learned to read by the time she was in the equivalent of fifth grade so my mother moved her out of Little Red and I went, actually briefly for two years, to St. Lukes in the Village. Then, I went to Music and Art High School and I would say that moving me from Little Red was the first thing my mother did that really angered and hurt me. In some ways looking back on it, when I talking before about some of her ambivalence about things that were Jewish, etc. I think that there was

always a part of her that felt that things that weren't Jewish were more American or somehow better.

DS: Was there also a class issue?

FH: Yes. I think that in the end that really was a class sort of thing but she would have framed it in other terms. That had something to do with going to St. Lukes. What it did was give my sister a much more structured environment and she was also maturing to the point she was able to learn to read and she was very articulate. She could function just fine if she didn't have to deal with the written language. Of course, for Jewish parents having a child who is not learning how to read is very disturbing.

DS: That was a question that I had. What kind of messages did you get, I guess from both your parents but particularly, your mother and maybe even Charity, about education and what you were supposed to do?

FH: Well, it was very highly valued and it was always seen much the way athletic ability was when I lived in West Virginia among working class families for their boys, as a way, if you could do well in school you could move up in the world and that you had an obligation, both to your family and to the world to use your intellectual abilities. I was a very good student. I think, I've always said that the best education that I received was at Little Red. It taught me to trust myself and it was very child centered and that the philosophy of Little Red (this is hard to do in an interview) but I think there are connections between the way I was treated as a child at the Little Red Schoolhouse and the philosophy of organizing, which in some ways is the philosophy of teaching that Ella Baker taught us and SNCC encouraged us to use.

DS: Do you want to try to articulate that? I understand what you are saying but-----

FH: Just in the sense that what I think of as the tenets of what she taught us and encouraged us to use was a really deep trust that the people in the communities where we worked knew themselves what needed to be done and that what they needed was some help in using their own strengths and abilities. A really deep belief in the autonomy of the people we were organizing. That we didn't have to impose anything from above. I haven't read that much of the progressive educators although I taught school for years but I think that there was a deep sense among some of them that the material the child needs in order to learn exists within the child. You don't have to civilize the child and whip it into submission or humiliate it into learning.

DS: We are sort of jumping ahead to organizing which I don't want to do, I just want to get your whole educational path first, but the question that I'm formulating is do you think that experience helped you settle into the role of organizer a little more easily than perhaps some of the other white or Jewish women coming from the North might have?

FH: I didn't work with that many women from similar backgrounds because I was so early. Dottie was in Atlanta and I was in southwest Georgia and they were worlds apart. But, I think that might be true. In terms of the educational paths, I even think that Little Red would be where I learned about Paul Robeson, where we studied so called Negro spirituals along with other music and something important, Brown vs. Board of Education, a decision which happened when I was in ~~sixth~~ fifth grade. There was even a pretty explicit teaching that racism was an important thing to struggle against.

DS: Were there other black women on the staff there? Would you say that you saw any evidence of an alliance between progressive and black and Jewish women teachers there?

FH: I honestly don't know what other kind of women remember teachers there were. I suspect that at least some of them were not Jewish. I don't know that there was another black staff member. There were a small number of black students but even in the 1950's I was aware that there was a very small number and that the school, because a teacher was in my family, that the school had to exert some effort to even bring those numbers up. I also knew that a student who was younger than both my sister and me I believe, there was a brief period where a black student would get off the subway from Harlem and then walking to Little Red was attacked by a kid from the Catholic School. I don't know if he was ever physically hurt but he was threatened and I knew that coming to Little Red was difficult for children who came from other neighborhoods. So then, I went to St. Lukes for a couple of years and mostly I just experienced a place I didn't want to be and I think it really, my sort of devotion to Little Red Schoolhouse and my identity as a Little Red Schoolhouse student got mixed up with a thirteen year old kind of anger at parents and so it was very important to me to maintain myself as a Little Red sort of person. For instance, when the sit ins started in 1960 which was a little later, my classmates at Elizabeth Irwin, and that class actually included Angela Davis although she was not in the elementary school class, my classmates were picketing Woolworths and I went with them once or twice because it was important to me to do that.

DS: I'm sorry, I don't know what Elizabeth Irwin is.

FH: A private school. Elizabeth Irwin was a colleague of John Dewey and the founder I believe of Little Red. I could have the wrong person but that was what I was taught. That's great in that she was a woman in that movement who was of equal importance to him.

DS: Oh how wonderful. I went to John Dewey High School which was an experimental, public high school in Brooklyn based on that philosophy.

FH: Did you know that Little Red started as a similar public school experiment? When it broke off, I think it had to do with the faculty being too radical. It also like Dewey was a public school experiment at one point. Then I went to Music and Art High School and aside from the fact that I really believe in that kind of education for adolescents where they have a chance to do something, to experiment with something that's not just academic. I think that Music and Art was one of the things that helped me ultimately move beyond the sort of Greenwich Village liberal idea that people, the whole class confusion, that the Jewish Greenwich Village world had that sees people from working class backgrounds as being less aware politically, less sensitive to racial or whatever issues. At that point in Music and Art's history there was a wonderful sense of comraderie that was for its time pretty cross-racial.

DS: Did you go there with a particular dream to do a particular thing?

FH: No. I think I probably had some fears about going to "regular public high school" from my very sheltered childhood. I also tried out for Hunter and got in but I really liked drawing and painting and was so encouraged at Little Red. I always wanted to do that and I heard that neat kids, whatever that meant, went to Music and Art. I didn't actually know anyone who went there although I understand Dottie was there. I don't think she was there my freshman year. I think she's old enough older than I am that we went there at the same time. I had just heard that interesting people went to school there.

DS: What years were you there?

FH: I believe that I graduated in 61. I went all four years so I would have started four years before that.

DS: What would you say was your absolutely first political act, public political act?

FH: In a lot of ways walking down my street when I was a child with Charity and my mother was a political act, in the sense that people did call us names. It was definitely that. My first demonstration, hmmm. Well, back before getting to the demonstrations, there were events that Charity took me to that I would guess were sponsored by the Teachers Union maybe. I remember hearing Pete Seeger sing when he was blacklisted and a couple of concerts that must have been benefits for something but I don't quite remember what. What I remember is just a tremendous sense of belonging, solidarity, etc.

DS: Do you remember McCarthyism?

FH: Yes. My best friend's father was called as were lots of people and I remember him sitting in front of the television and yelling back at him. The woman who had been my teacher when I was four had some connection or maybe was friends with the Meerpols or maybe even a direct connection with the Rosenberg children before they started living with them. I just remember knowing that and that my mother went to demonstrations around the time they were executed as did several parents of kids in my class.

DS: You just thought of your mother as sort of an ambivalent liberal but she did go to demonstrations which for that time was just a little more than just the nice Jewish liberal. What other things was she involved in?

FH: I really can't think of anything specifically. She would have signed petitions and done that sort of thing. Actually, she and Charity had the first interracial children's television show on commercial t.v. There was no public t.v. in those days. It was a music show on Saturday mornings which probably would have been on the air from 1955 for a few years. At one point NBC's lawyers called my mother and Charity in and said that some one had complained that they had been prematurely anti-fascist and what they cited in my mother's case was that she had signed some petition concerned with Spain. It's really sad that she died in 1973 of cancer and I can't ask her what that was all about. I know she did some things but she didn't belong to any regular group whereas Charity went to Teachers Union meetings. As far as my first demonstration, the first ones I remember have to do with peace, SANE kinds of politics. I didn't go, but in 1955 there was, I think it was a children's march on Washington. It was a year after Brown vs. Board of Education. I did not go to that but I went to some similar events in New York at that time. I think the essence of what they were about was insisting that the federal government live up to the mandate of Brown vs. Board of Education.

DS: Do you know a woman named Rachel Horowitz?

FH: Yes. I didn't know her at the time. I have since seen her once or twice. She has been at events that I've been at and I have always wanted to ask and maybe you do or don't know whether the Pam Horowitz that married Julian Bond is related to her.

DS: I don't know that.

FH: It seems like such a trivial question.

DS: I think relationship questions are very revealing. When did Pam Horowitz marry Julian Bond?

FH: I'm not sure. In 88 or so is when his first wife, who I believe was named Alice, went to the newspapers with stories about him and cocaine, womanizing. Julian is not one of my close friends but I run into him every few years or so and I gather it really shook him in a fundamental kind of way. I don't think he and Alice had been happy for a long time. He, in a way, severed some of his ties to Georgia and settled here in D. C. which was where he lived for a long time. Sometime, I'm trying to think, maybe even at the SNCC conference in 88 in Hartford, Pam was with him. I think so but they weren't married yet and this would have been a year after his first wife had gone to the newspapers and he had a really devastating, ugly, match with John Lewis in Georgia for the House of Representatives seat. I think once he lost to John and the things that happened with Alice, he pretty much left Georgia emotionally as his base and reportedly examined how he had been living his life and at some point met this woman Pam who is a lawyer and that's all I know.

DS: Well, thank you. I had seen a speech of his, somebody had given me a speech of his on black/Jewish relations. It was very positive so I guess we can assume that Pam Horowitz is a Jewish woman.

FH: Dottie should know actually. She and Julian have remained close friends.

DS: Yes. It sounded that way. I can ask her about that.

FH: On to my education. When I was at Music and Art, in addition to the SANE type demonstrations, I know I was involved in some demonstrations in connection with the Cuban

revolution that were on the proper side, the left side. Although, I couldn't tell you exactly what provoked them or what they were for. Then I also had become involved through student government with the National Council of Christians and Jews. At their summer leadership camp that they used to run for high school students in the summer of 1960, which would have been the end of my junior year in high school, I met some students who had been involved in the sit ins and freedom rides which was my direct entree to SNCC.

DS: Where was this camp?

FH: It was held in Beacon, New York and one of the things I remember about it was that before he had gotten on national television and been reintegrated into the mainstream, Pete Seeger used to come and sing at that camp. I went two summers, once as a camper and once as a quasi-leadership type person. It may not have been that summer but it was through that NCCJ connection that I met Charles McDew who was chair of SNCC at the time and Diane Nash who became Diane Nash Bevel, who was a very important leader in the freedom rides. Diane who is not mentioned as often as she should be.

DS: I know.

FH: I was also at that time, through NCCJ, involved with a group called the Harlem Brotherhood Group which was high school and college students who were involved in mostly doing surveys around housing but about five to ten of us became one of those very close groups that spend a lot of time at one another's houses and doing everything from going to the beach at Riis Park together to demonstrating to going to meetings. It's just a very heady kind of thing that I think happens to some high school age people around politics, around other things. One of the things that's interesting is I was one of the only white people in that group and that one of the women I was closest to, I was in high school and she was in junior high school, but became very involved with the Nation of Islam during those years. I don't know if you saw the special on Malcolm X but she became, one of her intermediate identities was ~~Sharon~~ Sherron Ten X. Her name is Amina Rahman. Actually, Amina and her lover and their baby spent last weekend at our house but Amina was also involved with SNCC and I think the fact that we could stay friends and I think in a principled way, is one of the things that helped me learn that what was called at that time Black Nationalism---I don't know exactly how to say it except that I could be comfortable with that and I could understand that. That's a really important thing for a white political person to learn and some never did.

DS: Could you spell her name because I think this is a really important point.

FH: Amina. I believe she spells her last name R a h m a n. She pronounces it as if there's a "c" and I have always spelled it Rachman. One of the things that's fascinating about Amina, and I never thought to ask her this when I'm with her but during the few years that we communicated very little, although there wasn't any hostility, I don't think.

DS: What years were those?

FH: That was 66 or 67 to the very early 70's. She had a daughter probably in 68 or 69 whom she named Sabra and I always thought for a woman in the Nation of Islam or by then she would have been in traditional--she moved from, at the time of Malcolm's death to traditional Islamic religion. That for a woman in that situation to name her child Sabra which is a very Israeli identified name was absolutely fascinating. I'm quite sure it had not only a lot to do with her friendship with me but the people who were with her as she was becoming political.

DS: One of my frustrations with the current black/Jewish discussion in the city is that I feel like the women's perspective is left out of it and I have this intuitive sense that if you had more information about women in this whole discussion that a very different picture would emerge. So this is really exciting to me.

FH: You could certainly call her. I have to go downstairs to get her number.

DS: That's great. Let's remember that at the end.

FH: She's all over the second half of the book on the Malcolm film, Make It Plain, Bill Strickland's book. She was Sharon Ten X in the film but she was quoted as Amina Rahman in the book.

DS: I'll have to look at what I have here. So other people in that group that you were tight with. Can you sort of describe the composition of the group.

FH: One of them with whom I've lost touch, actually I'm trying to find her right now, was some one named Peggy Damond who made the move from that group at least briefly into SNCC also and also through southwest Georgia.

Dammond

DS: Yes. I think I remember seeing her name.

FH: She's a black woman. Very light skinned. Her picture is all over Danny Lyon's book.

DS: Yes. I know which one.

FH: She's right on the front page. A very little skinned Negro woman, black woman with blondish hair and she was the granddaughter of the Trotter family.

SECOND TAPE

DS: Thank you for all the stuff. I just got home so I haven't had a chance to read it, but I think it's going to be really, really helpful. Selfish person that I am I would like to ask for the opportunity to read it and then if I have follow up questions, maybe give you a call again.

FH: Sure.

DS: I think we still have plenty that we can talk about now. As I said, I listened to the earlier tape and there were a couple of little questions that I just wanted to ask to make sure that I understand what you already told me and then would like to get on to the civil rights movement. The one thing that I remember your saying that your mom did in terms of work was working on the t.v. show. Did she do other things to support you?

FH: In the 1940's she worked in writing advertising copy. In the early 50's I remember going to her office at Macy's at one point and then work became harder for women to get.

DS: As Betty Freidan pointed out.

FH: We probably got by on alimony checks from my dad and little odd jobs, editing and stuff and then in the late 50's, she authored a couple of children's science books and then became an editor. I believe her first job was at Prentice Hall as a children's book editor and she did that until she died in the early 70's. Not just at Prentice Hall. She moved around some but she was a children's book editor.

DS: Can I ask about your sister? What does she do?

FH: Well, she was a student at Performing Arts High School and in 1966 moved to India to study dance there. She had taken some guest classes here in this country and went to study with someone who had her own troupe in northern India. Actually, she became a fashion model there for several years and eventually moved to France in 1972. She lived there for seven years and then married someone. She works as a dance therapist and teaches modern dance.

DS: I hope you visit her often.

FH: Actually, in all these years I've only visited her once. Partly because of the expense but until a year and a half ago, our father lived in Arizona so I would occasionally see her when she went to see him there because he was paying for her to do that.

DS: I know how that feels. I don't recall if you told me the year that you were divorced.

FH: I separated from my husband in 72 or 73. The divorce was a couple or a few years later. West Virginia had one of those laws, when you don't live together for two years or three years, you get a no fault divorce.

DS: Can I ask you to spell his name because it wasn't really clear on the tape.

FH: Sure. His first name was Hillel which you know how to spell and his last name is Liebert.

DS: Thanks. Now, I would like to ask you to take me from New York to how you got down south.

FH: Okay. As I said, through the National Council of Christians and Jews a group of us working in Harlem had met people connected with SNCC, specifically Diane Nash and Chuck McDew, Charlie Jones and Tim Jenkins. That was Christmas of 61. I told you that piece that I went to jail in Maryland.

DS: No, you didn't.

FH: Well, that was my first trip south. People were planning to do a sit in in Quickfield, Maryland which was the home town of the Governor of Maryland at the time, on Christmas

Eve. I can't remember exactly how people I knew heard about it but I went and Peggy Damond, who was part of the group in Harlem, also went. A couple of other people from New York, one of whom was connected with NCCJ, but wasn't a close friend, and the sit in was staged by people in Baltimore, the Baltimore Civic Action Group, I think it was called. We went to Baltimore, we were trained in non-violence and all that and we drove a very long car trip to Quickfield which is all the way on the eastern shore of Maryland. We sat in and were arrested Christmas Eve and stayed in jail for a week or ten days and were released. I guess what's interesting aside from the fact that it was my entree into the south, is that two SNCC staff people stayed on the eastern shore after we got out of jail and the result of their work and local activism became the Cambridge Movement which Gloria Richardson led. Gloria's brother Freddie Sinclair, was our bail bondsman. Their family, the generation older than Gloria and Freddie, became sort of the base for a while for SNCC. The following summer of 62, SNCC had a precursor to the 64 summer project in Albany, Georgia. Albany had, not long before I was arrested, erupted in the first mass marching kinds of demonstrations which became a pattern in other parts of the south. That was in the autumn of 62. SNCC decided to have the summer project with a few students from the north coming down to southwest Georgia and Peggy Damond who was part of the group that I was part of was one of the people who went. I stayed in New York that summer but was doing some fund raising and making phone calls and stuff for SNCC. There was no SNCC office at that point. There was a nucleus of people who were interested at that point in New York. At the end of that summer in 1962 three churches were burned in southwest Georgia and I decided to go south, take a year off from Barnard where I had just finished my freshman year and went south for a year. I worked in southwest Georgia. The end of my year there was when Medgar Evers was killed and the march on Washington happened. Shortly after that four children were killed in the church bombed in Birmingham. I worked in a voter registration project in southwest Georgia for part of the year in Albany and for part of the year in Terrell County which was---

DS: Terrible Terrell.

FH: Right.

DS: Before we even get down to Albany, let me ask you if you can remember your feelings about being in jail the first time. What was that like for you?

FH: Well, it was a little scary. I don't think we were particularly threatened. We just went to a small, what they call down there, a cafe, kind of like a diner or a coffee shop. It was a

cafe because it was the south and I have actually driven through that town and I think I found the place where we were arrested. The jail house was just a square cinder block building and almost more like a house except the walls were all cinderblock. The only people in the women's cell were those of us who had been arrested and we were all in this one big room that, except for the fact that it was cinder block, was not too different from a dormitory. We could hear the men who were in the next cell although they were on the other side of a little hallway and we couldn't see them. It wasn't barred like a jail. We were locked in but it wasn't behind bars.

DS: When you went down were you prepared to stay that long?

FH: Yes. What I remember about the first night in jail, is that the faculty from the local, what would have been called Negro Teachers College in those days, heard about the arrest on the radio or by word of mouth, and they came to carol us and it was really very moving.

DS: About how many women were you in jail with?

FH: There was Peggy and myself and a woman named Angeline Butler who I think is the person who became a singer but I'm not sure. A woman named Diane Ostrofsky who was more noticeably or identifiably Jewish than myself. Diane was from Baltimore and came through Baltimore CORE and a woman named Bonnie Kelstein from New York who had actually been born Jewish and converted to the Episcopal Church a year or so before we went to jail.

Kilstein

DS: Did you talk about that at all?

FH: Some. Bonnie was a couple of years older than me and also involved with NCCJ. We weren't particularly close. I know that she converted partly as a response to working with Father C. Kilmore Myers on the Lower East Side who was in a parish there doing work with gangs. But, no we never really discussed it in depth. She actually received communion while she was in jail on Christmas Day. That was a big deal. Her conversion was very important to her but it was not something that interested the rest of us a whole lot.

Kilmer

DS: You started at Barnard. Did you have any idea of what you would be studying or doing?

FH: When I started in college? I don't think so, no. I was always a good student and both of my parents were editorial sorts of people so I think I shied away from English. When I came

back from southwest Georgia there was one professor in sociology at Barnard whom I liked a lot and what sociologists talked about was interesting to me. The government department at Barnard was very much full of prelaw students and still is. In those days that was fairly unusual and the law really didn't interest me.

DS: Who was the sociologist?

FH: Her name was Gladys Wolf Meyer and she had written a book on race relations that if I read it now would seem quite old fashioned. She had done some work in Chinatown but I liked her because she said it was important to talk about power relationships when you talked about sociology. That was considered very crude in those days I guess. She was an older woman, I guess, in her 50's. Well, that's not so old, in her 60's perhaps. She's dead now. The other ideological wing of that department was people who had studied with or allied themselves with Talcott Parsons, the so-called value-free sociology that, of course, has its own values.

DS: This was prior to feminist scholarship's critique of all of that I'm sure. How did you make the decision to go south?

FH: I think it was very impulsive because I really saw myself as this city activist. I was very clear that I was going to go back and work in New York although as soon as I finished college, in fact, I left.

DS: What was the thinking behind your New York City activist identification?

FH: Just that I found what I was doing in Harlem and on the Lower East Side really interesting. I don't know that people were using the words participatory democracy yet but some of the people that I was working with in Harlem in a few years would become involved with Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited which used teenagers essentially to do a major study of power and powerlessness in Harlem. Kenneth Clark was associated with it.

DS: Did you work with CORE at all?

FH: I wasn't hostile to them. I knew people in CORE but I didn't work directly with them, no. I was very much identified with SNCC once I met people from there.

DS: So even when you were doing the work in Harlem when you were a student before you want down south, you identified as a SNCC person?

FH: In terms of groups other than that very local effort in Harlem, yes. It's really hard to remember all this.

DS: Let me ask about your family's response to this decision. Was Charity still living with you at that point?

FH: No she was living in her own apartment at that point. Both she and my mother expressed concern for my safety and I think it was at that point more than any other that I realized how ambivalent they were about this tremendous upsurge. That they really, of course, supported everything the civil rights movement was for, but also their feelings [reflected] all the garbage that people who are basically right thinking carry around with them if they grew up in a racist society. I think Charity especially was very confused about how she felt.

DS: You talked about that ambivalence again and I'm still having a little hard time----

FH: It's hard because it's not something that was talked about but Charity maintained her ties to several friends from her youth in Harlem. But, she really made her adult life in the white world. She's not light skinned so she was clearly a black person. She wasn't passing or anything but the place where she ended up doing her work, I guess it's racism among other things, was in an almost entirely white setting. If I think about it, she probably had very mixed feelings about black people who were southern. Probably had some old fashioned feelings about our youth.

DS: Well, you were really young. I didn't realize you were a first or second year college student.

FH: I was 18 when I was arrested the first time and 19 when I went to Albany. I turned 20 when I was there.

DS: And when you went to Albany, did you go by yourself?

FH: When I went to work with the southwest Georgia project, I got on a plane that went to Atlanta and then they put me on a Greyhound for Albany. I think that was probably in some

ways the time that I felt most nervous was the bus trip from Atlanta to Albany. As I remember it, but maybe I have embroidered this, Sherrod, the project director was there to meet me and some other people from SNCC, but also the police if I remember. Because all the phones were tapped so they always knew who was coming to town and how they were getting there.

DS: I know that was designed to be an interracial project but I also know that it was very hard for white women to get into the movement at such an early time. How did you get in? How did you become allowed to become a field worker?

FH: I think Peggy Damond is one reason. The person who had been there the summer before. Sherrod who was the project director had met me through, he had done some fund raising in New York or whatever and he wouldn't have sent me to Mississippi but I don't know that SNCC was turning anyone away in those days. By the time I volunteered to go south and he had wanted me to go at the beginning of the summer, Sherrod was "going" with my younger sister, exactly what that meant I don't know. They were hundreds of miles apart, but he was quote going with my younger sister so he knew who I was. He had been at my house. I don't know. It never occurred to me that anybody would say no actually although there certainly was some discomfort around being white. There were a lot of restrictions on my freedom of movement.

DS: Could you say specifically how you felt the discomfort and what the restrictions were?

FH: Well, the restrictions were that it was really important not to jeopardize other people's safety by my presence. For instance, being in a car by myself with a black man from the movement. I think Sherrod called it the movement anti-lynch law but maybe, I've made that up. I mean I write fiction so some of this----if he didn't call it the movement anti-lynch law that was certainly the gist of it.

DS: Would it be correct to say that Sheppard is him in your writings?

FH: Right. It was a long time before I moved out to Terrell County but at the time, I moved out there when Prathia Hall came back. She had been there the summer before and before that there hadn't been another female staff member who could go out there.

DS: And she's black?

FH: Yes.

DS: So you two went together and did others go or just you two?

FH: Well, we had had an ongoing project; people had moved out there the summer before. That was actually where one of the churches burned and that's where Jack Chatfield was shot in the arm. He was one of the summer students in 61.

DS: 61 or 62.

FH: 62, sorry.

DS: I have this elaborate grid that I made for myself because it's so hard to keep track of all of this. Do you remember your feelings about the work that you did?

FH: Oh, yes. I was really happy. I liked the organizing part. I found it very interesting to be in a place where things were where I had to learn a lot.

DS: What did you do exactly?

FH: In Albany at the beginning I worked on a voter registration campaign which involved canvassing and record keeping and working with high school students to do canvassing. Also, because Albany was the center of the southwest Georgia project, we were the ones who by and large dealt with the Justice Department or the newspapers or the Atlanta office. There was a fair amount of telephone work and report writing and that kind of stuff. At one point, one of the few times I remember rebelling---Sherrod was discriminating against me because I was female and he said he was because I didn't want to keep the books but nobody did. I mean, such as they were. I don't think I did. I can't remember how that was resolved. The Albany movement at the time I got there had a number of ongoing projects. There had been a bus boycott and the city of Albany terminated bus service for the entire city so the movement ran a volunteer, we ran our own bus system that couldn't pretend to take over what the other system had done, but it got people to work in white neighborhoods. That's mostly what it did was get people from the black side of town into white neighborhoods where they had jobs working in people's houses. Then by the time I left, the movement was beginning literacy classes and sort of general trouble shooting. For example, if a family's house was burned down it took on

and assigned me to book-keeping

some of the functions of getting money, etc. By the time I left, the people associated with the movement and the lines were very blurry, I think--for instance, were beginning the first Head Start program.

DS: Really, that early?

FH: Maybe a year later. For sure, a year after I left. It was one of the first ones in the country. I think the ones in Mississippi were early too.

DS: Aside from the bookkeeping controversy, you said to me and also I see it in this little article that your experience was more egalitarian than has generally been portrayed by people like Sara Evans. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with black male staffers and black female staffers? Just how that played out?

FH: That's such a general question. It's really hard to answer.

DS: Were there conflicts that you experienced?

FH: Conflicts? I don't know that they were based on race. Some of them were. Some of the people that I worked with had never ever dealt with a white person as a peer or a friend so there were a lot of stereotypes. I did come into it with that experience of having grown up in a household with someone who was black and also the work in Harlem. I think some people had a hard time because it was like they were their first black people. It's hard for me to answer such a general question as the relationships, racial dynamics of relationships.

DS: Let me ask a more specific question. Some one that I interviewed said that she didn't know you but said that you were dating Sherrod.

FH: No. That was my sister. I was not involved with anybody I worked with when I was in Albany. That seemed really crazy in terms of danger although I know some people did it. I was involved with Reggie Robinson who was a SNCC field secretary who that year was doing mostly campus traveling. Reggie was one of the people who went to jail in Quickfield and he was one of the people who did the work that started the Cambridge movement.

DS: When you were doing the campus work were you traveling all over the country or is this just in the south?

FH: No, this was just him. He was doing it. In other words, he was not in southwest Georgia.

DS: But, were you involved with him at that time when you were there?

FH: Yes.

DS: Did you know or work with Joni Rabinowitz?

FH: Yes. I came down in September or October. I'm not sure which and Joni came down the following spring on Antioch Work Study maybe. She wasn't there more than three or four months, but you would know better than I.

DS: Could you tell me a little bit about what she was like or how you two worked together? Did you work together?

FH: At that time, I was in Terrell County when she arrived and I don't remember a whole lot. I remember that when she arrived she found the restrictions on her movements really onerous and actually I thought about Joni when I was talking about restrictions on our movements. They seemed very functional to me; they seemed to make sense but I think she felt they were onerous. I think she had a set of sensitivities in terms of what people might be feeling about her presence. She may not have been as aware of how that really was inflammatory for young white women to be living with black people.

DS: How do you understand the difference in your perception of that?

FH: Well, I don't know what experience Joni brought to that situation. In some ways, she may have been a more assertive person than I was but at that point, looking back on it, I think the fact that I was quite soft spoken and quiet acted to my advantage in the sense that it gave me more time to factor in what other people were thinking and feeling.

DS: I haven't talked to her yet.

FH: Are you going to?

DS: I'd like to try and get in touch with her. Are you in touch with her now?

FH: Yes. Actually, I hadn't seen her in thirty years but last year for the April 3rd march, she and the man she's living with were coming to D.C. There were some previous contacts but the first time I had seen her in a very long time was last year for the Gay and Lesbian March. She and the man she's married to or lives with and has for 25 years came to the March and they stopped at my house on their way. They were staying with Larry Rubin, who had also been in southwest Georgia. I stopped on my way to Cleveland and spent the night with her and John.

DS: She's in Cleveland or Pittsburgh?

FH: Pittsburgh, on the way to Cleveland.

DS: I think it would be good to try and talk to her. I'll try and do that. I'm just trying to remember if Dottie gave her number to me or not. If I don't have it I'll ask you for it. Dottie told me Pittsburgh but I don't have her number so that would be good. Let's get back to your experiences in Terrell County. When did you go out there exactly?

FH: It would have been in the spring and it was after Sheriff C. T. Matthews was on trial for intimidating people the summer before. As I remember it, the federal government brought a really weak case against him that should have been very strong as I remember it. I think it would have been in February. The trial was very brief. It was in Americus, Georgia and Prathia and I went out to Terrell County after the trial was over.

DS: Can you tell me about some of the people you worked with out there?

FH: Well, we worked with Carolyn Daniels who was a hairdresser who was really the center of SNCC activity in Terrell County. Carolyn's house was shot into the summer before I got there. She had a son whose name was spelled Rochester, but she pronounced it "Roychester," who was a high school student. During the school year 61/62, some time in there, he had encouraged all of the students in George Washington Carver or whatever the local high school was called to walk out. Roy had had to leave town; he went to live with relatives in Florida after that happened. He was quite a fire brand. Roy lives now in Atlanta I believe. I think Carolyn does too. We couldn't have made any inroads in Terrell County without her support. She was one of the local leaders who just were invaluable. She knew everybody and everybody knew who she was. She had grown up in the county. She's very, very feisty.

DS: Did you immediately get along well or was it uncomfortable?

FH: Carolyn I'm quite sure had been involved with Sherrod and so there was some tension because of my sister. But also, she got along okay with the white men as I remember it but I think the fact that I was a white woman, there was tension around that. We never talked about it directly. It's not that I was miserable there or anything, but there was some tension. Whether it was because of my sister or my race or both, or she didn't like my hair, I don't know. or whatever

DS: Well, I think in one of the writings that you shared with me there seemed to be some sense that maybe you could pass for black or that you sort of got a kick out of that idea.

FH: Yes. Well actually the end of the story about Sherrod saying I had to get a driver's license was that I did go out to apply for a learner's permit and I walked into this long narrow cinder block building that was divided down the middle with just a piece of twine and white people were on one side and black people were on the other. I just couldn't bear to walk down the white side so I went down the black side and got a so-called "colored" permit and then he couldn't let me use it because he thought it would be even worse to have me picked up and have the wrong race on my permit so actually I never did learn to drive that year.

DS: What was it like working with him?

FH: He was a Baptist minister and what I came away from the year feeling in spite of a lot of conflicts we had was that I liked talking about political things with a recognition of the moral or if you like, religious dimension. He was a very self righteous person looking back on it, he was incredibly young, like early 20's. Actually, I had a conversation with Ralph Allen, who was one of the white male students who was there. He was saying that it sort of hurt him that one of the main characters in my novel was one of the other white men in the project, he thought. And I said, "Well Ralph, all the people that were interesting and Sherrod wanted to talk to, tended to be male, and you were one of Sherrod's buddies and I didn't get to know you as well." That was part of it.

DS: I have a note to myself from Clay Carson's book that in the spring of 63 the staff was eleven people. Would you be able to reconstruct in southwest Georgia?

FH: Yes. I could try. It would depend when in the spring probably.

DS: Let me tell you the names that I have. Ralph Allan, John Perdew and Peggy Damond.

FH: No. In the spring of 63?

DS: Yes.

FH; No, John Perdew came at the second SNCC summer project. One of the students connected with the second summer project in June of 63. Ralph was there for part of the spring, after the ~~Q.T~~. Matthew's trial that I was talking about. Peggy wasn't there. She was there the summer before. She was the person from Harlem.

DS: She was not there in 63 at all?

FH: No. She was in Boston at the University. Actually, she got married in 63 I think but she was at Boston University. The people who were there were myself, Sherrod, Chico Neblett, Jack Chatfield and then at one point, Chatfield left and Ralph Allan came on in the spring. Someone named John O'Neil. Things just changed so we may end up with more than eleven people. John Churchfield who is in Philly now and who I think came from there. Prathia Hall, Joyce Barrett who was from Philly. Joyce and Prathia both came through one of the Quaker groups in Philadelphia.

O'Neal

DS: Was Joyce black as well?

FH: No. Joyce was white and Ralph Allan and Chatfield were white. All the others were black. How many is that?

Carolyn + Mama D or Eddie Brown

DS: Let's see. Nine.

FH: Then Joni came after spring break. Antioch had weird semesters. As you can see, it was definitely an almost all male staff. Then, right before the summer project but I don't think they would have been counted, Joyce Ladner and Martha Prescott Norman were there but I don't think they would have been in this count. Who else? There were a couple of local people and I don't know if you would have counted them.

Prescod

DS: How did the women interact in this male dominated environment?

FH: Well, the people that I was closest to on a day to day basis were people in the community, most of whom were women. It was sort of a loose collection of people that it would have been hard to say who was staff and who was outsider. I mean who was staff and who was local person. Certainly, the people like Carolyn from Terrell County functioned like SNCC staff people when they were in town. Some of the people who had been expelled from Albany State like Annette Jones White who might have been in that staff count even though she was a local person. Bernice Reagon, although Bernice was hardly ever back but Annette actually spent some time being on staff that spring. Then there was a whole household of people, some of whom, or people like them, were in that small book, <u>While We Were Singing</u>. Rutha May Harris who was one of the original Freedom Singers, she and Bernice were. Rutha May lived in the house with her mother who was a teacher and two of her older sisters who were public school teachers and then two brothers who kind of came and went. I got sick with hepatitis and I spent a lot of the summer in their house. In terms of who I would speak to it was more likely to be some of those families and although they were families, it was quite apparent when people started looking at feminist issues, that by and large, the people I related to were by and large women. There was a family with four daughters, three of whom were of junior high school age, who were very active, they and their mother were and that was a house I stayed at a lot. But they were not like Carolyn Daniels in the sense that they weren't fire brands. They were really fire brands but they were members of the Albany movement more than SNCC staff people. Actually, Carolyn may have been in that staff count.

DS: That reminds me of another question that I had. I know it's a question that comes very much from the 80's and 90's but particularly given your mother's relationship with Charity, would you say that there were any women-identified-women or women's partnerships among the women in SNCC?

FH: Not that I know of but I could have missed it and it's very noticeable to me because I did finally come out. I didn't write a declaration and send it around but several people have seen the chap book that I sent you and Reggie has known for years and Martha Prescott Norman, I told her several years ago and Martha talks to lots of people.

DS: Was that a hard decision to make?

FH: It was and it wasn't. I knew that it might mean that I would lose those friendships but in some ways, SNCC people really have functioned like my family because of my mother's death

and my sister's distance, it suddenly felt really silly to be so close say to Martha, and have her think I was this heroic, single mother. I was in many ways but there were some things she just didn't know. I would have to think that there must have been some partnerships but probably a lot of it was unacknowledged even to the people themselves. I think that that experience of being in that community with the friends that I just described was an early, very positive experience of women, of women's community to me. We would never have used those words but I saw those friendships as really vital to survival. I felt that was true for the women in that community too, that women were their mainstay in a lot of ways.

DS: Have you kept in touch with any of the women there?

FH: Well, I see Bernice occasionally. Bernice Reagon. The last time I saw a lot of people from Albany was 82 and occasionally, Joanne Christian, who was one of the junior high school girls and I have written over the years. Our first children were born the same year. She's very peripherally involved with some people; she lives in Lowndes County. Ralph Allan went to Albany three or four summers ago and stayed with Joanne Christian's mother who is one of these older women.

DS: Are you going to that reunion by the way?

FH: In Mississippi? I'm thinking about it. I wasn't in Mississippi. I was working in New York that summer at the SNCC office but Jean Wheeler Smith here, (she's a woman whose name pops up in SNCC history a fair amount, she's all over Danny Lyon's book), she's talking about renting a van and I would love to spend a week with Jean so that alone might be a reason. I sort of shunned a lot of those big events but I think I might go.

DS: Can I ask why you shunned the big events?

FH: Well, shunned might be the wrong word. When I lived in West Virginia, I didn't have the money. Some of them I found out about too late. What I have gone to is an Albany reunion in 82 that the Smithsonian helped sponsor and Martha, who was in Detroit at the time, called me and said you have to go and so I did and I'm really glad. Then I went to the conference in 88, partly because it was sponsored by Chatfield. I just knew, I had this feeling, that it would be a really good thing.

DS: That was the one in Connecticut?

FH: Yes. Oh, and I went to Miss Baker's 80th birthday party which was in New York in December of 78 probably but I couldn't afford to go to her funeral just a few years later.

DS: Tell me a little bit about her impact on you. I love asking this questions because people, I can feel people light up over the phone.

FH: I feel sort of inarticulate about her though. I mean especially since in the last three weeks I wrote that speech that talked about her and I said most of what I could say except I was very lucky to know her and to be exposed to her. Her stance towards organizing was just that it's teaching. The teachers are always the ones being taught kind of. I just don't know what to say.

DS: I'll read that more carefully. That actually reminds me that I want to ask you about the other woman that you wrote about, Anne Braden. I have been trying to figure out, I don't remember if I asked this, if there were any southern Jewish women involved in the civil rights movement and if there were, perhaps they would have been around SCEF and Anne Braden. Do you know anyone?

FH: I don't off hand. There is a strange phenomenon of southern Jews losing their identities. I have an MFA and I met someone in that program who grew up in Americus, Georgia. She's a little younger than I am, a white woman and she was talking about the fact that "everybody knows that her family was originally Jewish but now they're not, they are white racists." That there was almost like a whole clump of whitewashed Jews in America who were land owners and everything. I think that's true a lot in the South but I can't think of anybody. Anne might know.

DS: I did write to her.

FH: She's terribly busy as you probably heard. She responds better to the phone than letters.

DS: I don't want to lose the chronology. Your mentioning the MFA reminded me to ask after you spent the year there and then you went back to school in New York and finished Barnard, how did you make that transition?

FH: It was very difficult and I think it was a mistake. I think that's considered therapeutically incorrect these days to say that. I had hepatitis when I came back. Looking back on it I didn't

feel physically well for almost a year but I also think I was not ready to leave the South but I had told my mother I would after a year. I think I shouldn't have. I was also pretty traumatized in terms of having been afraid for a lot of that year.

DS: Yes, do you want to talk about that specifically?

FH: Well, when everything you do is subject to scrutiny and every phone call you make is and possibly every time you go the bathroom, it may be being recorded, I think there is that uncanny sense the first time, like when I showed up at the bus station in Albany, Georgia and the police were there. I remember one time Bill Hanson called up from Atlanta and said I'm coming into town, I should be there about one and the state police were waiting at the town limits for him. That sense that they will just show up because they have access to your phone calls. All the classic stuff, driving down the highways at night being followed. And then just because the staff was very small, so we were in the community living with people's stories about what had happened to their family members. Outside Albany, Georgia there was this one tree that supposedly five people or eleven people or something really incredible, had been hung from, including a woman. Sherrod was really good at talking about, as were lots of SNCC people, the oppressiveness of these stories that get told over and over again in controlling people. I remember his saying and it may have been when Joni arrived that I had become a valuable staff member.

DS: I get a sense of Joni Rabinowitz as a bit of a "tornado." Do you have any sense of that?

FH: I don't know about a tornado partly because I wasn't in town, but a certain kind of unawareness of her possible impact. Of course, there were other political things that happened later in terms of her being implicated in that trial of movement leaders. I assume you know that. What her father's identity did or didn't have to do with all of that.

DS: Do you have a take on that or insight into that?.

FH: It's interesting, when I visited Joni, I almost felt like she said something about being very careful not to take a conspiratorial position but I always thought that it was clear as clear could be that people didn't want us to associate with people like Victor Rabinowitz.

DS: When you say people didn't want you to, which people?

FH: The Justice Department and the white people in Albany, Georgia. The Justice Department really was pretty hard on the Albany movement which to me said we must have been doing something right.

DS: Well, I wanted to ask you what is your assessment thirty years later of the impact of the Albany movement?

FH: Well, I haven't been back so I don't necessarily know. I think that I find it hard to even begin to describe the depth of the involvement and the range of the involvement of people in that movement at its height. Just the Avon ladies and the children. I don't know how else to say it exactly but I think it was a very threatening occurrence even though I know that movement is portrayed officially now in some circles as a failure. When people would describe Cuba in the early days or whatever, there was a similar sense of massive involvement and understanding and commitment. I know that there have been some concrete accomplishments like integration. Charles Sherrod has been a city council member off and on over the last twenty years. Just the fact that Albany produced important song leaders and song writers and carried the use of movement or songs in the movement to a new level from the freedom rides. The freedom rides had certainly begun that process or the freedom rides were a point of development in a centuries-old use of singing in the struggle. There was a particular way that that happened in the freedom rides and there was a particular way that that happened in Albany and because of the connections that were made with people like Pete Seeger, the Freedom Singers, who really grew out of the Albany movement, were able to take that nationwide pretty quickly. You would have to talk to her but I think that sort of approach to politics and culture shaped what Bernice chose to do with her life. I know as I say that Head Start grew out of the movement as it did elsewhere. I believe if you dug around, there were some things like a sort of benevolent burial society kind of thing that was started. One of the things in the south, even towns like Albany in those days, were very far behind the rest of the country in terms of welfare. I can remember when we suddenly realized that people didn't get welfare unless the plantation owner approved them or whatever so we started taking people down to apply for welfare as well as to register to vote if it was something they were eligible for. I think I'm really tired tonight.

DS: Yes.

FH: So I think there was what Marxists would call reformist kinds of things that happened in Albany. There was that incendiary period when it really was remarkable the depths of

political involvement and understanding. Then you would really have to talk with people who are still there in terms of how much things did or didn't change.

DS: Well, what was it's impact on you?

FH: On me, it was a way of a continuation of Little Red Schoolhouse in the sense of an approach to learning in life. I don't know how to say it.

DS: I understand what you're trying to say.

FH: And a trust in people. It was positive. I guess I need to say that although it should be something that goes without saying. I did not come away with some of the senses of ambivalence that I think some northerners especially did but I continued politically active and maybe that's why it seems part of the piece of my life not at all a separate chunk.

DS: You seem to have negotiated a little bit better the tension that arose with the rise of black power. Can you say how you negotiated that as it was actually happening in the mid-60's?

FH: I stayed on the New York SNCC staff through the summer of 65 and was still--

DS: So when you were in school, you were still working with SNCC in New York?

FH: I went back and worked. Went to school. That was my job. Then went to the New York Office. I spent a lot of my non-school time in the New York SNCC office and that would have been true through the spring of 66 probably. I don't know. It was very painful to me understanding that I was a white person and that the place I had to work with was a place I didn't know anything about, which was the white community. When I decided to leave New York and move to areas where I had never lived, at the time, and this certainly fits in with the Jewish identity question, I just found myself as a person in exile who, not because of something the movement had done, but the repression of movement people became worse and worse. I was living in New Mexico which was so far away, I couldn't come home.

DS: I wanted to ask you how you got to New Mexico.

FH: Well, it was a compromise with my husband. He really didn't want to go south and on our way to New Mexico we actually drove through the South including Albany. It was in the

autumn of 66 and Anne and Carl both, Dottie and Bob were in New Orleans. Anne and Carl really would have loved for us to move to the South. I probably would have done it if I had been by myself.

DS: Was your husband in the movement?

FH: No. He had been involved with SANE, anti-nuclear sorts of politics. I think a lot of his friends, not his family, probably were red diaper babies. His first wife had been one. Anyway, the southwest was a place that wasn't the South and wasn't New York City.

DS: Where did you live in New Mexico?

FH: Sante Fe. I think I said a little bit whenever we spoke I did work some with the Brown Berets and there was an anti war movement and the land grant movement was very active at the time.

DS: What was your next stop?

FH: Detroit. Liebert went to social work school and we moved there probably in 69 and left late summer of 71. He started work in West Virginia in September of 71. In Detroit, I worked for a radical education project. All the people there except for myself had come from the Rim Two wing of SDS. Actually I had a very amazing experience one day. Our office was in a warehouse building and these two people came through and they were on the run. They were Weather people. They had given up their children and stuff and I suddenly realized that, I can't remember who he was and I wouldn't say anyway, that the man who was my age, so he was in his late 20's, was the son of one of the people who had been a member of the parents support group that grew out of the Mississippi summer project. He had been in Mississippi and I knew his family although we didn't discuss it. That afternoon I had never met him. It was very strange. I don't think he was underground this was before. Anyway, it's just an interesting sidelight. The people in Detroit were Rim Two people too.

DS: What was it like for you coming from a SNCC background to working with SDS people?

FH: They were very serious and very principled people a couple or a few years younger than me. I really liked learning how to print and we had lots and lots of heavy duty political discussions about what we should print and I liked that a lot. They were on very close terms

with some of the people connected with the Black Workers Revolutionary Movement and then there was a more overarching group which I can't remember any more. Right before I left Detroit, Dinky Romilly and Forman moved to Detroit and worked with them. But they had the kinds of ties that people had in those days to people working in the black community. There were separate organizations but you often spent time with one another and supported one another's projects and stuff. I maintained friendships with a couple of SNCC people in Detroit--they were married--but that was definitely a women's friendship sort of thing, one of whom was this woman Martha who strongly urged me to go back to Albany in 82 and who was one of the first SNCC people I came out to.

DS: We never really finished that discussion of taking the risk and was it worth it.

FH: I think it was worth it. I think that I was one of the first people in that community to do that so whether I was white or black it was going to be--I mean that community hasn't always said very good things on that subject.

DS: Have they overtly said bad things?

FH: No. Not to me but I have to say that when I look at the very liberal things that people like John Wilson and Frank Smith say now and that the D.C. City Council has done in terms of gay rights and domestic partnership, it's very impressive.

DS: Is he the guy who just died recently like a year ago? I was in Washington the weekend of his funeral. My organization, we organized a conference there.

FH: What conference?

DS: Well, I worked for the National Council for Research on Women and that was just our annual meeting. We worked with Florence Bonner who is the head of what will be women's studies there (she's a sociologist). Joyce Ladner was supposed to speak at our meeting but she couldn't because of the funeral.

FH: He is the one and actually John came down to Albany for that summer project in 63, the second one that John Perdew also came to. I think that John Wilson moved on to live in Mississippi.

Perdue?

DS: Is there a culture of SNCC people who worked in Georgia vs. Mississippi SNCC people?

FH: I don't know. I think because of my friendships with Martha and some other people and the fact that I found the work that Bob Moses and other Mississippi people including Dorie, very interesting and attractive I didn't feel that and Dorie was someone I thought an important friend in SNCC. I think definitely there were some differences say between Bob Moses and Charlie Sherrod and I'm almost certain that if I had had the option as a white woman that if I could have gone to Mississippi I would have wanted to do that. But in 62 and 63, that just wasn't considered safe.

DS: Why?

FH: Why would I have wanted to do that? I really respected Bob's approach and this is pre-64 because I think after 64 things were very different. I guess just the sense that what people were doing was very interesting in terms of a more, I don't know, "participatory" has been so overused. I think Bob's approach was a little more consistent with Ella Baker's teaching, that Sherrod was very much, although very young, a Baptist minister.

DS: He sounds pretty authoritarian.

FH: I think if you challenged him, he took it pretty well and for where he came from, he was quite remarkable but yes, I think he was. He was more religious. Bob wasn't and he wasn't a teacher, he was a preacher.

Sherrod

DS: Well, that makes a very big difference in your patterns of communication and your goals.

FH: Yes, it does.

DS: Do you remember any incidents where being Jewish came up in the movement?

FH: I talked a little bit about my feelings about what I felt was the manipulation around the 67 war which was much later. There were remarks but I never heard anyone talk about "jewing some one down" until I got to the South but I also heard that in West Virginia. It was mostly a product of Jews being something people had never ~~heard of~~ met. They had never met, I think. I don't ever remember being called a Christ killer although my daughter was called that in public school in West Virginia. There were--I think there's a thing in one of the stories I

sent you about Sheppard telling her to put up her wild Jew hair and I think there was probably some of that but I don't remember any of it now. I think Sherrod for instance would have seen Judaism as a spiritual ancestor of Christianity rather than some Baptists who I think would see it as the antithesis. At least for me, it wasn't a painful thing. Yes, I taught in public schools in West Virginia where people were still saying grace ten years ago in the public schools. I think there were probably lots of prayers said over meals in the course of my time with SNCC where certainly Jesus was mentioned and all of that. I was so impressed with the feeling I got from 50 people singing together at supper, yes it's true they mentioned Jesus, but I didn't take it as something directed against Jews.

DS: That's consistent with what others I have talked to have said about their feelings of being in black churches. That it just transcended personal Jewish identification.

FH: I know that Larry actually went, now that I think about it. Larry went to the synagogue in Albany when he was there, I think once, and there were no friendly dealings with the local Jewish community and SNCC people in Albany. I don't know about Atlanta or Jackson or some of those places. I think they were not thrilled.

DS: Yes. I think that's the general view. I had an interview with someone and the Jackson Jewish community wasn't too thrilled either.

FH: I don't believe that 90% of the slave owners were Jewish but certainly some were.

DS: And also Jews in the South were in a very difficult position. It's a complex thing and has to be written about really carefully because it's so manipulated, so inflammatory the whole issue. I think we are both getting tired, what do you think?

FH: I'm exhausted. I've had a long day here actually.

DS: I did too. I had a crazy day so maybe we should just end and I will read all the wonderful stuff you sent me which I really appreciate.

FH: I would love to know how your thesis turns out. Actually, I'm curious what you're doing with it, etc. I'm not proposing keeping you up tonight talking about it.

DS: We can certainly have another conversation about it. I would enjoy that. I would enjoy your input as well. I'm just trying to finish up with the interviews and figure out how to put it all together.

FH: How many of us did you interview?

DS: About 12. About 12 in depth and I've had about five or eight other really interesting conversations. Once I got started they ended up being as long as interviews. More than I expected and very interesting. Whenever I've talked about this project people are just so excited and supportive of it that I feel that I want to get something out there and I know that I can keep working and other people can keep working on it but I think it's a really great time for Jewish women to be seen as participants in the civil rights movement as women and Jews.

FH: Do you want me to get Joni's number?

DS: Yes, thanks.