Dr. Jeannine Herron

SUMMARY

Dr. Jeannine Herron was born on January 19, 1937 in Berkeley, CA. She was raised by Quaker parents and has been active all her life in the peace movement. She met her husband, Civil Rights Movement photographer Matt Herron, while teaching in Ramallah, Jordan as a young 19-year old. After returning to the U.S., in 1963 she and her husband traveled with their two young children to Mississippi where they both worked in The Movement. Dr. Herron attended the funeral procession of Medgar Evers and covered the trial of his murderer for The Nation. Dr. Herron is a research neuropsychologist with expertise in dyslexia. She became interested in reading-related research in 1965 when she became co-founder and program director of the Child Development Group of Mississippi, a Head Start project.

LOCATION

Recorded via Zoom teleconferencing system. Dr. Herron was at her home in San Rafael, CA. The interview Team was in their separate homes throughout the San Francisco Bay Area during the “shelter in place” order due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTERVIEW TEAM

Lead: **Elsa Hagstrom**, Convent High School, Class of 2020
Support: **Sam Jubb**, Stuart Hall High School, Class of 2020
Instructor: **Howard Levin**, Director of Educational Innovation

TRANSCRIPT PROCESSING

Transcript and video content represent the interview in its entirety with minor edits due to breaks and occasional language. Initial automatic transcription via Otter.ai. Elsa Hagstrom completed the initial edit phase (5/20/2020). Howard Levin completed the secondary edit phase (5/30/2020). Please report additional suggested edits to: howard.levin@sacredsf.org

Recorded over two sessions

April 27, 2020

Elsa Hagstrom
My name is Elsa Hagstrom, and we are interviewing Dr. Jeannine Herron on April 27, 2020 via Zoom. Ms. Heron, as you know, we are here to record our conversation with you with the intention of publishing your story as a part of Convent & Stuart Hall's Oral

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

Jeannine Herron
My name is Jeannine Herron and I agree to doing this interview and publishing the story.

Elsa
Awesome. When did you first become conscious of your passion to help in the freedom movement? What kind of sparked it, specifically as a white or Caucasian person?

Jeannine
We had been involved with the peace movement and The Civil Rights Movement, living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And the major spark for moving to Mississippi and becoming actively involved in the southern movement was the fact that in the middle of the night one night in Philadelphia, I got A call from a friend in Mississippi who said to me, “Someone has been shot here in Mississippi and the whole world needs to know about it. Medgar Evers, the head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has been shot in front of his own home. And you need to come down here and be with us and witnesses from the north need to come down.” And I said, “Gee, I have two little children. I don't have any money.” And she said, “Just come.” So I did. And that was really the spark. My experience in the memorial parade for Medgar Evers and my experience at Tougaloo College with Ed King and his wife, Jeanette King were what really sparked our commitment to coming south and working in The Movement.

Elsa
Was that an easy decision or a hard decision, especially with two young children?

Jeannine
It was a hard decision. But my husband Matt was a budding photojournalist. He was very interested in documentary photography and felt that what was happening in the south needed to be documented with photography, and that photography would help The Movement by making the pictures of what was actually happening available to the public. So from that point of view, it was a very good move for him. And for me, I was very committed to The Civil Rights Movement, and the fact that it was a nonviolent movement, and we were both interested in nonviolence as a solution to conflict and aggression around the world.

Elsa
I know you guys were focusing on nonviolence but was there ever a time that you felt afraid or that violence against you or your family was a possibility?

Jeannine
Of course, of course, that possibility was present for every volunteer who came to Mississippi and every young person in Mississippi or anywhere in the south that was involved in The Movement.

Elsa
To kind of get into a sense of your passion, can you tell me about any instances in which you felt threatened or violence against you or your family was a possibility?

Jeannine
Yes. When we were first going to Mississippi, we passed through Birmingham. And we visited the 28th Street Church [16th Street Baptist Church] on a Sunday and participated in the service with our two children. That was a wonderful experience and not frightening at all until we learned a few weeks later that that church had been bombed and three little girls had been killed. And that was pretty terrifying because when you have young children, you want to make sure that you're protecting them and you're not taking them into danger.

Elsa
To backtrack a little bit about your time in Philadelphia. What was that like working with CORE? How did you feel you could make an impact?

Jeannine
In Philadelphia I was mostly involved with a group of women, called Women Strike for Peace, and it was an extraordinary group, a very spontaneous thing that one woman in Washington, DC called for a strike because women were so upset about the fact that we kept doing nuclear testing in the atmosphere, that there was an arms race that was really madness, and that we were having Civil Defense drills in the schools for children when obviously we would not survive a nuclear attack. So, being involved with that group was a very influential experience in my whole life.

Elsa
You mention a lot about being involved with peace movements and a lot of emphasis on nonviolence. What was it like deciding to go into a movement and immerse yourself into one like you said, you were prompted to go to Mississippi because of a murder. What was it like going into that movement as someone so focused on peace?

Jeannine
My husband and I had studied nonviolence and we read a lot of Gandhi. We felt that nonviolence was not well understood by the larger population and that it could be a solution to the problems of peace in the world, not just for civil rights, but there was a lot of violence that we were participating in as Americans that were distressing. So, we wanted to explore nonviolence personally. And part of that is facing danger yourself and having the confidence that your faith and compassion and personal commitment would make a difference.

Elsa
Do you feel that that message carried through or had some impact?

Jeannine
In Philadelphia?

Elsa
Yes.

Jeannine
In Philadelphia, yes. Philadelphia had a lot of Quakers and Quakers are pretty steeped in nonviolence. My father was a Quaker and was a conscientious objector in the First World War. Quakers would come out – people who believed that the peace movement was important – would come out and demonstrate. But it was all very polite. And the police knew in advance that we were going to be there. We stood, we witnessed. But it didn't seem to make a difference. We went to Fort Detrick and had demonstrations at the Germ Warfare Center there because unspeakable germs and viruses were being produced as a weapon. But people who worked there would walk by us and just either ignore us or make gestures. And it didn't seem to be changing people's minds. And it wasn't until we saw the kids in the south at the lunch counters being physically threatened and attacked that we understood that that was a place where nonviolence was really showing its value and it's worth.

Elsa
That was more in your earlier career as a freedom rights worker. Was that ever like deterring you? Did you ever want to give up? What was that like seeing no response?

Jeannine
I don't think that occurred to either of us, my husband or myself. We just felt so strongly that it was our responsibility as individuals to stand up for what was right that we needed to continue to take action like that.

Elsa
Why is that? Why do you think you felt that responsibility?

Jeannine
I think that you're on this Earth for a very brief time. And that you need to try to make it better.

Elsa
Very true. Did you ever feel like your kids were targeted as a result of you and your husband's action?

Jeannine
No, not at all. No.

Elsa
Would they agree with you?

Jeannine
Would they agree with me? Well, they were very young, so they didn't have much choice. But, in a way, being a family, had a certain communicative effect to other people in the south that we were united as a family in a way that the individuals who came were not. And I think that children may have even protected us a little bit.

Elsa
Did you feel it was a moral imperative for you to take them despite the danger o r did you ever consider maybe not taking them with you guys to the south?

Jeannine
No, we wouldn't have gone without them. Our primary loyalty was to raise our children, and we wouldn’t have done that.

Elsa
You mentioned the Quakers quite a bit. Do you think growing up with your father as a Quaker and that nonviolence and peace kind of shaped how your understanding and your outlook going forward and why you felt so strongly about participating in this movement as a nonviolent member?

Jeannine
Yes, I think my father was a big influence. And it wasn't just his views about war, but also his views about equality and justice. He felt very strongly about all those things, not just nonviolence. So I think I had a pretty strong upbringing in developing what he called “character and doing the right thing.”

Elsa
Speaking about influences, did your husband's work ever inform or influence your own outlook or your decision to maybe keep pushing towards The Movement or maybe take a step back?

Jeannine
Sure. I think we influenced each other. We've been pretty much in agreement for 63 years on these issues. There wasn't any conflict between us about whether to go or how to form our own relationship to The Movement.

Elsa
In your adult life, you guys moved around quite a bit. Was that solely tied to The Movement? Or was that more of personal preference?

Jeannine
I think we were young and wanting to explore the world. Going to the Middle East was part of that. Traveling home from the Middle East, we visited a lot of countries. And I think it's important to see how other people live and to appreciate other cultures. So that was a very important influence.

Elsa
For someone involved in certain groups like CORE or SNCC, what drew you to them specifically? Was there a person other than your beliefs?

Jeannine
No, there wasn't a particular person, it was the action, it was the activity. It was the fact that these were the only groups who were actually taking specific actions to produce the justice that they were interested in. And both of them are nonviolent, COFO and SNCC.

Elsa
What do you think your greatest positive was in your time in CORE?

Jeannine
Calling attention to prejudice and injustice. I think even in Philadelphia, that's where we were most involved with CORE, there was prejudice and suppression of certain rights. I think that was probably what influenced us.

Elsa
Kind of going back into what influenced you, are there any things that stand out in your

childhood or young life that you think pushed you towards following this action that you keep mentioning? Or pushed you towards action?

Jeannine
I can't think of anything in particular. There was a moment when I was about 10 years old. I was in the Sierras on a lake in a little canoe with my dog, and it was night. And I just felt the weight of the universe up in the sky and felt like I wanted to do something significant with my life. And I remember that moment. I don't know what influence it had. But it was a moment when I felt like it was important to do something that would change things for the better.

Elsa
Do you think you've accomplished that goal?

Jeannine
I don't really know. Sometimes I think yes. Sometimes I think no. Right now with the political situation the way it is, I wonder if we've changed very much.

Jeannine
I think you're doing a fantastic job.

Elsa
Thank you. I want to talk about your earlier life in high school, and what diversity was like for you.

Jeannine
My high school was Anna Head School for Girls in Berkeley, California. It was a private school. Small. My mother taught there in order for me to get a good education. There was no diversity whatsoever. It was all pretty wealthy young Berkeley-Piedmont area young women. The only diversity that I was really – and I never even knew boys until I graduated from high school, seriously, in terms of diversity of gender, as well as cultures, and races. My father took us to a Community Church in Berkeley. The preacher's name was Buell Gallagher and he was very strongly interested in integration and in justice. And he was a good speaker and a powerful communicator and my father really responded to that. So it was an integrated church. And that was where I really first bumped into diversity of any kind.

Elsa
Would you say your time in the church and that environment was what sparked and fed into how you became someone so focused on the movements of peace and the rights of everyone and equality?

Jeannine
Yes, probably so. I certainly believed in the teachings of Jesus, and in particular, the teaching that you need to treat other people as yourself. And that's a very strong belief among Quakers as well that there is God in every person, whatever God is – I think it may be more like love or compassion – but there is that good in every person and it needs to be respected as you respect yourself.

Elsa
How was that received by your peers, that mindset and opinion during that time?

Jeannine
You know, I don't think we talked very much about politics at all or about these social situations. I think those girls were mostly interested in boys and in our studies. There really weren't very many conversations that had anything to do with that. I was quite innocent of social problems at that point.

Elsa
When do you think you entered that world? What broke that innocence as you called it?

Jeannine
Partly when I went to the Middle East and began teaching in a Quaker school in Ramallah. And also, my husband has been a big influence on my life. He was six years older, and he knew more about the world than I did. And so I learned a great deal from him as well.

Elsa
One thing that I would like to talk about is your childhood, both of your parents worked. Was that normal or a regularity of that time period or in the context of when you were growing up?

Jeannine
Yeah, I think so. With my peers, probably mostly the fathers were the workers and the mothers were at home. But my mother and father were both teachers. They came through the Depression. My father was trained as an architect but during the Depression, nobody was building houses so he became a teacher and remained a teacher. He taught biology and general science at Alameda High School, and my mother wanted me to be able to go to a school like Anna Head. She was French and she was very lively. She was also a singer, she sang in the French Opera in San Francisco. She was very good with children. And people, even after I've gone back as an alumnus to Anna Head occasions, people come up to me and tell me what a

wonderful teacher my mother was. She would sing songs and she would play games all in French. And she taught the whole lower school at Anna Head, French, and I think she had a strong influence on a lot of young girls' lives. That was the atmosphere in my home. My mother and I walked to school together. Her work never took her away from my upbringing at all. I had an older sister, nine years older, who by the time I was nine or 10 she had already gone off to college. So she wasn't a part of my growing up as much as I would have liked. She's a wonderful sister.

Elsa
Do you think your mom's role as someone so pivotal in the community, and so inspirational is kind of an inspiration to you as well? I know you do a lot of work and kind of helping kids with dyslexia. Did that inspire you in any way?

Jeannine
Yes, I think so. I certainly caught her joy at being with children. And I considered some kind of role in education. I guess the other influence that she had on me was music and singing. We would sing while we were doing the dishes, and so on. And I have continued that throughout my life as well.

Elsa
Would you say that your parents' marriage was more like a partnership because it sounds similar to yours?

Jeannine
Yes, I would say so very much. They met on a ship going over to France. My mother was going with her mother and sisters, just as the First World War was ending. My father was going as a conscientious objector to do reconstruction work in France, and they met on the ship. They wrote letters to each other for several years before they actually got together. But I think that experience on the boat was what carried them through their 55 years of marriage.

Elsa
Your mom was an immigrant. Do you think that influenced you at all or maybe had some impact on your childhood?

Jeannine
Maybe so. I don't think I thought much about it when I was a child. I very much enjoyed visiting my grandmother. And on occasions like Christmas we would all gather together as a large family. My grandmother had sisters and I had cousins and so on. And we would sing French songs and I loved that. Each time we got together we would sing these songs each sister, each aunt would have some role in the song. And we had wonderful food that my grandmother cooked. Being in an immigrant family I think probably did influence my life in very intangible ways.

Elsa
Was their partnership common in the era? Did you see any other examples of that or was it unique?

Jeannine
Well you know, as a child, you don't have much experience of other people's families, at least I didn't. I think my family was unique. My mother and father loved each other very much. And there was never conflict in the family that I was aware of that was serious. So yeah, I think they had a wonderful and very unique relationship.

Elsa
So going into after high school and your experience in college, you had a lot of involvement in different groups like in high school you were in a lot of sports teams. Do you think that sense of community was something that you and leadership was something that you liked and wanted to keep working towards?

Jeannine
Yes. Yes, I did.

Elsa
Why do you think that was?

Jeannine
Sports were an important part of my life. I appreciated teamwork and the community of the school and my friends. I don't know how it may have influenced my future actions, but I certainly developed strong relationships.

Elsa
Did you ever feel like maybe with your aspirations and your fairly progressive mindset you were born ahead of your time?

Jeannine
That's an interesting question. No, I didn't ever feel that. But no, I don't think so.

Sam Jubb
Can I ask a question similar to that? For me reading about The Civil Rights Movement, it's frustrating with the blatant racism and how people in power just kind of rigged the system against African Americans and minorities. So how was it to deal with that sort of frustration?

Jeannine
That’s a wonderful question and we're all dealing with it right now.

Sam
That is true.

Jeannine
I think the important thing is to do something. To be inactive or to be passive just doesn't work, it doesn't doesn't deal with that anxiety. As long as you can feel like you're doing something, and that you're with other people who are doing something to change what's happening. I think that relieves the depression and the frustration that these situations have caused throughout history.

Elsa
Kind of to further that frustration, I'm sure you might have had contrasting and conflicting opinions with friends or family? What was that like? How did you deal with that as someone who feels so strongly about equality and freedom?

Jeannine
Actually, I don't remember any conflicts like that. Certainly not with family. As a young person – I graduated from high school when I was 16. So I didn't really have much sense of the world or my future or what was going to happen. And I didn't have a lot of serious conversations with people about these issues.

Elsa
Furthering the frustration that you held on to from Sam's question, where did you take that frustration? To church, to your community, or did you use that as kind of kindling?

Jeannine
I don't think I developed that frustration until I was older. If you're still talking about the high school years or my young years, I don't think I really was smart enough or informed well enough to have that kind of frustration. It didn't occur until later when I saw actual instances of injustice or watched films and news reports about Vietnam or watched what was happening in the south that I began to feel that anxiety and frustration.

Elsa
Do you have any experiences that are specific and experiences that you remember becoming conscious of this?

Jeannine
I remember as a young child going to the movies with my mother and watching those reports and seeing that the air fights in the air and airplanes going down and

understanding that there were people in those airplanes and watching the news reports of the war. I think it was very upsetting to me.

Howard Levin
Can you think of one of those stories or one of those newsreel incidents that you can bring back in your memory and talk about one of those?

Jeannine
I don't know, it was a long time ago. But I can certainly remember the news reports. I can remember the music that comes on with the news. "The eyes and the ears of the world." And the cameras coming up. Just those scenes of the war, and particularly the air combat, I think made a big impression and I became quite anxious. Sometimes I would leave the theater with my mother and she would comfort me by taking me across the street for an ice cream cone or something.

Elsa
Do you have any other memories growing up and encountering everyday life, like, with the war? Like, how was the violence in your everyday life? You mentioned it was in the movies that you guys saw or on TV, how do you think all of that violence influenced you?

Jeannine
Well, you know, there wasn't any TV. We didn't have TVs so it was really going to view a movie in a theater when the news came on and showed these images. And that's really where I got that experience.

Elsa
I'm going a little more forward, you got married in Beirut. Could you maybe explain a little bit about your decision and the destination location?

Jeannine
I went to Whittier College, which was a Quaker college. It was pretty much already arranged. I didn't have a lot of choices about going to college, my parents had figured that out for me pretty much. And my sister had gone to Whittier. So I went to Whittier. And I was interested in religion, I was interested in sorting out what I really believed so I did a lot of classes in religion. And at the end of my junior year, my religion professor was going to take a tour of the Middle East, and I wanted to join him. So my parents agreed and I went on this tour of the Middle East. We stayed in Ramallah, which is a town in the West Bank, it was in Jordan at that point. And because it was a Quaker school, they were empty during the summer and they had facilities and so on, so this group had stayed there several years when they were taking the tour. And they just

lost a teacher and the headmistress of the girls school, asked me if I wanted to stay and teach. I was 19 years old. I hadn't quite finished college, I had a few more units to go. And I was concerned that my parents would be worried that I was in a part of the world that was kind of unstable. But I really thought that it was a wonderful opportunity. And so I stayed there. I was in Ramallah and I met my husband there. And the fact that we were married in Beirut was just because we were evacuated out of Ramallah during the Suez Crisis in 1956. And we were in Beirut and had enjoyed being in and out of Beirut several times before we were married there.

Elsa
Did your parents attend the wedding or were they accepting of this or a little hesitant?

Jeannine
I think they were quite upset. But it turned out to be alright. It was impossible for them to come to Beirut. We were married in a very quiet Quaker ceremony in an ancient Roman amphitheater in Biblos, which was north of Beirut. Quaker friends came and sat silently with us, read Kahlil Gibran in Arabic or stood up and spoke on our behalf. It was a beautiful ceremony.

Elsa
Sounds beautiful. When did you first start to become aware of deep racism? Are there any stories that come to mind about your earliest consciousness of this?

Jeannine
Of what places?

Elsa
When did you first become aware of deep racism?

Jeannine
Racism?

Elsa
Yeah.

Jeannine
I think it was something that steeped into us gradually. When we first were going to Mississippi and we traveled through Birmingham, the very, very first thing we did was we stopped at a laundromat because I had some clothes to wash because we were traveling with small children. And there was a sign on the door that said “White Only.” So I didn't wash my clothes. But that was the first personal experience of segregation. And then when we stayed there with our children, we went to the Gaston Motel

because we had understood that was interracial and that journalists stayed there from time to time. It was a black-owned motel. And they put us in a room in the front and welcomed us. And then a little bit later, early in the evening, they knocked on the door and said they would like to move us further back in the motel because they explained that this was not Birmingham, but “Bombingham” and that they were in danger of being bombed, and they wanted us to be safer in the very back of the motel.

Elsa
Let’s talk about your dad a little bit. Your dad's religion seemed to give you freedom to explore social justice. Do you agree with that?

Jeannine
Oh, yes, I would agree with it completely. Yeah. He would, he would bring it up in conversations. I don't remember specifically, but he very strongly wanted his children to consider social justice in the world.

Elsa
Where is he from originally?

Jeannine
He was from Kansas. He was in a small town in Kansas. When he became a conscientious objector the town was upset with him. And eventually, he had to move his family from that town in Kansas, because of his position in the war.

Elsa
You also had to move your family in Mississippi. Can you talk a little bit about that experience? What happened? Why did you guys have to move or leave?

Jeannine
I was trying to figure out what I would do in my life and Matt was being a photojournalist in Mississippi. And I thought maybe I could do some writing. So I got some assignments from The Nation. I covered the mock election in 1963, and I covered the trial of Byron De La Beckwith, who was the murderer of Medgar Evers. And so I was looking for stories that I could write. And I attended a White Citizens Council meeting to see if I could write about what the White Citizens Council stood for and what kind of activities they did. But they outed me, they figured out that I didn't belong there, and ushered me to the door. And as a result of that, I think they must have called our landlord. We were renting a house in Jackson and the landlord called us and explained that he had a lot of redecoration on the house and that we would please leave by the end of the month.

Elsa
What did that feel like to you in that moment? Were you afraid?

Jeannine
I was a bit afraid. I was afraid at the Citizens Council meeting when I was ushered out because I didn't know what they would do. But the actual moving out just seemed like what was happening to everybody in Mississippi. The mock election had created a lot of anxiety because there was anxiety in the white community that they were afraid that if negroes got the vote, that they would take over the state. There was so much other violence and intimidation, like arrests for no reason and periods of time in jail and beatings and burning of churches, that our moving out of our house didn't seem like a very big deal.

Elsa
We're going to focus on the White Citizens Council meeting. How did you get in the first place?

Jeannine
It was just a meeting. I think it was in a community building of some kind, I'm not really sure of my memories. I found out about it probably from the local newspaper. I had been aware of some of what the White Citizens Council stood for. It wasn't like the Ku Klux Klan, it was trying to be a more moderate segregationist organization. But I'm sure there were members of the Klan in the group. The meeting was a notice in the paper. And I just drove there, walked in and sat down with quite a bit of trepidation, I think, as I remember. But I had a notebook and I was going to try to explain that I wanted to tell their story. And they questioned me. A couple of men came up to me and asked me why I was there. This was before the meeting had even started. So I certainly didn't get any personal information about their functions or their activities. They asked me why I was there and I said, I wanted to be able to tell their story and that I was a reporter. They said, “We don’t want any outside agitators here in our meeting, and so please would you leave?” And so I stood up. I wasn't going to try to cause any interruption. So when they ushered me to the door, I just left. I felt quite disappointed that I wasn't successful, but also a little bit relieved that nothing worse had happened.

Elsa
Is that what you expected from going to the meeting?

Jeannine
Probably, yeah. Ed King, who knew the ways of the Citizens Council, Ed King who was Chaplain at Tougaloo College and my friend, had tried to explain to me what they were about and what might happen, but I didn't expect them to be violent. I certainly would have been very happy if I'd been allowed to stay. But as it turned out, I wasn't.

Elsa
What had you heard about these meetings prior? What were you walking into in your own mind?

Jeannine
In my own mind, I was walking into a group of white men – I didn't see any women there, but there may have been women, I didn't really have a chance to look around that much – that were strong segregationists, they were very active segregationists who believed strongly that the races should not mix in any way, and who would do most anything to keep that from happening. So I knew that if they knew my views, they would strongly be antagonistic.

Elsa
I'm kind of shifting to the Medgar Evers trial. Could you tell me about your role in that and writing about that?

Jeannine
Well, yes. As I said, My first experience in Mississippi was walking in Medgar Evers' funeral procession. And that was an extraordinary event, because there were hundreds of people walking down the street. I remember kind of a scuffle over to the side, something was happening. And then there is a very tall white man walking up and down saying, "My name is John Dorr and I'm from the Justice Department. My name is John Dorr and I'm from the Justice Department." And eventually, the scuffle was resolved in some way, I couldn't see what was happening. But that was a little alarming and I got separated from the people that I was with. So I was alone in this sea of people, all black, walking down the street. And this woman came up to me and held my hand. And she said, "Don't be afraid." She said, "We'll all take care of you." And that was really wonderful. So I had already had experience of feeling the weight of Medgar Evers' death. And I was interested in the trial and The Nation magazine was interested in covering the trial. So I went. I think it was probably two weeks, I forget how long it was, but I was in the courtroom listening to the testimony and so on, and paying attention to what the lawyers were saying, how they selected the jury. The jury was all white, of course. And I could probably say more about this if I find my article about it that I wrote. So maybe it'd be better to talk about the details of the courtroom and so on about the trial later.

Elsa
Okay, sounds good.

Howard
Will you describe a little bit further of the funeral procession. Say more about what was

going on during that funeral procession. What was the affect of people? What was being said? Were there speeches? Tell us more about what you experienced that event to be.

Jeannine
First of all, it was my first experience being in the middle of a whole crowd of black people. Being alone in that crowd of black people. Walking in a very solemn procession. I think people were devastated by the death of Medgar and also angry. And I felt the same. I felt what a tragedy it was that this man was murdered in front of his own house with his children sleeping inside and his wife coming out and finding his body. That whole thing was very vivid to me. And I felt strongly at that moment in walking down the street that I was part of a bigger movement. I felt strongly about – I think we sang “We shall overcome,” and we sang “Black and white together.” “We’ll walk hand in hand.” And it just reinforced my feelings that we will never have peace in the world until people could get along with each other.

Elsa
What was the feeling in the courtroom? Kind of tension? Or was it that same powerful kind of community coming together as they watched the trial?

Jeannine
Actually all have to refresh my memories about that and maybe my article can help me but I don't remember seeing a gallery with community people in it. Maybe there was. I was sitting with the reporters and communicating with some very interesting reporters from the north because everybody was there – The New York Times, Newsweek magazine. I think I'm gonna have to take a break and drink a little water. This is too emotional, Howard!

Howard
Elsa, when they start yelling at me, that’s a really good sign!

Elsa
What is it like kind of delving back into your memories that are pretty emotion packed specifically about the funeral?

Jeannine
You can tell from my face and the tears on my face that it was emotional and right now thinking back on it, I remember it as a pivotal point in my life. I remember the whole experience of The Movement as an experience of community and brotherhood. So it was also devastating to me when Black Power came along and SNCC ended. That would be a good place to stop.

Elsa

Thank you so much. That was great.

May 18, 2020

{Note: This is a continuation of an interview started on April 27, 2020}

Elsa Hagstrom
Can you walk me through your morning on the first day of the Byron De La Beckwith trial for murdering civil rights activist, Medgar Evers? I'd like to start with that morning at home, did you get your kids ready? How did you get to the courthouse? Did anyone accompany you? Where did you sit?

Jeannine Herron
You expect a lot from 60 years ago. I don't remember details like that Elsa, but I do remember my feelings the first day, which were a lot of trepidation because as I went into the courthouse, I was going in with reporters from Newsweek and New York Times, and so on. And I was certainly not an accomplished writer in any sense. So I felt very fortunate to be there and kind of insecure that I was in such company and trying to anticipate what the trial would be like. I remember that there was a jury that came in that were all white men. And I remember something about the attorneys. But I don't have great memories of the details that you want to ferret out.

Elsa
How many days did you actually go to court?

Jeannine
I don’t really remember. It was several days, I know that. I remember that there was testimony by a couple of policemen who said that Byron De La Beckwith was somewhere in another town miles away during the time that Medgar Evers was shot, and the jury seemed to be taking that as strong evidence that it couldn't have been him that did the murder. Talking to the other reporters when we had a break, we were all pretty convinced that the trial would be rigged and that Beckwith would be acquitted. And that is exactly what happened. I've looked for The Nation article that I wrote. But I can't find it. It was a long time ago.

Elsa
Do you remember when the verdict was read?

Jeannine
Yes.

Elsa
Like you said you kind of were expecting that, so was it expected and a little frustrating?

Jeannine
We expected it and of course all the reporters rushed out to make their reports. And I went home feeling very frustrated and somewhat angry that that was the result, even if it was expected.

Elsa
Do you remember if the gallery was mixed race?

Jeannine
I don't really remember. Sorry. I don't have a lot of visual memories of the whole scene at all.

Elsa
Interesting. Do you think that's maybe because it was really painful or traumatic?

Jeannine
No, I don't think so. It’s being 80 years old!

Elsa
Was his family in the courtroom? Do you remember anything like that?

Jeannine
I don't. I'm not sure I know anything about his family.

Elsa
Of your experience, were there any things that stuck out to you as maybe strange or maybe any memories that you wrote down that you have?

Jeannine
I've looked for things that I wrote down at the time, and I really can't find anything. My main memories are one of gratitude that I was part of that scene. It was profound in the sense that when I went to Mississippi, I was a kind of an innocent white girl from the north. I thought the police were my friends. And I didn't have a lot of built-in suspicion at that time about corruption or about “fixing things” in that way. So it was probably more of a shock to me than it was to other people. I remember being really surprised that I had to consider the police my enemy instead of my friends. And to be suspicious. And that cynicism kind of grew over the time that I was in Mississippi. I'm a very optimistic person.

Elsa
That kind of made you a little more suspicious of police. Is there any other way that you would say that changed your perspective towards law enforcement or the judicial system?

Jeannine
Yes, absolutely. When I consider the changes over the last 60 years it's very sad to see what's happening to my country now. And I do look at things with different eyes because of what happened in Mississippi. My husband's book about Mississippi, his book of photographs, is called *Mississippi Eyes*, because he talked about how his experience in Mississippi changed his eyes and the ways of looking at things. When he went to Dallas to be there just after the President was killed in Dallas, he said he looked at the situation there with Mississippi eyes because being in that experience does change your perspective.

Elsa
Are there any other instances where you feel like your eyes where you had maybe eyes of a different place where they were kind of opened up to a new perspective?

Jeannine
Oh, yes. Definitely. When we were photographing the Baptist Church in Jackson when there was a group of students from Tougaloo, and ministers and priests from out of town, trying to go to enter the Baptist Church downtown, and the elders of the Baptist Church stood on the church steps and refused to let them come into the church and worship just because that was a mixed group of people. That really profoundly changed me because I think I couldn't imagine a Christian doing something like that.

Elsa
I know you don't really remember a lot from the trial, but do you remember if there were any protests following it? Were they immediate? Were they kind of delayed? What was the Freedom Movement's response to this?

Jeannine
Gosh, I don't remember if there were any public demonstrations. There must have been, but I don't remember. Sorry.

Elsa
Moving on to the church, you and your family attended services at the 16th Street Church (Birmingham, Alabama), like three weeks before the bombing you said, and you spoke a little bit about that. Is there anything you'd like to add about the first visit?

Jeannine
The first visit. I don't remember what I said originally, actually. I think it made me a lot more cautious when I went back to Mississippi, particularly of my children and the safety of my children.

Elsa
How did you get back to the church after the bombing? Who invited you or were you just inspired to go?

Jeannine
No. We were staying at Tougaloo College with Ed and Jeanette King. Ed was the chaplain at Tougaloo. College. He wanted to go back to Birmingham to the funeral. And there were a number of students at Tougaloo who wanted to go as well. Ed asked me if I would drive our VW bus because it held a lot of people. So I said, “Certainly I would.” And so we went. We went from Jackson to Birmingham with a mixed group in the car. And I remember Dorie Ladner waving an American flag out the window and I said, “Please Dorie, don't do that, don't attract any attention to us,” because an American flag really meant “These are Yankees and they're coming down here to stir up trouble.” Anybody who waved an American flag in the south was asking for trouble.

Elsa
How did you hear about the bombing initially? What were your first thoughts?

Jeannine
I don't really remember Elsa. And I'm sure that I was very, very shocked. Especially when I understood that four girls had been killed. I don't remember the moment that I heard it.

Elsa
You had small children yourself. Can you kind of talk about what you felt returning to the church and how that kind of changed your perspective going forward participating in the movement?

Jeannine
Yes, I think I'm seeing the actual damage to the church and to the steps that we went up and to the basement where my children – where my daughter went down the stairs to go to the bathroom, it just made me feel like, first of all, how fortunate we were to not be there at the time. And also how tragic it was for those mothers of those children, mothers and fathers who lost their children. And also for the girl who became blind. It was just such a shock to see the church in person. And then as I was walking on the street, my feet were crunching in pieces of glass from the stained glass windows. And I

stooped to pick some up thinking these would be a memory of that moment. And later, I think Christmas 1963, my father who was a woodworker took those pieces of glass and made them into pendants like this. I don't know if you can see it, but ebony around it and he put the glass inside. And I wrote a letter to my nieces who were about the same age as those children that were killed. And I have a copy of the letter that I wrote if you would like to hear parts of it.

Elsa
We would love to.

Jeannine
“To my nieces, Kathy Lynn and Jeanie, Christmas 1963. I must write my explanation of these strange gifts because they are of serious significance to me. The materials seem to tell me what to do. The wood is ebony. The glass is from the shattered windows of the 16th Baptist Church in Birmingham where four girls were killed by a bomb while they attended Sunday school. Four children about your ages are dead, and another is blinded. I wanted to make something beautiful out something brutal. I wanted to make a symbol. I wanted to say something about good and evil.”

It's longer, but that's probably enough to explain what I was trying to convey to my nieces and they still treasure these necklaces.

Elsa
Did your nieces end up getting involved in The Movement from that? Did that kind of prompt them a little bit?

Jeannine
I don't think they did. But it certainly raised their consciousness about segregation, definitely. I don't know how much they took action about it.

Elsa
What does that necklace mean to you now? You talked about what you wanted it to mean to them, how does it serve you?

Jeannine
It's such a precious thing. First of all, because my father made it. And because it brings back the memories of that time, which were so mixed, so much love and community in The Movement and so much brutality from the segregationists.

Elsa
Do you have any specific memories that come to mind when you talk about that?

Jeannine
The good memories. Yes. The good memories for me were very much about singing together in integrated groups. I loved the way those local people in Mississippi sang those freedom songs. It's very different from the way white people sing freedom songs. And it's very moving, and especially when you're crowded together in a church with people swaying and holding hands, and there's danger outside. It's very moving.

Elsa
So switching gears a bit. Was it during or after this time that you and your husband decided to go to Africa?

Jeannine
Oh, that was way after this time. In 1965 I started the Head Start project, and we were in Mississippi for that. But we moved to New Orleans and I started school at Tulane Medical School, and went there for 4 years from 1966 to 1970. We lived in New Orleans. And it wasn't until I – sort of a strange thing happened with my PhD research, my mentor moved to California and said, “If you wait a year, you can come to California and we'll finish your research and I'll have money enough to pay you.” So I had a year and Matt and I just talked together about what we might do with that year. And he said, “Let's do something completely different.” At that point, we were kind of burned out from The Movement and wanting to change our lives a little bit and focus more on our children. The idea of going to Africa came to both of us, I don't remember who thought of it first, but it was a pretty extraordinary idea to sail a small boat to Africa. But I think part of it was the contact that we had had with African Americans and wanting to know where they came from and what it was like where the slavery ships had come in and that sort of thing. So that's how we decided to do it.

Elsa
To bring it back a little bit to Tulane and more from ‘63 to ‘65, you mentioned that you guys felt burnt out by the end of that. How did you guys reach that mindset? Are there any other actions or experiences that contributed to that directly?

Jeannine
When SNCC decided – I guess it was in 1963, I don't remember the dates very well, 1964, the end of 1964 I guess – Stokely Carmichael and others in The Movement kind of overwhelmed John [Lewis] – I’m losing my memory. Anyway, SNCC decided that they were not going to be welcoming white people into The Movement anymore. And that was a really strong blow because it had been such a beloved community before that. And I think that's one of the reasons. But there were so many things happening. The assassinations and the increasing corruption around us, it just felt like we needed a new perspective and new scenery to look at.

Elsa
Backtracking a little bit, where did you guys go after the Medgar Evers trial?

Jeannine
We were living in Jackson, as I said, and then after I went to the White Citizens Council meeting, and we were evicted from our house in Jackson, we moved to a place outside of Birmingham, where I stayed for the summer of '64 while Matt was traveling around. I worked with the SNCC office – I'm sorry in Atlanta, not Birmingham, Atlanta. And then we moved to New Orleans and came back and forth to Mississippi because we wanted our children to be in school in New Orleans.

Elsa
Talking about SNCC again, you mentioned a lot about interracial groups and some of your happiest memories being with them and singing. So can you talk about some of the emotions around when SNCC decided to be a black-only organization?

Jeannine
Yes. It was shocking and it was very disappointing. I did have conversations with some of the other white women in The Movement like Jane Stembridge and others. We were all in tears because it had meant a lot to all of us and we felt that the integration of The Movement was really important. The other thing was the fact that it looked like The Movement was going to get more militant. And while nonviolence had been a stated strategy, it had never really taken hold with the majority as a way of life as the way John Lewis or Martin Luther King or Gandhi talked about nonviolence. And that was really what Matt and I had hoped would come out of the movement would be a real embracing of the nonviolent philosophy. So that was one of my major disappointments as well.

Elsa
What did you guys do next? How did you guys choose to proceed within The Movement after that? Was it deterring?

Jeannine
Actually, we had moved to Mississippi – I mean we moved to New Orleans – there were a lot of artists, like the Free Southern Theater and James [????] the poet and others who had moved to New Orleans and one idea was to start kind of an art movement about The Movement. But essentially, I got into school, we changed our direction somewhat and weren't as involved in The Movement in New Orleans as we had been.

Elsa

You talk about going into school. What inspired you to get your degree and go into work with dyslexia and neuropsychology?

Jeannine
I think it was those kids in Mississippi in the Head Start project. And I loved being with them. And of course, I loved the experience for my children being with them in the Head Start project. I understood at some instinctive level, that that was one of the most important things that anybody could do would be to provide learning experiences for young children. And that's what I'm still doing.

Elsa
Can you talk a little bit about the Mississippi Head Start project program from the ‘60s, maybe some stories or memories?

Jeannine
Yes. I think I told you about the little girl who said she wanted to go home and teach her mom and daddy how to read and write. But there were lots of experiences during that summer. First of all, there was great pressure from Washington to close the project. I think Senator Stennis understood that it was a threat and that we were doing community organizing, that we were raising consciousness in the communities that we were in. Of course, there were rules on the statute books in the south before that, that slaves should not be taught to read and write, that people would be fined for teaching their slaves to read and write. That specific law wasn't still in place, but there was still a lot of feeling that young black children should not be schooled or that certainly public funds shouldn't be used for that. So Senator Stennis tried to change the location of the project from Mount Beulah to Holly Springs. Did I tell you about the meeting that we had so late at night?

Elsa
I don't think so.

Jeannine
A representative from Washington came down to inspect us. And of course, they wanted to find any kind of infraction that they could find in order to close us down. Our books were good, they couldn't find anything that they could pin on us. But they decided that the best thing would be to require us to move from Mount Beulah to Holly Springs. Holly Springs was way up in a corner of Mississippi. It was a place where SNCC hadn't been very much so it was more dangerous. Mount Beulah had been a black community for a long time and was relatively safe for us.

So there was a meeting with this guy – I forget his name – we sat around and talked about what the problems would be if we had to move to Holly Springs. And eventually, it got to be one o'clock in the morning and we were all exhausted. And it was clear to

us that we couldn't do this, and they were going to cut off the Head Start funding if we didn't. So we just said, “Well, go ahead, go ahead and cut off the money. We'll keep doing it without pay.” And we started to get up and go to bed. And the guy said, “Wait a minute, you win.” It would have been very bad publicity for Senator Stennis and for the President to have this project [ended] and the news of this to get out and the fact that we were going to continue without pay. It would have been a black mark on the Great Society and all the efforts of the President. So we got to stay. So that was a big crisis.

Other things that happened were learning local songs and dances that we taught the kids. It was a bit different from the kinds of songs that we would have sung to our children at that time. And traveling around to different Head Start projects in these little towns, it was very difficult to find them sometimes because there weren't signs on the street or anything like that. You had to turn at this grocery store or that gas station. Eventually, we found the places. In Mississippi in ‘64, and ‘65, a lot of black churches were burned. And so sometimes it would be the case that a project would have to move because it had been in a church that had burned.

It was an extraordinary summer. And it's certainly in my contact with the children, my interest in finding materials – my job was to find the materials for the different projects and order them and have them delivered them so on. That was a great learning experience for me. It was a joy to be with the people in Mount Beulah, the people who had put the project together, and to meet and talk about strategies and plans and programs, and so on. It was a summer that did change my life.

Elsa
Do you remember some of the songs?

Jeannine
Oh yeah!

Elsa
Will you hum or sing one for us?

Jeannine
There was one game that we played, where one child was given a square of cloth, a blanket or a towel, or something like that. And the song was about little Johnny Brown. And it went:

Little Johnny Brown lay your comfort down
Little Johnny Brown lay your comfort down

So the kid would put the cloth down on the ground. And then we would say:

Fold one corner Johnny Brown

Fold another corner Johnny Brown
Fold another corner Johnny Brown
Fold another corner Johnny Brown
Take it to your lover Johnny Brown
Show her your motion Johnny Brown

So it was lively and I'm sure the children didn't know the deeper meaning of what they were singing or what the motion was supposed to be about, but we had a lot of fun doing it. And it's a song that really stuck in my head.

Elsa
What role do you think education played in The Movement?

Jeannine
I think everybody realized how Important it was, but the main focus was getting the vote. And so Head Start was really kind of a side project. I think it was an extremely important thing to do there. There are still Head Start projects in Mississippi. People who remember the Child Development Group – in fact, I made a contact last year with somebody. I was asking if I could come and do some teacher training in their Head Start project. And the woman said, “Oh...” – I said, I co-founded the original Head Start project in the country in Mississippi – and she said, “Oh, I went to Headstart in 1965.” So that was a very good thing to realize that somebody had taken that experience and evidently was back in the Head Start in 2017. After all those years.

Elsa
One thing that I notice a lot is you're very, like happy and joyful. So where is the joy in this work for you?

Jeannine
I think there's nothing more important than increasing learning experiences for young children. I've just recently written an editorial that I'm not sure will get published, but it talks about the history reading and writing instruction in America, and the fact that the neural pathways that are formed when children learn to read and write are the navigational GPS for all kinds of other learning. So reading & writing is one of the most important things young children can learn. And, at this point, the most recent testing for blacks in America in the category of “reading at a proficient level,” 18% read at a proficient level. And two-thirds of American children are not reading at a proficient level. I'm really glad that I wanted to understand the brain and the brain’s role in learning and that I spent time doing research and had that experience in my life. I actually feel lucky that in my lifetime so much has been learned about the brain, the fact that how important it is for the young brain to learn, and how we need to establish efficient pathways, especially for reading and writing. And that those can be inefficiently established with instruction that is not based on science.

Looking at the long view, human beings are still evolving their frontal lobes. And when we neglect young brains, they're not developing the neural pathways that will extend to the frontal lobes in a way that will develop what's called “executive function.” Those are the functions that enable people to allocate their attention appropriately, to make judgments, to have perspective, to look into the future, and to consider the consequences of their actions. And dear me, we need that at this moment from our government, and from the people who seem to be controlling a lot of our lives. And if you young people are looking for something to do besides doing direct action about civil rights, you could do something about helping young children to build their brains to be more efficient, and to develop those executive functions.

Elsa
You continue to go back to Mississippi working with the students and the teachers. Why is that? Do anything there now? Or do you see any changes from then to now?

Jeannine
Yes, I do. I see changes. And in fact, Mississippi has been in the forefront of changes in literacy. And when the last testing was done, Mississippi was the only state in the union that had made an improvement, a significant improvement, in reading and writing. That had nothing to do with me, except that I have been doing a lot of teacher training. Since 2017, I've gone back 18 or 20 times to train teachers and to offer my software. It's an area that was so affected by poor educational opportunities, especially for minorities, and I think that's changing and it's very hopeful.

Elsa
Talking about education, I'm really interested to hear what your thoughts are on Brown vs. Brown of Education, specifically the perception that it played an overtly negative role in the black community, given that they disbanded black schools and fired the teachers at the schools. Do you think it was a negative or positive?

Jeannine
You know, I don't really know how to answer that question. I'm sorry. I don't. I think in general the Brown decision was profound, it made a huge difference in what was happening in schools. So I think it was positive. Definitely.

Elsa
One thing that I asked Bruce Hartford and one of our other interviewees was if he thought there were any films or documentaries that he felt captured the spirit of the era. He spoke about *Morning Song* and *Selma*. So do you have any movies or films that you thought struck you?

Jeannine
Yes, there is a film by a friend of ours, Connie Field – I think it's called *Mississippi Summer* [later corrected, *Freedom on My Mind*], I can't remember the name of it now, I can certainly send it to you in an email. But that's an extremely important film. There were films, major films, that I thought were not very instructive at all. One was *Mississippi Burning*, which kind of glorified the heroism of the FBI and so on, and did not fully accredit what was happening at the grassroots level.

Elsa
Shifting back to Africa and your sailing. What was the genesis of that idea, other than wanting a change and feeling kind of burned out with the Movement?

Jeannine
My husband had – we had been sailing on Lake Pontchartrain, and enjoyed sailing. I had never sailed before that. My husband had sailed as a young boy in Rochester, New York. We had talked about getting a boat. But until we conceived of this idea of going to Africa, we didn't really get a boat and start preparing it for a trip. I remember that we were at the New Orleans Yacht Club and people would come by and see us preparing our boat and say, "Where are you going?" And we'd say, "to Africa." Yacht Club members would say. "To Africa! Why would you want to go to Africa?" I think part of it was that idea, that we would go to someplace that people had not taken a sailboat before and that we'd discover new things. It was really the adventure of it, one of the things that attracted us.

Elsa
Of all your stops, can you name one or two that were the most meaningful, and why, like a story?

Jeannine
Yes. One of the first places we stopped was Dakar in Senegal. We went out to an island right off the right off of Dakar. And there was a fort there that had been used as a place to hold slaves before they were put on the boats to be taken to the New World. And there were bolts in the walls that were the original places where they were chained. And that was a very serious experience because you could imagine the thousands of Africans who had gone through that place, had been chained to those walls, who had been pulled away from their families, and were going off, many to die at sea, and many to become slaves in America.

Elsa
Was there any stated or unstated goal to your trip? And if so, do you think you accomplished that?

Jeannine

Oh, yeah. One of the things we wanted to do was to provide a completely different experience for our children. Our children were starting to watch a lot of television. And you know there would be quarrels about not watching and doing something different. The culture in New Orleans in the schools was not great. My son was intimidated for his lunch money. The schools were not great. When we first moved there our son was in first grade at a local school. And he came home one day and told me that a little boy had peed in his pants and the teacher had sent him to the girls' side of the playground and told him that he was being punished and that he would have to be on the girls' side from now on. I took Matthew out of that school right away and tried to find another school. But it wasn't a great educational place at that time in the 60s for young kids, particularly young kids from the north. And so we wanted a different experience for them. And I think that the trip accomplished that in a terrific way. It was a great adventure. It was very demanding and challenging for our kids and they had to do the work on the boat. They had to keep watch. They had to help us and they helped us in a number of very extraordinary ways when we were in trouble. So that was an important accomplishment. I think it drew Matt and me closer together, I think couples who have gone through trials, challenges and have developed teamwork to overcome those challenges are more likely to stay together and keep the relationship going in a loving way. I think we both learned a lot from dealing with the challenges and meeting Africans, we were very impressed with meeting Africans. I would not recommend that kind of voyage today, but at that time, Americans were respected, Americans were welcomed and we were very generously treated as we went. There were very few incidents as we went along.

Elsa
Do you have any experiences that you can share of these?

Jeannine
Going up the Gambia River – the Gambia River is about 300 kilometers long and goes into the interior of Africa between Senegal and Gambia. It's called "The Wiener," as in the hot dog, it just goes right up the middle there. And we would come up to village docks and we would have to do kind of a little ritual. We brought gifts, we brought photographs of the boat, of our children. We bought kola nuts as gifts and we would have to do a certain amount of negotiating and explaining ourselves until the chieftain of the village would come onto the boat and have coffee or tea with us. And that was the moment that we understood that we were welcome in the village. That was something I'll always remember.

We did have an incident with thieves. I don't know if you want to hear about that. It's a story. We were sleeping on our boat – we had had the boat in the harbor, and we'd had to have a guard come on the boat when we left the boat because Sierra Leone was

known for thieving. People stole telephone wires, and I don't know, everything. So we found in the library, the logbooks of ships that had been there and described thieving on their boats. So we were sleeping in the harbor on our boat one night and Matt was aroused by some noise. There was a guy in the companionway, we could see just the outline of this guy in the companionway, reaching down into the boat. And Matt, my pacifist husband roared like a lion, and it was like some invader had come into his bear cave and threatened his bear cubs. And he just roared and went for the guy. And the guy had swum to the boat so he was slippery. And they struggled in the cockpit. And the guy slipped over the side and swam to another boat that was waiting for him. And of course, we were all frightened. The kids were upset. And then we could hear the guy laughing in the boat, he and his friend were laughing. And Matt just got furious. And before we left, we had traded our car for an old deer rifle that we got just mostly as a threat. Matt says, “Get me that rifle.” So I got it and he shot it into the air. It was so old, it made a huge sound. Boom, boom, boom. That kind of said, “Well, at least they know that we can defend ourselves, and maybe they won't come back.” But then the next morning a group of people, very well dressed Sierra Leoneans came out to the boat. Matt had gone into the library, he was doing some research there, so I was alone on the boat with the children. And they came and they interviewed me, they wanted to know about this noise in the night and did we shoot a rifle and what it was. Then the main person asked me if he could take the rifle as evidence. We had declared it and everything so it was certainly legal. I said “yes,” and he gave me his personal identification papers as collateral against taking this rifle. There were about six of them perched on this little 30-foot boat around with their shoes on and everything. I said, “This must happen a lot because there's so much thieving in Sierra Leone. Why is there such attention to this?” And he said, “The noise was reported as several shots. And we've been nervous about a coupe from our neighbor, Guinea. And so we moved the president of Sierra Leone in the middle of the night to a place of safety. And everybody prepared for a coup.” So that's what happened in Sierra Leone where we nearly brought down the government.

Elsa
You played a lot of roles as a mother, a sailor, an activist, a daughter, a wife. Which one do you feel is the greatest role that you've had or the most important?

Jeannine
Oh, that's a really difficult question, Elsa. They're all important in different ways. And I think as young people, you don't realize how many different roles you will have in your lifetime. And they'll all at different times, take different importance. When your children are very young, they take much more attention. Of course, when they get to be teenagers, they do also, and even on into their later life, they do, but it's a different kind of attention. And my relationship with my husband has always been very strong. I think I was very lucky to find somebody in my life who was so competent, who was so committed to social justice with the same values that I had. And who was an

adventurer because I never would have gone on these kinds of adventures if I had not been married to Matt. And so being a mother, being a wife, those were probably the most seminal roles. But I think I also was very lucky to get into a graduate program that enabled me eventually to get grants from the government and develop materials for teaching children to read and write. That's been a great joy to me as well. Being a sailor was very temporary – not a very temporary, but it was temporary, and now we've downsized, we have a canoe, we do wilderness canoeing together. But sailing is a matter of the past.

Elsa
Are there any questions that you would like me to ask or anything that you would like to talk about?

Jeannine
I don't know if I've talked about the role of children and young people in The Movement. But, in Birmingham, it was the children and the young people who started demonstrating and going to jail and that was really the impetus of getting the adults involved – their parents and other adults – involved in the movement. Those children were so creative and courageous. I think our hope lies with young people because I see a lot of challenges ahead – even with the virus and the current challenges – it's changing things profoundly. And you are so lucky to have a school that's inspiring you to think about your future. And I think our future depends on you and your generation.

Elsa
Could you tell us a story of one or more of the children you're referring to in The Movement?

Jeannine
Matt has photographs of children and stories about children in the movement. The story I told you about the little girl is probably the most important one to me, the little girl who said she was gonna go home and teach your daddy to read and write. There were so many experiences with kids because of course, my kids were interacting with other kids. And the young people that I had the most contact with were students from Tougaloo College and they were actively figuring out different things that they could do all the time. And there was one guy who decided he was going to try to boycott entertainment in Jackson, Mississippi, and he just personally took this on and contacted people who were going to be coming to either speak or sing – they got Joan Baez to come to Tougaloo instead of going to Jackson. They got a lot of major musicians to boycott at the last minute. It was very frustrating to the audiences in Jackson. And in fact, a lot of young people from Jackson, young white people, came out Tougaloo to hear Joan Baez when she performed there. I think the young people at

Tougaloo and the young people in SNCC were very inspiring to me. And they were so courageous. They were in danger all the time.

Elsa
Thank you. That's all the questions that I have. That was awesome.

Howard Levin
I want to try to ask a question and Sam, you might have one too. We are with a neuropsychologist and I may be reading too far into this, but It feels like you have a hard time summoning up the difficult visual memories of '63, '64 and '65. And you attribute it to being older.

Jeannine
Yes. Old!

Howard
Is that really what's going on? Or do you think that there's some trauma associated with that time that is keeping you from recalling those memories?

Jeannine
I don't think so, Howard. There are a lot of other kinds of memories that I can't recall that vividly. And I think over time what you do is you remember things by repeating memory by telling it to somebody or you know in some way reinvigorating it in your mind. And so when those memories are not reinforced in that way, they tend to disappear. And I know that certainly with trauma that can be affected. But I don't think the trauma was that severe in my case. I don't think I would have forgotten on that account. I think it's just plain old age.

Howard
Anything else from either one of you before we say goodbye?

Sam Jubb
I have a question about your experience driving a VW van because, there's one right here {he points to a toy model on his shelf}. Do you remember what that was like?

Jeannine
Oh, my goodness, yes. We had VW vans, we had several VW vans. The one that we took to Mississippi was really fitted out so that we could sleep in it and si the children could sleep during the day. I think it was one of the ones that had a sunroof, so you can open it up. I remember driving it to Mexico one year when we were living in New Orleans. And I remember going through villages in Mexico with the children, we were all standing up with our heads out of the sunroof and waving to people And that was

really a lot of fun. We had one incident with the VW. We were driving from New Orleans to Florida – we wanted to do some photographing of children learning about marine life. And on the way back, something went wrong.

Sam
With the car?

Jeannine
I'm trying to remember. Yes, something went wrong with the VW. I forget what it was. But we had discovered that you could find in the newspaper people who wanted to drive cars from here to there. And you could call this phone number. So in any case, we got a car with a tow bar and we were going to tow the VW back to New Orleans from Florida. And on the way, I was driving, it was late at night, and I wasn't paying attention to the gas, and we ran out of gas. And we were in the middle of nowhere. Matt woke up and he said, “What are we going to do?” It’s miles to walk anywhere and, of course, we didn't have cell phones. And finally, there was this little voice from the back, Matthew and Melissa who were with us and were asleep. Matthew must have been 6, 7 or 8. And he said, “Why don't you take some gas from the VW that we're towing?” It was such a brilliant idea. So we siphoned gas out of the VW and put it in the car, and we're on our way. That's certainly something I remember.

Sam
That's a good story.

Howard
Any chance to your husband's right there that he can come pop in and say hello?

Jeannine Herron
I just want to say that I have enjoyed this process. And I really enjoyed meeting your students. And I think they're very bright and have a wonderful future ahead of them.

Here's Matt. They want to see us together.

Howard
It’s really great to see you.

Jeannine
This is Elsa. That's Sam.

I hope you all have as happy a life as we have.