

*Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee: Ms. Mary Jones
Interview Date: March 9, 2013
Location: Campus of Albany State University, Albany, Georgia
Interviewer: Willie Griffin
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 00:52:06

John Bishop: We're on.

Willie Griffin: Okay. Today is Saturday, March 9th, 2013. My name is Willie Griffin, and I am a research associate with the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am with videographer John Bishop in Albany, Georgia, on the campus of Albany State University to conduct an interview for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. We are here today with Mrs. Mary Jones. Thank you so much for being here, Mrs. Jones.

Mary Jones: You're quite welcome.

WG: And agreeing to share your story with the Civil Rights History Project. So, I just want to begin by asking you, simply, where were you born and when were you born?

MJ: Albany, Georgia, Dougherty County, 1933.

WG: 1933?

MJ: Yes.

WG: Okay.

MJ: In other words, July the 24th, 1933.

WG: Okay. So, what was it like to grow up in Albany?

MJ: Boy, it was kind of rough.

WG: [Laughs]

MJ: But I enjoyed it, but it was kind of rough in those days.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. I lived on the farm, see, and a lot of work to do.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. A lot of excitement, too, I would say.

WG: Um-hmm.

MJ: Um-hmm. My grandmother, who reared me—

WG: What was her name?

MJ: Bertha McIntosh.

WG: Bertha McIntosh, okay.

MJ: Yeah. Now, my mother's name, you have that already, I think.

WG: Yes, I do. So, what—?

MJ: But anyway, that was their place that—I grew up on my grandmother's place.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Because her fore-parents had bought that little “slot” of land. We called it “slot”
along in then. [Laughs]

WG: Slot?

MJ: Yeah, slot. [Laughs]

WG: Okay.

MJ: And so, I grew up on that little slot. [Laughter]

WG: Okay.

MJ: And we knew lots about going to church. And where you worked during the week, and then you went to church on Sundays. And from there on to when I got large enough to really go out and work on the farm, the white man's farm, like gathering nuts, and picking cotton, and digging potatoes, as we call it, "pull" corn—also, pecans, gathering pecans. We couldn't go to school [clears throat] when school started like in September. We had to stay and gather the farm. And then, after you gather the farm, then you could go to school, and that was around about October or the first of November.

WG: Wow. So, you missed the first two months of school each year?

MJ: Yeah, uh-huh.

WG: And so, when you first started doing this type of work, how old were you? Or how young? How young were you when you first started?

MJ: I probably was about eight.

WG: Eight years old?

MJ: Uh-huh. And [clears throat] my grandmother would let me go with this [clears throat] old lady, Miss Alice Porter.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And she would take quite a few of the children from the neighborhood to do that kind of work and everything. See, they trusted her because she had children and she didn't play.

WG: [Laughs] She was a taskmaster?

MJ: Yes.

WG: Okay.

MJ: But I loved her because she was always so sweet. She kept us in line! So, after eight years old, then that was our job, like going out. And sometime before the farm got ready, we would do hoeing bird's feed.

WG: Hoeing?

MJ: Yeah, hoeing.

WG: What—explain that. What is that?

MJ: That's like with a—Mr. Kenner, who used to be the mayor here, he had a little farm behind ours, and he would plant birdseeds. And they would come up, and we had to hoe the grass from around them. And it was real exciting, because he paid us pretty good.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, like maybe seventy-five cents [laughs] a day.

WG: Okay. So, that was good then? [Laughs]

MJ: Sure! That was a lot of money then. [05:00] And we would save that money like that to help buy our school clothes and things.

WG: Okay. So, your typical day, a typical workday for an eight-year-old child is like how long?

MJ: I'd say about—well, we'd try to get out there before the sun come up, because it'd be so hot. So, I would say around about seven o'clock.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Um-hmm. And they would have food for us to eat, uh-huh, so we didn't have to worry about taking lunches. And we would work until about five in the afternoon.

WG: Five.

MJ: And it was in walking distance. So, a group of us, we would get together. And all of us lived around in the same neighborhood, so we would, you know, get together and walk back to the house. That wasn't too far. So, we didn't need a chaperone like we did [clears throat] Miss Alice Porter when we went out to do peanuts and cotton and all of that, because we all lived right around the neighborhood.

WG: Okay. So, let's talk a little bit about when you finally did—once the season was over, and it was time to pick the crops, and then you finally got into school, what was the school—what were the schools like?

MJ: The school was—well, we first started in the church, First Bethesda Baptist Church. That's one of the oldest churches in the Southwest Georgia. Matter of fact, Du Bois attended that church—visited, rather.

WG: W. E. B. Du Bois?

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: Wow! Okay.

MJ: And he was so excited about it, about how it was. It was a great big old something, like a barn, that the white folks had given us that we could use. They used it first, and they built them a church and then gave that to us.

WG: Okay.

MJ: So—

WG: So, did they have special classrooms? Or did you just hold church, like in the—?

MJ: Whole—it was the whole building, you know, in different areas. Like, first through fifth was in this corner. And then, the others, over there, up until the seventh grade.

WG: Wow.

MJ: Uh-huh. Then, we ended up building a church, our own. Matter of fact, that's where I went to school until I finished seventh grade.

WG: Okay. What was the name—?

MJ: But we started in the church.

WG: Okay. What was the name of this one that you finished?

MJ: Shepherd. We named it after the master that gave us the big church.

WG: Oh, wow.

MJ: Because he gave us that ground and stuff, so we named it Shepherd—

WG: Shepherd.

MJ: Uh-huh, Elementary School.

WG: Okay. So, what were the teachers like in school? Do you have fond memories of them?

MJ: Yeah, just like your mama. [Laughs]

WG: Just like your mama. [Laughs] They kept you in line.

MJ: They kept us in line, uh-huh, and whip you when you did wrong.

WG: So, you knew not to step out of line.

MJ: I tell you!

WG: Okay. So, do you remember any of them, their names, in particular?

MJ: Yes. Miss Willie Mae Jackson was my first grade teacher, through third.

WG: Okay. So, what type of student were you? Did you like going to school for the social part—?

MJ: Yeah.

WG: Or were you there for the academics?

MJ: Well, you was going to get that, because they was going to make you get your lessons!

WG: Right.

MJ: And from fourth through seventh was Miss Celestine Scott.

WG: Celestine Scott.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: Okay. So, after seventh grade, you went on to high school?

MJ: I came to Albany. You had to come to Albany then.

WG: Okay. And how was that? I mean, it was a big change, I imagine.

MJ: Yeah, that was a *big* change, because we had to find, you know, like some of your relatives or someone to stay with unless you could get you a ride back home every day with people who was working up here in Albany. But I stayed with my aunt. My three cousins and myself lived with my aunt, Ella Holloway.

WG: Ella Holloway?

MJ: Uh-huh, on Cherry Street.

WG: Okay. Now, was that in the primary black community? Was that in Harlem?

MJ: Yeah, that was the black community. And when I came up here, we went to Monroe High School, [10:00] which is still open today.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: What do you recall about Monroe?

MJ: Oh, I loved Monroe! I was into sports.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, I played basketball, ran track.

WG: Oh, wow! So, you were an all-around athlete.

MJ: Yeah, and most of my children are.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. What about your—so, you were in high school in—what year did you graduate from high school?

MJ: It's supposed to have been '51.

WG: '51?

MJ: But I was in love and I got married. [Laughs]

WG: [Laughs] That's a good reason!

MJ: [Laughs] And he was going to the Army the next day or so, too!

WG: Uh-huh, so you got married.

MJ: Yes.

WG: And what was your husband's name?

MJ: Jimmy Lee Jones.

WG: Jimmy Lee Jones?

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: Okay. And how did you meet him? How did you start—?

MJ: We started at Monroe. He was at Monroe. He was playing football and basketball, and we met like that.

WG: Okay. So, in 1950, I mean, the schools were—I mean, they were segregated.

MJ: Yes.

WG: And what were the racial conditions like in the '50s in schools? Was that something that was on your mind? Were you thinking about race? How did you navigate that?

MJ: Well, I had listened to the radio and different things like that and read the paper about in the other cities and things about this integration. And I read about it and kept up with it, and I said, “If it’s hit Albany, Georgia, I will sure enough be a part of it,” because I wanted better for my children.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Um-hmm. Because, see, when my children was old enough to go to public schools, they was just integrating here in Albany then.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And they went through so much. Um-hmm, they really did.

WG: Okay. And you said you’d been reading about the Movement and hearing about it?

MJ: Yeah.

WG: What were your sources?

MJ: From the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Southwest Georgian*. Mr. A. C. Searles—

WG: Mr. A. C. Searles?

MJ: Yeah, was the owner of that paper and did the writing.

WG: Okay.

JB: What did your children have to go through. That's something, a part of the story that doesn't get told much.

MJ: They first integrated the high schools here, first. And my oldest daughter, I signed for her to go the second year. And, boy, boy, it was something! The principal, Mr. McNair, he'd call them "little monkeys," because he said "that's all he ever called them, and he couldn't call them nothing else." And they would have almost a riot every day.

And today, I do not understand—okay, it wasn't too many telephones then in the home, and we didn't have a cellphone, but every time it starts at Albany High, those children from Monroe will be there! I don't know how they got there. [Laughs] But the children got where they didn't want to sit beside them, you know, in the cafeteria and all of that. And they would spit at them and call them all kind of names: monkeys and bears and all of that.

WG: How did your children respond to this?

MJ: They—she hung in there! Uh-huh, she hung in there. I think it was about one or two that acted kind of nice, whites.

WG: Right.

MJ: But she hung in there, because so many of her friends went along when she did. You know, we got them registered and everything, so she had some friends over there, although she had to go through something.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And the teachers, I think she told me she had one or two nice teachers.

WG: Were all of her teachers white at this time? Did the black teachers lose their jobs when the schools integrated?

MJ: Not really. Now, I'm trying to think: Did she have a black teacher over at Albany High? Because that's been a long time, because, see, she's about sixty. [Laughs] [15:00]

WG: Wow.

MJ: But when they started that, like you say, they was transferring black teachers over to their schools and white teachers over to our schools. But it really didn't help out too much, because if it was any over there, it wasn't over one or two blacks.

And see, everything, you know—like my daughter played basketball when she was going to—I can't think of the junior high—Carver Junior High. But when she went over there, you know, no need of applying, because they wouldn't have any blacks or “monkeys.”

WG: They actually used those names?

MJ: Um-hmm, I'm telling you! [Laughs]

WG: So, when your—you said your husband went to the military.

MJ: Yeah.

WG: So, how long was he away?

MJ: He went—along in the time of the Movement starting and everything, he went back on active duty. So, he was in—he was—about two years.

WG: Okay. So, what were you—

MJ: But the first time he went, he did two years. Then came out, and then he joined the Reserve, the Army Reserve. So, that's when he was called back on active duty.

WG: Okay. So, what were you doing while he was away? I mean, obviously, you were raising the family, but how did you—?

MJ: Ah, looking at stories on the TV. [Laughs]

WG: [Laughs]

MJ: Because he kept telling me I needed to go on back and finish, because I was lacking—that was the last year that we had was graduating from the eleventh grade here, in '51. And, let me see, I played basketball that Friday night, and then we got married that Tuesday. So, [laughs] I didn't went back until later years.

WG: Okay.

MJ: But I was a, you know—well, in other words, I was a house-mama, a housewife, you know. I had to do all the running, like backwards and forward to school and backwards and forward to all the different meetings and things like that.

WG: Okay. Alright. So, what type of lessons were you trying to instill in your kids as they went to school?

MJ: First thing, let them know that they were somebody, regardless of the color of their skin, and that God loves all of us. And you're not going to school out there to beat up on nobody, take nobody's pencils, take nobody's lunch money. You're out there to try to learn, to be somebody in life.

[Sound of door opening, conversation outside room, door closing]

WG: Now, so when the Albany Movement sort of blows up and begins to really take effect, your kids, are they in school at all or what?

MJ: Uh-huh. My oldest, my daughter was eleven.

WG: Eleven, okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, and my son was nine. And I had—well, I really had four children. When he went back in service, I had my last two after he came out.

WG: Okay.

MJ: But anyway, yeah, they liked sports just like we did. My son, he liked sports. He played football and ran track and high-jumped. I forgot about that. I high-jumped, too! [Laughs]

WG: [Laughs] Alright. So, the Movement, you finally—you said when it comes to Albany—it's here now!

MJ: Yeah.

WG: How do you respond to it?

MJ: I started—I had heard about the Montgomery incident, you know.

WG: Right.

MJ: About the bus boycott and all that. So, when it first started, the Criterion Club here had organized and got together. And I had worked with them in voter registration, helping get peoples to register to vote. Matter of fact, they had a little school, like—it wasn't a school, but it was set up in the office that we taught peoples how to read. Because the main incident that they asked for when you go down to register—most of the people back then [20:00] didn't have an education—you had to learn how to read the, uh—[pause] just a minute.

WG: Was it the Georgia Constitution?

MJ: Yeah! That's it.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, the Constitution.

WG: So, when you set out to do these voter registration drives, how did you go about doing this? Did you go door-to-door, knocking on doors?

MJ: Yeah, we had to canvas.

WG: Okay, canvassing.

MJ: Uh-huh, yeah, and especially in the projects where I was living. It was so many, you know, people out there who was not registered to vote, who were scared to go down because they had heard tell of all of that, what they had to read.

WG: Sure.

MJ: And most of them couldn't hardly read.

WG: Right.

MJ: But after I started working with them, and some more, and had these little classes and things, they got then where they—I guess they were saying that, “If Mrs. Jones is down there, I know it's going to be alright. She's going help me.” Because that's what I did.

WG: Um-hmm.

MJ: And after, even after getting them, you know, registered to vote, you had to carry them back. I remember one lady told me—and I got so upset about it [laughs]—told her, carried her the flyer about registering to vote and all that, and she said she was going do it. So, I talked to her the day after. She said, “No, I didn't. I registered like you told me.” I said, “But baby, you didn't *vote*, and that's what *counts!*” [Laughter]

“I didn't know! I just—.” I said, “No, now, you know we talked about that.”

WG: Right.

MJ: “Going through all of that and everything, and then you don't register. How will we *ever* get some black peoples in?”

WG: Right.

MJ: Because, see, we weren't holding nothing then in Albany.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. So—

WG: So, could you—?

MJ: So, working with that, along with the Movement when it started, and carrying folks backwards and forward down to get registered. And then, making sure that they [laughs] go back to vote. I worked with that a while, and then, I worked on the Police Committee—

WG: Committee, right.

MJ: Uh-huh, with the Movement.

WG: Okay. And you were the first black on this committee, right? How did this whole process come about, that you become the first?

MJ: I'm the only one living now. It was seven of us.

WG: Oh, there were seven? Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. And they chose us from the Movement, you know, who would want to be on this committee to go down to talk to Chief Pritchett. And so, you know, the different ones volunteered to go, along with myself. Mrs. McCree Harris was our spokesman. She was working at Monroe High.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: So, I mean, a lot of people—I mean, Chief Laurie Pritchett was pretty popular, as you know.

MJ: Yes, he was.

WG: So, what was [laughter]—what was your opinion of Chief Pritchett?

MJ: The first two or three times we went, he ignored us.

WG: Um-hmm, ignored you?

MJ: Uh-huh. And about the fourth time—and he knew Mrs. McCree Harris, because she was working at Monroe and was kind of among the different things that go on here in the city went on. So, he finally wanted to know, “Well, McCree, what y’all want?”

She said, “Well, we’ve been here three times and we tried to tell you,” said, “but you just told your man over there,” she said, just like that, “‘the man over there’ to ask us to have a seat.” Said, “And we sat for an hour or two, almost two hours, and you never did come. So, we got up and left.” Said, “And we came back again,” said, “and the same thing happened.” Said, “You were so busy.” Said, “And then, the third time we came.”

And so, he said, “Oh, I’m just so sorry,” you know, “I have so much to do.” And so, he apologized, and then he told her, he said, “Well, y’all just put the word out,” and everything. He said, “Because nobody has been up here to apply for a job.” So, the next time we met, that’s the first thing she wanted to know: Had anybody been up there? He said, “No.”

So, she said, “Well, I tell you what. You give me some applications.” She said, “I’ll go out and I’ll carry them. Will that be alright?” “Oh, yeah! Yeah, yeah, that’ll be alright!” [Laughter] So, she did, [25:00] and from that process, they did hire five—I think it was five. Uh-huh. So, that was Etris Smith—

WG: Etris Smith?

MJ: Uh-huh. David High.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Robert Benning.

WG: Robert Benning?

MJ: Yeah. Insert in there “Big Junior,” [laughter] because that’s what we called him. Most folks didn’t know his name, because he was working at the funeral home before then. And the other two names—how many there I gave you?

WG: You said Etris Smith, David High, and Robert Benning, “Big Junior.”

MJ: Uh-huh, and it’s two more.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Is it any way I can—?

WG: That’s fine. We’ll—

MJ: If it comes to me, I can—?

WG: Yeah, you can get them to me. That’s fine.

MJ: Okay.

WG: Okay, so—

MJ: So, but they were told when they was hired, “You know you can’t arrest no white folks.”

WG: Um-hmm.

MJ: Uh-huh. That’s true.

WG: And this was in—so, they weren’t really full officers, right?

MJ: No—uh-huh, they was full-time for *us*.

WG: [Laughs] Right. But they just couldn’t—?

MJ: Oh, no!

WG: Now, did they have police cars?

MJ: Um-um.

WG: They didn’t get patrol cars?

MJ: No, they had to walk their beat!

WG: [Laughs]

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: Uniforms? Did they have regular uniforms?

MJ: Yeah, they had regular uniforms.

WG: They had regular uniforms, okay, because I know in some cities, you know, they would give them these positions—

MJ: Yeah!

WG: But they wouldn't give them uniforms, they wouldn't give them patrol cars, and they couldn't carry weapons.

MJ: I think—well, they was already coached on—I'm trying to think. Did they—I think they had weapons. But I know they were told they couldn't arrest no whites.

WG: Um-hmm.

MJ: Uh-huh. And the reason that came about—the Movement decided to start, you know, going up, talking to them about this, because every week or two, some black man got killed. All you had to do was stumble across their floor there, and they would kill you.

WG: Um-hmm.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: And it was usually at the hands of a police officer, right?

MJ: Yeah! Uh-huh. And we went up and, you know, swear to them, you know, “We don't feel safe, because it's just only white policemen, and they're the ones doing the killing!”

WG: Right.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: And the police were supposed to make you feel safe.

MJ: Yeah! Every week! I'm telling you the truth! Uh-huh, somebody got shot! This and that! So, out of that, they did hire them, like I said, and everything, but they gave them their rules and regulations.

WG: Do you remember the year that the first black police officers were hired?

MJ: [Sighs]

WG: Was it in the '60s, or '50s?

MJ: It was in the '60s.

WG: It was in the '60s.

MJ: Because it was during the Movement.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And the Movement had started around about the last of '61.

WG: '61, okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, yeah, it was in the '60s.

WG: Okay. I wanted to backtrack a little bit, because—

MJ: Okay.

WG: The Criterion Club has come up in some newspaper articles, but no one knows that much about it. Could you talk about the leadership of the Criterion Club and, I guess, some of the reasons why they formed initially. You said that they formed initially to—was it voter registration? Was that their primary—?

MJ: They were doing—uh-huh, they were doing voter registration. But they're kind of the one that came in, also, with a few more and set up the Albany Movement.

WG: Okay. Who were some of the more prominent leaders in the Criterion Club?

MJ: Okay, Dr. William Anderson.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Chevene—Attorney King, Chevene King.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Thomas Chapman.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Ah, um—good as I know them folks, I tell you—um—

WG: Paige? Was there a Paige?

MJ: Yeah! Yeah, Paige, uh-huh. I can't think of his first name now.

WG: Okay.

MJ: It was quite a few of them.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Um-hmm. So, they helped organize, by they were already, you know, into registration and all of that.

WG: Okay.

MJ: So, they chose Dr. William Anderson as the president of the Albany Movement.

WG: Okay. [30:00]

MJ: And then, they had Mr. Paige, like you called his name, he was the secretary. And a few more others, go on and on. [Laughing] I can't think of other folks now.

WG: Okay. So, when the Albany Movement, when the students, the Freedom Riders come in, what are you thinking? How does that—I mean, does it—I mean, I know it captivates—

MJ: That's what really tipped it off because, see, they came in and they went out through the country area and all of that. Uh-huh, they came in one Sunday evening on the—they met

them, because my husband hadn't gone back into duty then, active duty then. So, they all went down to the train station and welcomed them in.

WG: And that's when they were arrested and beaten?

MJ: Yeah, uh-huh. And we—they had the mass meeting every night but Saturday and Sunday. But if it was necessary for a called meeting, you know, they would.

WG: They moved these mass meetings around—

MJ: Yeah.

WG: Or were they always at one place?

MJ: Uh-huh. Now, some of the ministers didn't cooperate, really because they were afraid that—some of the churches had gotten burned up in Lee County and Terrell County.

WG: Right, yeah.

MJ: Which was a blessing, because they was little shacks anyway. And when Dr. King and them organizations built those churches back, it was so nice.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Um-hmm.

WG: Okay, now, I didn't hear about—I have heard about the rash of church burnings in Leesburg. So, Dr. King played a role in getting these—?

MJ: Yeah, helped getting forms.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Yeah.

WG: Could you talk a little bit more about that? How did that take place or—I mean, I'm not—

MJ: Talking about the burnings?

WG: Yeah, the burnings and then the—

MJ: Because they had mass meeting at those churches.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And they were on people's places, you know, [laughs] plantations, things—

WG: Right.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: And some people were even afraid of Martin Luther King coming to these churches, weren't they?

MJ: Yeah! They were, uh-huh.

WG: But he ended up helping them anyway rebuild some of these churches?

MJ: Yeah, uh-huh.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Because, see, he knew all these different organizations and all of that.

WG: Oh, that would fund it. Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, very intelligent person.

WG: So, did you ever get a chance to meet him personally?

MJ: Huh?

WG: King, Dr. King—did you ever get a chance to meet him personally?

MJ: Yeah, you know, going by, like, shaking his hand at the Movement or something.

[Laughing] There'd be so many folks around, you couldn't get there to try to talk personally.

WG: Right. So, now, when you—when they started, when did you decide to become involved in the marches and so forth? When was the first time you got arrested?

MJ: What happened, it drew out of one of the meetings that we were having, mass meetings and things, about the marching and all of that. Well, the children had marched first, the young people. And so, the *Albany Herald* had printed, and also on the Channel 10, which was James Gray's, uh—

WG: Right.

MJ: Uh—

WG: Newspaper.

MJ: Uh-huh. And he was saying about the people, the older, the *grownups*, they're too scared to march, so they pushed the children out to do their work.

WG: Right.

MJ: And, boy, we had a fit about that! [Laughter] Um-hmm! Because my oldest daughter was locked up, too, eleven years old. Uh-huh!

WG: So, that was a call, a challenge, a clarion call to—

MJ: "They pushed the children out first." So, then, we said, "Naw, that ain't going go!" So, we organized right there to the mass meeting, and who wanted to march, and all the hands just went up, uh-huh!

WG: Okay.

MJ: And so, we met around there on the corner of Washington and Broad Avenue the next morning, and we marched down Washington Street by the old jail, which was on—um, I can't think of the name of that street now, but I know it wasn't Flint—um, good as I know the name! But anyway, it'll come back. But anyway, about 700 of us "grownups"—

WG: Wow. Okay, so you were in the large group?

MJ: Yeah, uh-huh. So, the thing that we had to straighten out, because they said we sent for Martin Luther King to come do our job.

WG: Right.

MJ: We didn't send for him to come *march*, because 700 of us was in jail when he came.

WG: Right.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: This was strictly a local movement, and Dr. King—

MJ: Yeah, uh-huh. [35:00] So, I was in there from Monday about 11 o'clock to Thursday, uh-huh, and my father came and bonded me out.

WG: Okay.

MJ: But anyway—

WG: So, what—I mean, before you go into that—

MJ: Okay. That's what I want you to do: Ask me what you want me to say.

WG: Okay. Did the marching—I mean, walking with 700 people, how does that—I mean, how does that make a person feel? I mean, you're—

MJ: There wasn't no one—we was in every jail around here.

WG: Right.

MJ: I went to Baker County jail.

WG: Okay. When you were arrested, how did they treat you? Were they hostile? Were they strong-handed?

MJ: Yeah, yeah. They had these billy clubs. "Get on in here! You're marching." They had warned us one time, "If you don't stop that singing and go home, you're going be locked up!" And we got louder then. [Singing] "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around." [Laughing]

And so, we marched around about two more times, and sure enough, they told us we was under arrest.

And back then, the jail was so small, they had a little place in the back about—it wasn't big as—it was about big as from where he's sitting over here. And that's where they put 700 of us.

WG: Wow!

MJ: We was all on top of each other almost. And we stood—they let you stood out there about three or four hours, and it was pouring down rain then.

WG: What?!

MJ: Uh-huh. Then they finally let us come in and they booked us. And they sent us different places. I was intending to remember the name of the jail around here that wouldn't take any of us, said they didn't want to have anything to do with that. I can't think of what—

WG: So, there was one county that wouldn't take anybody?

MJ: Uh-huh. They said, "No, we aren't taking any."

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. I can't think of it to save my life.

WG: That's okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. But—

WG: So, I mean, how did they—I mean, what did you do—700 in jail? How did you go to the restroom and eat? Did they feed you?

MJ: Yeah, uh-huh. The little room down there to Baker County where I was, it actually would hold, looked like, about 8 or 10, and they put 25 in there. Uh-huh. One bed.

WG: Wow.

MJ: The mattress was split in the middle and on the floor. The sink was running; the water had wet the mattress. And that's where we had to stay, sit on the floor and all of that.

WG: From Monday through Thursday.

MJ: And pray and cry. Every night they would come out with some German shepherd dogs, and they would put them, looked like, almost to the window. But they had the fence around it; they couldn't get exactly to the window. And they would make them dogs so mad, they'd be barking and going on. And they said, "We ought to go in there! We ought to open the gate and let these dogs go in there and eat them up! And see what they'll do then! That's what we need to do!" And, boy, we would sing louder and pray and everything!

Then, when they feed you food—I told some of them, I said, "When I go home," I said, "the peas that I'm going cook, I'm going be able to *drink* them!" Them peas were so hard you couldn't hardly cut them!

WG: Wow.

MJ: Couldn't eat them! Uh-huh. Grits the same way. And they'd take the butter and put right in the middle of the grits and throw the bread on top of it. And that's what they gave us to eat like that—grits and bread and peas, black-eyed peas, like that. And we were so tired down there. We were just—oooh, I tell you the truth, it was rough and tough.

But if I had it to do again, I would have done that. Uh-huh, because they were studying marching as we, you know, got out. And I tried to go back, but they wouldn't arrest me.

WG: They wouldn't arrest you? [Laughs]

MJ: Uh-uh. See, we knew how to dress then. They had told us how to put on extra clothes, you know, up under your pants and what like that.

WG: Right.

MJ: Uh-uh. It was too many of them going to jail. They didn't have nowhere to put us!

WG: You just continued to march.

MJ: Um-hmm. So, it was really rough and tough, but it was worth every bit of it. And, of course, we had some good white friends, too, that really helped out. Uh-huh, you know, a lot of them couldn't come out to the front, you know, and do. But they helped.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: Do you remember any in particular?

MJ: No, because they didn't really—they called their name, but they was kind of quiet with it.

WG: Okay.

MJ: They didn't mean for nothing to get back, you know, because they would [40:00] end up doing them the same way, any of them that paid us any attention.

WG: Right.

MJ: Because see how they did the civil rights leaders that came in? And Sherrod and them?

WG: Right.

MJ: It didn't make no difference with them. If you sided with us blacks, like—no, they weren't calling us blacks then—if you associated with “niggers,” you got just what the “niggers” got. So, they were going to jail.

And see, all this came about because our leaders, like the Criterion Club and some ministers and others, had gone down and tried talking with the city manager then—I can't think of his name—talked with Pritchett and them, you know, about the situation here.

WG: Right.

MJ: And they wouldn't even talk to them! Um-um. "No, you ain't got nothing to talk about."

WG: They just wanted you to stop protesting.

MJ: That's right! Oh, yeah!

WG: And just stay in your place.

MJ: But after it got so many, and they could see that it won't going be no stopping, then they did. Uh-huh. But before they did that, we had to cut off all ties with the downtown Albany. We started going to Moultrie getting our clothes and all that kind of stuff.

WG: Okay.

MJ: They gave us time to get our—it must have been coming up to Christmas, because they gave us time to get our lay-aways out. Uh-huh. And once you got them out, Albany was a Black Christmas. Um-hmm! Folks was going to Camilla and Cordele, places like that. And we mostly was going, and I was taking people, too, to Moultrie.

WG: So, the boycott was a success?

MJ: Yeah, the boycott was—oh, they started sending for you then! Want to *talk*! Uh-huh, sure did.

WG: During Christmas?

MJ: It was coming up to Christmas when I went to jail, because we had gotten our things out, I believe it was the first Monday in December. Get all your lay-aways out! Because that's the way we shopped then, by lay-away.

WG: Right.

MJ: You know, putting that stuff up and paying on it! [Laughing]

WG: [Laughing] I've heard about the lay-away system!

MJ: Yes, goodness!

WG: Okay. So, now, when your father comes to get you out of jail, what's the first thing you do? What do you do? How do you feel?

MJ: I felt so *good*, I'm telling you, because I wanted to see my children! Because, see, my neighbor next door, she was overseeing them, because she had dared me to go to jail. She had known I was going, because I had always said it. I said, "Once it hits Albany, I'm sorry!" "You better not to go to jail!" [Laughs]

WG: This was your time, though, right?

MJ: Yeah. And so, I was real happy and everything. Now, some of the peoples, I think, lost money in that deal. Because that was the first beginning of it where they'd tell you you could put your house, you know, up or either pay. I forget how much the fine was.

WG: Right.

MJ: But a lot of that, they kept that money and stuff.

WG: So, they made a lot of money out of it?

M: Yeah.

WG: And your father just—

MJ: But he didn't lose nothing.

WG: He didn't lose anything, okay.

MJ: Uh-huh.

WG: Okay. So, after this, you go back out and you march some more. Is that the extent of your participation? How do you—do you continue to stay involved?

MJ: Yeah, I stayed involved. I couldn't go to jail no more.

WG: Okay.

MJ: They wouldn't arrest me. [Laughter] So, [coughs] I took on then [pause]—oh, just a minute here.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Then I was living in the Washington projects, which is right down over there. You can't tell it now, because I think they've got a golf course down there now.

WG: Okay.

MJ: But it was so many of us living out there in the projects then, we kind of even—the Movement was going on each night. They would meet at my house at twelve o'clock every day, Sherrod and them.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And that would give all the older peoples, who wasn't able to really walk down to Shiloh or Mount Zion from the projects over there on Washington Street, that would give them a chance to come to the meetings, too.

WG: Okay.

MJ: And we would have that there, plus I worked as one of the [45:00] voting captains that was—I was the one out there in Washington Street Projects that they would tell at the mass meeting who we were going to vote for, because we had our people then, uh-huh, the ones that were going to do right and everything. So, then, I would call them and let them know, or either go around to their house the next day and let them know who to vote for when they go to vote.

WG: Okay. So, I guess, just looking back, reflecting back, on Albany's Movement, the successes and failures—where would you pin those, if there were any failures and there were successes?

MJ: I wouldn't say failure, because Lord knows where we were before we started, before it began. I would say it was a success, because that come up to the schools and all of that; and our peoples, looked like, a lot of them really caught on and began to try to do for their children, to bring them up the right way and everything; and then, good jobs opened up and everything, because we wouldn't have no good jobs. If you did, you was—just like the Belk's department store. We had to picket that place for the *longest* before they would hire any blacks besides cleaning up!

WG: Right.

MJ: Uh-huh. But they finally come around, because they know they were closed for that Christmas because we didn't shop there. [Laughs] So, when I go to those stores now—*all* these stores that you weren't working in there, not ringing no cash register or nothing, only to clean up and go pick up the mail and things like that, and to watch black people when they come in.

WG: Right. Okay. So, if there were any legacies that you would want, you know, known about Albany's Movement, I mean, what would be the most important thing that you would want people to know?

MJ: One thing: much prayer. And then, sticking together and not going back to them old Uncle Tom ways: Everything that, you know, they try to do, I sneak off at night and go tell him, my bossman, you know, or whatever.

WG: Right.

MJ: We had a lot of snitches. Uh-huh. But they didn't fuss at them or nothing. They let them know they knew who they were.

WG: Okay.

MJ: But they didn't have to call their name, but they could tell it so plain, because they know who they were. And I would say, you know, by sticking together—first thing was, like I told you, much prayer. And then, sticking together. And we learned how to love more then, because back then, we was kind of off in love, each other. We had gotten where, like, we hated each other, like the white man hated us.

WG: Do you think we've gotten to that point now?

MJ: We're getting to it. We ain't to it altogether, but we are working on it.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. So, we're trying to let that be a legacy about doing, you know, the right thing.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh. Not only about, you know, black people, but white peoples, too, because it's like I told you, we had some good white folks in there.

WG: Right.

MJ: Um-hmm. And another committee I thought about I wanted to talk about. We had all kind of committees from the Movement. And one thing I wanted to make sure—about the teachers, because the superintendent had told them if they marched, that was their jobs.

WG: Right.

MJ: They could not march. So, now, what is more important, marching and going to jail and you don't have no job, or either helping the peoples who went to jail? And that's what they did.

WG: So, they helped?

MJ: They organized, and people that marched, they saw about their children.

WG: Oh, okay.

MJ: They bought food, paid light bills, paid the rent.

WG: Wow!

MJ: I'm telling you what I *know*!

WG: Wow.

MJ: Uh-huh. So, they played an important role in the Albany Movement. You don't hear about it too much.

WG: Yeah, those stories you definitely don't hear.

MJ: Uh-huh, you don't hear about it, but I know about it because I was there.

WG: Okay.

MJ: Uh-huh, they played an important role [50:00] because they didn't have to worry about nothing. And one thing, we had [laughing] one lady, she was older than me, but she sold Avon. So, she heard about that, and they was telling her what happened. She said, "Well, I can go to jail," said, "because these folks ain't buying no Avon and stuff nohow. They ain't got no money." Said, "I can go to jail!" So, she did! She went three or four times. [Laughter] And her lights was paid, her rent, and when she got out, she had food and things.

WG: Oh, wow!

MJ: Uh-huh! They did that! And therefore, people like myself and others, who didn't have the money—you know, you wanted to do something, but you really didn't have nothing. Uh-huh! So, I wanted to say that, because they really played an important role in this Movement.

WG: That was well-put.

MJ: Anything else you all want to ask? I don't want to take up *all* your time. [Laughs]

WG: [Laughs] No, ma'am, Mrs. Jones. I really appreciate it. I want to thank you again for sitting down and taking the time and sharing these wonderful stories that you have.

MJ: Okay.

WG: And we appreciate it.

MJ: Yeah, and I told you about my educational background.

WG: Um-hmm.

MJ: Uh-huh. Because I didn't do that until after, you know, the Movement, well, *during* the Movement. That's when that came out, the War on Poverty. President Johnson was the president, and Sargent Shriver was over that program, the Head Start Program. Now, they get me stirred up when they start talking about cutting them funds for Head Start!

WG: Right.

MJ: Because I know where my education came from.

WG: And you went into Early Childhood Education?

MJ: Yes, uh-huh, I sure did, and fifteen hours on a master's. But I promised the good Lord I was going home with that, what I got! It was just too hard and I had got too old! [Laughs]

WG: [Laughs]

MJ: [Coughs]

WG: Okay. Well, good. Thank you again.

MJ: Thank you all for taking the time.

[Recording ends at 52:06]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council