Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee:	Miss Dorie Ann Ladner and Dr. Joyce Ann Ladner
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Location:	Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Interviewer:	Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	2:01:26
Note:	Ms. Elaine Nichols, Project Curator for the NMAAHC, was present as an observer.
Comments:	Only text in quotation marks is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions.

JOSEPH MOSNIER: Today is Tuesday, September 20, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I'm with videographer John Bishop in Washington, D.C. at the Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress to record an oral history 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. And we are really honored and privileged today to have with us Miss Doris Ann Ladner.

DORIS ANN LADNER: Dorie.

JM: Dorie Ladner, and, uh, Dr. Joyce Ladner, sisters, um, originally from Mississippi who have had –

JOYCE ANN LADNER: Joyce Ann as well.

JM: Joyce Ann as well. Uh, long, long histories of involvement in progressive struggle in the Movement and, uh, let me note as well, we're delighted to have with us Elaine Nichols, who is the project curator at the museum. And I think we are not – we're not recording to the SD card. Okay. Um, Miss Ladner, Dr. Ladner, thank you so much for coming in and sitting down. It's a real privilege and honor to be with you.

DL: Thank you. Thank you.

JL: Thank you.

JM: Um, you set the challenge of opening with a, with a complicated or stimulating question, and I thought I might um, we can work back from this, but let me take you back since we're sitting here on the mall in Washington, D.C. Let me take you back to 1963, and, uh, I want to ask about the March, but most particularly I want to ask about the ambivalence and the range of thought and feeling and criticism you had about that experience because I know it was a complicated question that –

DL: Well, my feelings were, uh, one of ambivalence and complicated in that, uh, there were so many things going on on the front line, meaning that Medgar Evers had been killed on June 12th. His funeral was June 16th and, uh, Lawrence Guyot had been beaten; Miss Fannie Lou Hamer had been jailed and beaten very badly in Winona, Mississippi, and there was a bus boycott going – not bus boycott but a boycott of all the stores in Jackson, Mississippi, and people were being arrested in Greenwood, Mississippi. We were under siege. So, uh, we knew that we had to return back to these

homes. We had three guys on death row in Georgia. Um, so coming together was good to address, bring our, um, grievances to the seat of government to let the President and everybody know, but we knew that we had to return back to those towns. And what would be waiting for us.

I really looked forward to coming here and to letting everybody know what was going on. But in reality, James Farmer, who was, uh, executive director of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] was in jail in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. He couldn't attend. So, uh, my sister Joyce worked in the March on Washington office coordinating the, uh, transportation and working out the logistics. And I was working in the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] office, uh, raising money for the organization's livelihood and also, uh, recruiting people to participate in the same, uh, um, march. But the point was I was always thinking about what was going on because I'm a frontline person. And always thinking about the strategy, and my sister was talking about the fun that we had and I was thinking about the other side of it. And I said, wanted to say, and death shall have no dominion over what we were doing at the same time because we didn't fear death as well as enjoying ourselves partying and so forth. We were young and, uh, zealots, we were zealots.

So, uh, in essence, oh, the one thing that bothered us was that uh, we didn't sing, [laughs] which always kept us going. And, uh, when they wanted to change John's speech [John Lewis's March on Washington speech], but I'll let Joyce talk about that because uh, she was involved back there with Courtland [Cox] and Jim [Forman] and so forth. But that was one thing that turned us off. And we were always busy. You know we had all this energy, energy. Nineteen, twenty years old, you're very energetic.

JL: Very busy. Um, I was at a conference, student conference, in Lake Forest, uh, Illinois, the day that Medgar Evers was killed. And I had gone there as a SNCC representative to try to recruit students and also to raise money and to spread generally spread the word about the southern movement. [5:00] I got a call, um, while I was at this conference one evening from Ruby Doris Robinson. Now Ruby said, "Joyce, Medgar has been killed." And I said, "Oh my God. I've got to go home. I've got to get back to Jackson." And she said, "No, you need to go to Washington to work on the March on Washington." I said, "Yeah, but I've known Medgar, you know, since I was fourteen." I mean, I was very upset. I started, I think I was even crying. I'm sure I was. And she said, "But we need to send two representatives from SNCC to work on the March, and I want you to go from there, from uh, uh, get you an airline ticket and I want you to go to New York City to, for the rest of the summer to work on the March." And she said, "This is" – I remember so clearly – "this is what Medgar would have expected of you, or wanted you to do." One or the other she said. And I was, like, taken aback, and I – but I always had the ability to think with my head even in difficult, emotional times. So, I saw the logic of what she, anyone could appeal to my logic. So she appealed to that part of me.

And so I was then off to New York to work um, at, at the Harlem Headquarters for the March on Washington. And, uh, I spent the summer there working under Bayard Rustin's direction. Uh, there, uh, we, Dorie and I stayed with Rachelle Horowitz who was a young person, and she lived, uh, at West 8th Avenue and 24th Street in ILGWU [International Ladies Garment Workers Union] condo apartments. And she had a one-bedroom apartment there. Dorie and I slept on the sofa and then later in the summer

Eleanor Holmes [later Eleanor Holmes Norton] arrived, and she, she was at Yale Law School, and she came and she, uh, joined us up at March headquarters.

So Dorie, while Dorie was working out of the SNCC office, Rachelle, Eleanor and I worked up in the Harlem office of the March. And my job really was to raise money. So I went out on Long Island. I went out to New Jersey, around the city spreading, uh, the word about the March and why it was so important to bring, uh, people who were involved in the Movement from the South to participate in the March. So El, uh, Rachelle, uh, used to say that every time Joyce went out to raise money, she came back with enough to rent another bus. So, [laughs] uh, and that was [phone in background] what was important to us.

I, I – we worked long hours. We worked on Saturday and it was very tiring. One Saturday I remember seeing Malcolm X for the first time. He was, he used to speak on the corner of 125th Street, and I stopped and listened to him speak, and as I said we worked very long hours. We did whatever Bayard [Rustin] told us to do. So it was, it was, uh, it was –

DL: Well organized.

JL: Very well organized. I was, he was a, a great organizer. He had a very clear tactical sense, and he saw the big picture, and he, you know, anything he asked us to do we did because, um, but he also left us with enough flexibility you know to, to be independent to go out there and do what had to be done. Um, so every night we worked late at night, came into, back to the apartment and, and there was 'Bobby' Dylan sitting on the sofa, strumming his guitar, and I wanted to go to sleep. And he would sit there until midnight, and I just couldn't wait until he would go to sleep. But he was sitting

there entertaining Dorie, and, um, uh, you know he wasn't, he was well known, but you know we were all young people at the time. I didn't see him as any great, you know, famous person or anything because we were peers in a way, and we, then we went down, flew down to Washington, uh, for the march, the day before, and we stayed at what, what was then called the Statler Hilton Hotel. It's now, um –

DL: 16th and K.

JL: Right. It's the Washington –

DL: Not the Washington.

JL: Not the Washington Hilton but –

DL: The Hilton.

JL: I'm not sure what the official name of the hotel is, but it was, back then it was called the Statler Hilton. And it was the March hotel, and I remember, um, there were a lot of media people, a lot of people who were there for the march, um, and I remember, uh, meeting Malcolm X – seeing him rather – in the lobby after the March, [10:00] and I'm pretty sure I saw him there before the March occurred as well.

DL: No, we saw him the morning after we picketed the Justice Department.

JL: Yeah, we – early that morning we went down to picket the Justice Department because –

DL: Because we had three guys on death row.

JL: Because of uh, Don Harris, um, John Perdue.

DL: Ralph.

JL: Uh, Ralph Perdue and –

DL: Ralph –

JL: Ralph Allen and John Perdue were, were in jail in Americus, Georgia and they, um, were jailed for sedition. Essentially what they were trying to do was organize and that was the charge they charged. That was a tremendous charge because they could've been killed.

DL: And we had petitioned the federal government to no avail.

JL: So we picketed them about six o'clock that morning. Then we got ready earlier went on over to the mall for the March. I had a pass, a stage pass, because I was on the staff. And so what I remember first was seeing all those people. It was an incredible sight. A nineteen year-old from Mississippi who had never seen huge numbers. In fact no one on that platform had seen numbers like that before. But I remember seeing people march, coming and coming and coming and they just kept coming. Um, and then I saw the people on stage, and I think I might have been impressed by some of them, but I think probably most by uh, uh, Josephine Baker [laughs]. She was the person I remembered most because she was a legend, and I could not imagine that I would have ever met her. She was very gregarious and exotic-looking and, and she was shaking everyone's hand and hugging people and so on.

And, um, then seeing the actors, people in movies up there and that was, even though there were people who were involved who were very strong supporters of SNCC, you know, who were, uh, who raised a lot of money for us. And then I, then seeing the union guys on stage, uh, and seeing Mahalia Jackson and hearing her sing. Um, in other words, it was just – it cut across a swath of a lot of people, you know, who were, swath of America on that stage. I remember seeing Marlon Brando and I used to, I felt I got the kind of chills when I saw him and Josephine Baker, and I was thinking more than

anything else that our support really ran deep you know. Uh, that was what, what, uh, I felt. And I saw Lena Horne, and I had met her earlier in the summer because –

DL: She came to Jackson, Mississippi at the request of Medgar Evers before he was killed.

JL: But we, also I met her at the Delta Sigma Theta convention that summer in New York when, when Joan Trumpauer [later, Joan Trumpauer Mulholland] who was later my roommate at Tougaloo [College], and, um, Joyce Barry who worked with SNCC in Southwest Georgia and I, we were all Deltas. There were two white girls who were Delta, who were members of Delta Sigma Theta and I, and we were all in the Movement. So we, uh, Jeanne Noble [Dr. Jeanne Laveta Noble] who was the Delta Sigma Theta president at the time and was from Albany, Georgia, uh, and a professor at the time at Brooklyn College, later at NYU, invited us to speak about what was happening in the South. And the Deltas were very activist-oriented, and they, uh, used to bail other Deltas, young Delta soros out of jail in the South. And so, uh, we spoke about at the convention about what was happening. Lena Horne talked about having been down in, in, um, Jackson, and she had a very, very strong, deep emotional tie to the Movement, very unusual, she, she felt it in her solar plexus, I think.

DA: Her mother had – according to her biography, her mother had taken her to Georgia – her natural mother, because she was reared by her grandmother – her father's mother had taken her to Georgia, and she stayed for a long period of time and she so identified with that area because you know she never lost her southern accent. And Billy Strayhorn was also with her, and her son. So, uh, and I remember being at a house there in Jackson with uh, Dr. Noble, president of Delta, Lena Horne, Dick Gregory, and I'm

not sure who else. Medgar Evers was there, and they were all talking. Here, I'm like twenty, nineteen or twenty years old sitting there observing them, and the one thing that, about Lena Horne was that uh, when Joyce and I were on the platform at the Lincoln Memorial, the Brit – the, uh, French television, uh, wanted to interview her. [15:00] She said, "No, these are the young people you should interview."

JA: Yes, she wouldn't allow herself to be interviewed at all.

DL: She said, "Interview them. Interview them."

JL: And she took me by the hand and took me over to the, I think it was NBC that um Nancy Dickerson that, the legendary female reporter, television uh, news person uh, was up on a scaffold. And we climbed up the scaffold and she told her, "Interview this young person, because, young woman, because she lives in the South and she knows what it's like." So, she was very generous in that regard, and I remember being interviewed and when I got back home a week later to Miss – Hattiesburg, my mother said, "I saw you on TV," and that was like, so, this was 1963. You know, you remember, fifty years, almost, almost fifty years ago, and it was – television wasn't what it is now. So it was so strange. And Mother said, "Yeah, all the neighbors," said, "Miss Katie [Grice] saw you, and Miss Ida [Bettis] saw you," and [laughing] she went on all the neighbors who had seen me as well. And my younger sisters and brothers had as well. And that made, uh, our mother was a low-key, no nonsense, uh –

DL: Strong-willed.

JL: Very strong-willed and kind of shy but she –

DL: Like me. [laughs]

JL: Right, right. Just the opposite of you [laughs]. And she, she would, she would give you a lot of compliments but when she gave you one, you know. She said, "You look nice up there," and I said, "Oh, thank you, Mother" and that meant everything because – um, and she had had a lot of ambivalence about our involvement in the Movement because she was afraid that number one, something could happen to us, and also she always worried that the house would be burned down by the Klan.

DL: But Mother started teaching us, let me go back to how we, it all started. When we were very young, I remember her telling us to always look a white man in the eyes when you're talking and –

JL: And don't blink.

DL: Never look down, and we were like four and five years old. And she grew up in an integrated community in [clears throat] Wayne County, Mississippi and so it was really through her –

JL: It really shaped the way she saw people.

DL: Yeah, people.

JL: In general. And she never feared anyone. So she always told us to –

DL: That we were as good as anybody.

JL: Yeah, that was the mantra that passed through five generations of our family, uh, uh, maternal line of our family. We can go back in a minute and talk about that. But, but Mother, uh, always, she was – while she had ambivalence and some fear and trepidation about our involvement. What I always remember is that she never told us not to go. And that was important. She never said stay here. Never. And so when, I remember on that day we, you know, being interviewed by a French media reporter and

then uh, uh, Nancy Dickerson at NBC. And so it was, but what, what bo – I remember most is John Lewis' speech because I was on the podium with Courtland [Cox], uh, Mildred [Mildred Thompson Forman, later Mildred Page] and Jim Forman, and John. There were others around, but that small core group of people was when John was saying, "Well, I don't want to change anything. I don't want to," and you know, he wasn't screaming or shouting because he, he's soft spoken. And Jim was saying, "Well, they should, they shouldn't be telling – who is this archbishop telling us what to do?" And of course as word spread out in the crowd to the SNCC people, everybody got very upset because this was our speech, and what we felt most of all was that, "This archbishop doesn't know what we go through. Who is he? What right and authority?" – we always challenged authority. "Who gave him the right to decide what John should say?" And it was, there was a crisis on the, on the platform for a while. Then finally the language was changed as little as possible, and he gave the speech. But that was, that and the guy, our friends being in jail in Americus, Georgia were the defining things that I remembered most, that I remember now, about the March.

Of course I remembered King's speech, but we had an ambivalent relationship with King as well. We called, you know, referred him as 'de Lawd,' D-E-L-A-W-D, like the Lord you know. And everybody is looking up to him when in fact, the SNCC people went into the most dangerous areas like Albany and other places, and we called it breaking an area: staying there under the toughest conditions until you finally have a breakthrough with the local community when they begin to let you stay with them. Then you began to, [20:00] uh, they come out to the meetings and they start getting involved and organizing as well. And then it builds up to a crisis stage, and that's when King

would come in, we felt. And so we had an ambivalent relationship with him. We respected him of course. But it wasn't all, "Oh, this is a fantastic man. This great speech he gave," because it was – that wasn't it.

The reality was that we knew we were leaving that next day. I left the next morning with John Lewis on a flight back to Atlanta. Funny what you remember. I remember the plane was – in the back of the airline there was a round seating area, like a circular sofa back there. And John and I were sitting back there. Um, and we went to the SNCC office, and, and I went back there because I was waiting for a ride back to Hattiesburg because a week later I was going back, going back to Tougaloo for my senior year. How did you get back?

DL: In a car.

JL: But did you go back to New York first?

DL: No. I went to Hatties – to Jackson.

JL: Well, John – I guess it was because I had been given a plane ticket because I had been on the staff to get back South. Otherwise I would've been in a car as well. And, um, then what I remember is that I don't remember riding a high euphoria either. I'm not sure that I'm remem – of course time and events reshape memory, but I don't recall having seen that as something that I savored and carried with me because we couldn't for long because we were right back in that same tough environment. Three weeks later we got on a bus and rode, Bob Moses drove a school bus to, um –

DL: Birmingham.

JL: Birmingham, and he took a dozen or more SNCC workers –

DL: September 18th.

JL: – to, to the funeral of the three little girls who had been murdered.

DL: Who had been murdered.

JL: So I always saw that as, "Okay back in your face. You had your big march, but we're back in control," you know, the white racists. So we didn't have time to savor things, the March or anything else. It was a big event. But also, as young people you don't hold on to, you know, things that are, there is some more living to do right after that. So that was what I remembered most, but I remember the contradiction in my mind. This, all these people there, and then we are now at a funeral of, of the most vulnerable people of all, and they hadn't killed children before, and that was another big thing that stuck, stuck out in my mind. I remember writing a –

DL: Emmett Till had been murdered.

JL: Oh I'm sorry. Emmett Till, we did – that's when I remember first being very upset about a child being killed.

DL: Because we so identified with him.

JL: Yeah, he was our age.

JM: Your age?

JL: Right and, and, and in the throes of our, on the, of adolescence and here's a boy, and the feeling was if they could do that to him they could kill my brothers. I never thought they would kill me, but I always felt –

DL: I always felt they would kill me.

JL: Umm, hmm. I felt they would kill my brothers.

DL: Very deeply. Very deeply.

JM: I remember uh, I don't mean to –

JL: No go ahead.

JM: – interrupt your train. Um, Miss Ladner, that, um, that summer, that summer in Natchez [MS] when you, you were ill so frequently, I understand, because of the pressure and the –

DL: Yes, the stress. I would go to sleep at night not expecting to wake up. Yeah, and, uh, it was unusual because I've never seen a telephone that would ring in your hand, and it's off the hook. And, uh –

JL: Um, hmm.

DA: Literally holding the phone, take the phone off the hook, the receiver, and it's still ringing because people in the South go to bed very early and the phone would start ringing about, between six-thirty and seven and uh, they would leave their phones off the hook so we had no contact with the outside world. And, uh, we lived right beside an alley; so we never knew whether or not we were going to wake up. And I developed stomach problems from eating, from the, it was pure stress, pure stress. But, uh, it made me more determined, so determined one time that I went to, um – Mr. Charles Evers had gotten, maybe close to eighty people arrested, and they were taken to Parchman Penitentiary, [25:00] and I never followed him because I didn't think that he was –

JL: You didn't respect him.

DL: I didn't respect him. And so, uh, we were trying to get the bond signed. You needed two signatures, the chief of police, and you needed a property owner and so I got so frustrated because we were tr – in the Delta we had to travel from Natchez, which is in the far south, to the Mississippi Delta which is probably two hundred miles to get people out. And I asked one of the police officers, "Where is the chief of police?" and

they said, "He's at the Holiday Inn." So I got a cab and went to the Holiday Inn, which was segregated and stood and had him paged. I was at the desk, the cashier's desk and had him paged standing in the middle of the floor. I was that frustrated and that angry. And so he never responded. I don't what he – I would've done if he had confronted me. I don't know, but that was the height of level of frustration that one would get to. So I got in a cab and went back to the house. And another time I remember getting very frustrated was the next day after Medgar was killed we went to the, um, Masonic temple, um, Dave Dennis from CORE, his wife, Mattie Bivens [Dennis] –

JL: Who was our cousin.

DL: – and myself went to the Masonic temple, and, um, there were two white police officers sitting on motorcycles, and I ran up to them and started screaming, "Where were you last night? Why are you here now? Shoot! Shoot! Shoot us in the back like you did Medgar Evers. Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!" just screaming, just *enraged, enraged*. The amount of rage I can't even begin to describe. And it was anger, frustration, hurt, pain, all everything that you could think of, and they sat there with their heads bowed, and only recently have I begun to think that they practiced non-violence with me because they never responded.

JL: Do you think they were upset about his killing?

DL: They never responded. They could've turned around and shot me.

JL: I know, but do you think they may have also –

DL: I don't know. The insight is beginning to come to me as I get older and think that they looked sorrowful themselves. They had their heads down. They never glared at me. They never looked at me. They never made any towards me gestures.

They just sat there, and I was really enraged. And it only came to me recently that they were using the same tactics, non-violence tactics, passive resistance, with me that we used with them.

JL: They probably felt bad about it.

DL: Well, I –

JL: It might have struck their little core of humanity they may have.

DL: Well, you know as you keep living, as mother used to say, the more you live, the longer you live, the more you learn. And this is coming to me, these revelations are coming to me that that was what was practiced. Because I've been told recently that a lot of whites in the South and in Jackson in particular did not care for that. Although I went to both trials, uh, for Medgar, and the first trial was alright although I had to kick some white men's feet because they put their feet on the bench and wouldn't let me sit down. I kicked their foot and told them to move it and then sat down. That's the type of temper I had.

JL: We were –

DL: The judge told us we could sit anywhere we wanted. They wanted to prevent it. So the next trial, when the governor –

JL: That was when Barnett came in –

DL: – came in they made us go up to the balcony –

JL: Right.

DL: – with a cane behind my head, the, uh, sheriff, a big thick cane, and the mistrial happened so quickly until we didn't know, we, we had gotten caught. And only divine intervention happened at that particular time because, uh, we were caught between

the courthouse and the police station, and the black street, Ferry Street, was quite a distance, and we were trying to figure out how we were going to –

JL: Get out of there.

DL: – run away from this mob, and who would drive up but one Jesse Morris, uh –

JL: A SNCC worker.

DL: He said, "Do you all need a ride?" and we hopped in that, uh, Volkswagen bus and took off. These were kind of things that happened, and that's why we we're alive because there was a greater power than us that was looking after all of us.

JL: A lot of serendipity and, but I remember seeing, um, Ross Barnett [Mississippi Governor] walk into the trial of Medgar's killers and, I just – he went over and shook the hand, and he was no different. He was indistinguishable from the other Klan supporters [30:00] sitting there, and I said, "My God there's – ". Another time Dorie and I decided we were going to go to Barnett's inauguration.

DL: While you're on that, um, at Medgar's trial, each day, uh, when [Byron de la] Beckwith would come in, the Klan would stand up and give him a standing ovation.

JL: Yeah, they did. It was awful.

DL: And applaud and applaud and he would bow.

JL: Yeah, I mean, he was it was, like, some famous rock star.

DL: And, and, and the district attorney said, uh, in choosing a jury, "Medgar Evers was a nigger. He lived over in Niggertown. I didn't agree with what he did, and I know you don't either. But it's my job to uphold the law."

JL: Is that Willy Waller [Governor Bill Waller]?

DL: "Do you think it's wrong for a white man to kill a nigger?" And that's the way the jury was selected.

JL: That's what Willie Waller said?

DL: Yes.

JL: Hmm.

DL: Yeah. The DA.

JM: Let's pause for just one second. [Recording pauses]

DL: Um, hmm.

JM: We're back. [DL clears throat] Miss Ladner I want to, I don't mean to –

DL: Go ahead.

JM: It's just, I'm interested in this because it's one of so many indications of how extreme the stress and pressure was even how young and very energetic as you said all the young people. I've read you were even physically ill so many nights in Natchez because of –

DA: It was a stomach, um, and also eating, um, greasy foods –

JM: Ah, I see.

DL: The fried foods. We ate at what we called the White House restaurant that was owned by some sisters who were independent. They had lots of land. And, um, every time I would eat, the food would come up, fried chicken, and now to this day I watch my diet. I can't eat fried foods and this is, um, hereditary I would imagine.

JL: I used to worry about her because I was off in the safety of graduate school, and I was, I lived with so much guilt. This tremendous guilt and worry my sister who was still back in the South, but not only in the South but in Natchez, which had the most

notorious reputation for being a dangerous place. And we kept in touch by phone, and I started working on her telling her it was time for her to leave to come to get away. And eventually she did; she moved to St. Louis with me. But, but –

JM: You felt guilty because you had –

JL: Because I left. Because I left and went to graduate school. Yeah, I felt that, I wouldn't have changed anything but, so, you know, living with guilt, but at the same time feeling that you did what was best for you was the worst combination in the world. It was awful.

DL: I didn't see it that way, I –

JL: But I did.

DL: I saw what I was doing as something that I had to do that, um, I had to make some changes. The line, the line was drawn in the sand and I had to – I crossed the line, and I had to go for it because so I did not want to live under the conditions that had come before me, and I didn't want to leave the conditions that way so, it's a passion with me.

JL: I think all of us felt that what drove us was that we felt number one, that we were doing the right thing. We never questioned whether or not the cause was not, not a just one. I mean that was a foregone conclusion, but I think my sister endured a lot more dangerous situations by far than I did. But at the same time, I mean I was in enough dangerous situations just, uh, but I always felt that, that – I was always scared. And I, and I didn't want to be around people in the Movement who would say, "I'm not scared." You know, because especially if they were northerners because they could get you killed very easily because they didn't have respect for the local traditions and because we

southerners knew what those conditions were, we could decode, decode them a lot quicker and easier, more easily than, than the northerners.

A lot of times they acted out of ignorance but because, my roommate Joan Trumpauer and my senior year at Tougaloo, for example, used to say, "I don't care about these people. They're not going to do anything to me." And I said, "Well, you're not going to get me killed." I used to carry around a black scarf in my pocket, and when we were driving back to Tougaloo College at night on this long stretch of, of road called Hanging Moss Road, there were no lights. And Tougaloo was eight miles from downtown Jackson. So we had, I used to put her on the floor. If she wouldn't get on the floor [35:00] I'd say, "Well, you've got to put this scarf on you because your long blonde hair is not going to get me killed." And because people you know would've shot at us even if they'd just known we were movement workers, and we were – and there were no whites in the car.

But I came to understand, I guess, as I got older that, that fear doesn't mean inaction. I mean it – courage was the ability to act or to prevail in spite of one's fear. Um because you could easily be paralyzed by your fear if you – I mean, in my mind was constantly working. I was sitting there I remember once Lawrence Guyot told me in a SNCC meeting, he said, "Joyce if we listen to you, you know, you take everything to its logical conclusion. We wouldn't do anything." I said, "Well, I didn't mean it that way," I was just trying to point because my mind is always working on this hand, on that hand, da, da, da, da, da. These are the, this is what would happen in one scenario. This is what would happen in another. I said, "But I didn't mean not to do it. I just was thinking about what could happen."

JM: Let me take you back for just a minute to a very specific material circumstances question. Could you describe the home you grew up in in Palmers Crossing?

DL: The what?

JL: The home, our home.

JM: The home. And maybe, and maybe the –

JL: What it looked like physically?

JM: Just the home environment?

DL: Our home or the average home?

JM: Yeah, your home.

DL: It was, we had what three bedrooms, um, living room, dining room, kitchen. Um, what, what was the covering on the house?

JL: The porch.

DL: The house?

JL: Brown siding. Brick siding, we called it brick siding. It was like, it rolled up and you would pull it out and it was, it looked sort of like imitation brick.

DL: And we had a front porch.

JL: And we had – it was on one lot and we had, our younger brothers always had, uh, um, animals. Usually they were rabbits or –

DL: Dogs.

JL: Dogs. They always had animals.

DL: Pits.

JL: And we lived just –

DL: In a tightly knit community.

JL: – just in back of us was our great aunt and uncle, um, and then to the right of them was our grandparents. And so it was a modified compound, uh, that we lived in, and there were no fences so we could go across the back yard, we're in grand uncle and aunt, Uncle Archie and, uh, his wife Ms. Bettis, Icie, Aunt Icie's, um, house, and next door to them was Miss –

DL: Miss Ivey and Mr. Buehl.

JL: No, Miss Mosely.

DL: No, that was later.

JL: Later, later yeah. Um – the grandparents, our stepfather's mother and father, um, Bill and Ida Perryman and then other people on the street in back of us were neighbors. Miss Katie, Mr. Joe, her husband.

DL: Mr. Grady [Mr. Grady Grice].

JL: Mr. Grady and Miss, uh – what was Ms. Grady's, Miss, uh, his wife's name? Gosh.

DL: I've forgotten her name.

JL: But we, they were all part of this extended nuclear family and community, and everyone interacted with you as though they were kind of family, a quasi-family, but very close by were our mother's brothers and sisters who lived in the broader community, and –

DL: There were plenty of them.

JL: A lot of them.

DL: But down the street from us was a, um –

JL: A house of prostitution.

DL: Well, that was across the street –

JK: A juke joint.

DL: Uh, he, Mr. Joe McCarthy had a still, whiskey still. And he made bootleg liquor [JL: Right] and every Monday the sheriff would come –

JL: And collect his money.

DL: "One-Eyed" Finch [James Finch] in his black Packard car, he would go up one side of the street with his hand stuck out, right hand and come down the other side –

JL: They paid him off.

DL: – with his hand stuck out.

JL: One night, one night we had a lot of excitement down at Mr. McCarthy's house. He had gotten, um, there was this, these big tractor-trailer trucks would bring in what we called sealed liquor [manufactured and labeled liquor, considered better than moonshine]. He stopped bootlegging, he stopped, um, um, making corn whiskey and he started selling what we called sealed liquor. And one Friday evening we saw these National Guard trucks coming down, and they went down and they found his liquor and –

DL: They started at Miss Bama's [house of prostitution] across the street. She had, she had integrated prostitutes. They broke her –

JL: Yeah, we had white prostitutes across from us.

DL: – slot machines, and then worked there way on down to Mr. Joe McCarthy's and broke liquor all night long.

JL: Yeah, we, there was a big rock, and they took, opened these, um, crates of liquor and they'd just break them against – and you could smell liquor all over near where we lived. And they said the next morning Mr. Joe –

DL: Well, we could, we could hear him the liquor because the glass –

JL: Yeah, he was sifting [40:00] liquor and trying to retrieve –

DA: He owned, he owned a lot of –

JL: – what he could.

DL: – he owned a lot of land.

JL: Yeah he was an entrepreneur.

DL: And in a wooded area, so the community that we grew up in – have you heard of Camp Shelby? Well, Camp Shelby used our community as a –

JL: Recreational outlet for the black soldiers.

DL: GIs, and so as a result we had a lot, gay life.

JL: And so anything could go I mean the police allowed the juke joints and so on because they said, ostensibly because the soldiers were nearby and they would come to the High, not the High Hat but the embassy Club and the Club Desire, the two nightclubs, and that's where all of the entertainers on the Chitlin' Circuit would come through.

DL: Plus we didn't live that far from New Orleans, um –

JL: And the Gulf Coast, [DL: The Gulf Coast] Biloxi and Gulfport. So, it was, Hattiesburg was different than the Delta. The southern part of the state was less overtly repressive day to day than the northern part. And I'm hearing now that our schools were pretty good in Hattiesburg, Forrest County. I know we had good teachers and so on, but, but, um, apparently they ranked, Forrest County schools ranked higher than they did in

other places, so I've been told. But we lived on, there was a dirt road, no paved streets at the time, and our address was Route 6, Box 69. There's a post office on the corner. One block from us was the school, the post office, and, uh –

DL: Mr. Hudson's little store.

JL: Mr. Hudson's little store. He started out in, you know, one corner of this room would've been his little grocery store, and now his sons, who are our age, you know, have, uh, stores all over the Southeast. They're Hudson's Salvage Stores.

DL: Multi-millionaires.

JL: Yeah. Um, but and that was what we called The Crossing, it was Palmers Crossing. That was The Crossing. Now the Illinois Central Railroad ran just across there, and we uh, the "City of New Orleans" train came through and the, um, Miss Katie, our neighbor's brother used to throw the *Chicago Defender* out to us as he passed by, and sometimes some of the other uh, uh –

DL: Reading material.

JL: Pullman porters would throw papers and magazines out.

JM: The description is so rich and good and I, forgive me moving –

JL: You should do a movie on this. On this sort of insulated –

DL: We talked about it more –

JL: Rich neighborhoods.

DL: – with Bernice, the same stuff if you hear it.

ELAINE NICHOLS: With the Freedom on the Plow ["Hands on the Freedom Plow] program, at Freedom on the Plow [event held at the Smithsonian]?

DL: No, no, with Bernice in '92.

JL: This was back at, yeah.

JM: Ah, you talked with –

JL: At the Smithsonian Museum.

JM: The Smithsonian interview, yeah.

DL: Yeah, you can go back and listen to her.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let me ask you, just one quick clarification did I hear you say that the brothel was integrated?

JL: Yeah, there was a white prostitute living there, and uh, the, and the clients were, were black men. The sheriff – Miss Bama who used to live across the street from us had, and she had, she had a little nightclub a little juke joint there, and she, and her house was there and every Monday afternoon when the sheriff, One-Eyed Finch, came by –

DL: I guess we shouldn't use his name, because for –

JL: Why not?

DL: Because reserve rights, for right, his right to privacy.

JL: Why not, that's his name.

DL: No, but legally we probably shouldn't.

JL: Well, let them worry about the legal part. Uh, but what happened is that the sheriff, Miss Bama would go out and sit in the car with the sheriff, and she was going with him, dating him, and they would sit there and then eventually they went inside, you'd see her taking her money out of her bra and handing him money. And I was a little budding sociologist even back then as a little child. I was always curious about all these things taking place, and then she would get, she and he got out of the car and went in, in

her house, and I just assumed with my young mind that he was, they were having intimate relations. He come out an hour or so later, and what I wondered back then was, "Why does she have to pay him money and then have sex with him?" I couldn't understand that as a little, a young child, I was ten or twelve years old.

JM: You had mentioned earlier just a few words about your mother, but how did your mother, can you illustrated some of the ways your mother helped you understand how to navigate this world as two young girls coming up [JL: Oh, wow.] in a climate as complicated and difficult as that?

DL: She said go to school, get an education.

JL: Because no one would take it from you.

DL: Work, and take care of yourself. Don't depend on any man to take care of you.

JL: Now see our mother had been divorced from our [45:00] father when I was an infant and she had, for a while she had been a single parent to us. And that had a deep impression on her. She subsequently remarried. Our stepfather, had six children by him, but she always told her girls, all of her girls to learn to take care of yourselves and –

DL: Which has served us well.

JL: Yeah, because we became very independent very early. Now what mother also taught us was to, we, we observed the way she navigated. If a man, insurance collector, came by the house, they never came in our house. She met them at the, on the front porch. She never let them in the house. And they didn't make passes at her. There was a certain, um, sense of pride and no nonsense behavior that she, she uh – she never let her guards down with them, not at all. And she treated them, kept them at distance.

She did not kowtow. She did not let them allow them to make her feel that they were superior ever. See, going back –

DL: Well, that's the way she grew up.

JL: Right, she grew up um, my sister can talk about the family genealogy but, but for generations before – see my mother's was the fourth generation and ours the fifth – but five generations removed they were descendants of, of a Creek Indian woman, Mary, and a white, um, man named Benjamin, Ben [Benjamin F. Woulard; Ms. Dorie Ladner later pointed out that the Woulard name has been variously rendered over generations as Woolard, Woulard, Wollard, and Woullard]. And he, Dorie did the genealogical research but at one point, they told us, they passed on a lot of folklore about him, and he said that he would not see his blood spilled across –

DL: No, he wouldn't, he did not enslave his children because he did not want his blood spilled all over the world.

JL: Blood spilled across the country. And so –

DL: And he was from Rockingham, North Carolina.

JL: And so, so they grew up with a strong sense of Grandpa Ben, said that we're as good as anybody. So that was passed on to each generation. It's almost like a, like school. You heard these, we heard these stories from our uncles and our aunts and just such a sense of pride in who we are.

DL: Plus.

JL: They always called themselves [uncertain word, at 47:24].

DL: Plus, excuse me, in these communities everybody was related and whether they were black or white. And, uh, not formally but informally, everybody was related

one way or the other. And that is, you've been to the South. I'm sure you've seen it and that's the way –

JL: But they also had a very strong sense of independence and pride of self. They, our uncles, most, for the most part they didn't work for other people. They were entrepreneurs –

DL: They were taught not to work for other people –

JL: Right.

DL: By our grandfather, work for yourself.

JL: And so they didn't put themselves in a lot of environments where they had white bosses. Uh, for example one uncle, Uncle Joe, uh, used to repair electronic things. And one day he went to this white man's house. The man told him to come fix his TV and he said he saw the screen was all broken. And he said, "Well, what happened here?" The man told him, "Well, I saw this nigger on TV last night kissing this white woman and I shot him." [Laughing] And we just all laughed and my uncle said, "Don't you know that's crazy? I mean why would you shoot him? You want me to fix it?" He said, "There's nothing I can do with your TV." And he turned and walked away, and you could see my uncle had good sense. But this man, they're looking a lot of white people who were like inferior to them in a way. I mean, that's the way they looked at them. And they didn't allow *any*one to, to beat up on them or treat, mistreat them even when they worked for whites.

Um, they tell, they used to tell us these stories of how they got in a fight with this person and "We beat him up" or whatever, and they were white. And I would just sit there marveling, "Oh, that's fantastic," you know, because it was just the opposite image

that you had of the downtrodden Negro. But they just weren't like that. And so that was the model we got, and, we felt that when we joined the Movement we were doing what they had prepared us to do. I mean, and they were all very proud of us.

DL: And that wasn't unique because in Natchez, uh, it was the prevailing culture.

JM: Let me ask about this shift as, um, teenagers into Movement activity and uh, especially after 1960, um, before we started today, uh, Dr. Ladner you were talking about, um, just that rush of feeling [50:00] and uh, so much excitement and a whole cluster of things and I wonder if you might talk a little bit about that.

JL: The Movement was the most exciting thing that one could engage in. I often say that, in fact I coined the term the "Emmett Till generation." I said that there was no more exciting time to have been born at the time and the place and to the parents that movement, young movement people were born to. It was through an accident of history that we were that post-war generation in the South at the time, who had the parents who taught us, stand up for yourself. That all of that thing, I mean you're talking about synchronicity and serendipity, I mean all those things fell into place for a small group of young people and that was our generation. That we were postwar kids. Some of our parents had gone, fathers had gone abroad to fight for freedom and they came back and they were so disappointed. We were that, uh, the era if you'd been in the North the suburbanization of America. You know where the, the white kids' fathers were getting the jobs, and they were, had the economic ex – expansion and the material goods, and we saw that we weren't getting those. We were that generation that had been brought up with the fire and brimstone, uh, of believing the Old Testament prophets on justice and you know just, uh, a strong sense of right and wrong. It was the morality of our times,

uh, that we believed that it was, uh, according to the Bible it was wrong to segregate people and to treat one group of people better than the other.

Uh, we grew up with the liturgy of the church, Baptist church that we translated to the Civil Rights Movement, the songs and, um, the [cough in background] and the preaching and the testifying. All that took place in those mass meetings. All these were factors and we were that, of that generation where most important of all it was that all of us were imbued with the sense by our parents and our aunts and uncles and our neighbors who said that you are the generation that will do better and your generation will change things. I remember so clearly Uncle Archie who was in World War I, went to France, and he always told us, "Your generation is going to change things." And so there was these expectations of us, and I think we, we fulfilled them. But I don't believe it was, it was, through, you know, obviously it was not a matter of King standing up in Montgomery and people saying well, you're right. It was, for us it was almost like you had to do it. It was a matter of time; the time had come. And they expected so much of us. Our teachers used to tell us –

DL: We were the first, um, sometimes the first generation to go to college, too.

JL: That was critical.

DL: That was.

JL: They said you've got to get an education because no one can take that from you. And, I think often my mother used to say that all the time, and but she grew up in a time when they took their labor from them. They took everything from them and gave them little compensation for anything. Our stepfather made thirty, thirty or thirty-five dollars a week as a skilled mechanic, diesel engine mechanic. His employer used to send

him to New Orleans to these training courses, and he retired on social security whereas the white men working alongside him, you know, had had pensions. Uh, and they understood the injustices, and while they may have felt they couldn't do anything abut it, there was this spirit of rising expectations that, that we would do it.

And we had so many mentors. I remember one of our mentors was an herbalist. We called him Dr. McCloud, and we called him Cuz. He was a cousin of our aunt. He used to come sit on the porch and talk to mother and he was member of the local Hattiesburg branch of the NAACP. He subscribed to the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender, Jet,* and *Ebony* magazines, and he read. So he would bring us books. He brought us, um, every week he brought us these publications. And –

DL: That was the only outside reading material that we had.

JL: That we got. Because everything was censored, everything. The radio, there was one TV station, uh, in Hattiesburg. I remember when it came, arrived, and they would call you niggers on, [55:00] on screen. Uh, and we, that, that outside information just fueled our curiosity and fed it and made us want to see the world and do things differently. It gave us the window into how the outside lived. We saw that kids were going to college in Chicago and in Pittsburgh and all over the North. And it made us see how, allowed us to see how other people were actually living, you know, and that that could be ours as well. But first we had to get rid of this little matter of segregation, discrimination.

JM: Uh, your first semester at uh, or first year at Jackson State would be a very, uh –

JL: Right.

JM: – busy one.

DL: Yes. Yes, it was.

JM: I mean, I don't want to knock you in another direction in terms of your [laughter] going to college.

JL: See we met Medgar –

DL: Well, I'll talk about that [laughing] –

JL: We met Medgar Evers in high school when he came to Hattiesburg to –

DL: We used to –

JL: – to set up a, a, an NAACP youth chapter. He came down, but Clyde Kennard and Vernon Dahmer were the two people behind really – the whole Hattiesburg NAACP chapter did, but those two were the motivating factors behind our chapter.

DL: And the, uh, pianist. Vernon Dahmer's sister played the piano at our church. Her name was Eileen.

JL: Sister Beard.

DL: Her name was Eileen Beard.

JL: She was Mother's best friend.

DL: So she would, Mother would let us go to NAACP meetings in Jackson with her and Mr. Dahmer, and since she was in church there was nothing –

JL: Mother trusted her.

DL: So, and our ears were wide open and taking it all in.

JL: Yeah, Clyde Kennard, they drove up to Jackson and they took us with them. We were little girls who were interested in Negro rights, as they were called.

DL: Clyde Kennard was our youth chapter adviser, and, but the tragic thing was that, uh, we were so young when he was jailed, and we knew that it wasn't right, the first time he went on campus and they said they found moonshine in his car. We were looking at it from a distance. We knew him; we didn't think that he would ever do anything like that, but it was, uh, so far away from him. And when he was incarcerated, he stayed in jail in Hattiesburg over a year, and we could go downtown and walk past the jail –

JL: And you wanted to go see him but you didn't dare –

DL: But you didn't dare go.

JL: We didn't even know how to negotiate even going in to see him.

DL: There was no movement of any sort.

JL: It was awful.

DL: To filter into and but there, I later learned there was an underground movement, but these were all adults.

JL: Yeah, we were kids. The other thing you have to think about here is that look at this from the perspective of fourteen, fifteen year-olds. Uh, who know it's not, these things are not right and who would just love to some day figure out how to make everything right. Uh, but being, also being, very powerless. I will never forget how Dorie and I responded to Emmett Till's lynching. We used to go to the, uh, the Hudson Store every day at 4:20, 4:15-4:20. That was when the, we had, the city bus ran, went through to, to, from downtown Hattiesburg out to Palmers Crossing and they brought the Hattiesburg American on that bus, 4:15-4:20. And we ran up there with a dime every day and bought our copy of the newspaper. And I remember I used to clip out, clip the paper

about Emmett Till's lynching. Talk about feeling powerless and frightened but also just like this is awful.

DL: That was my realization that if these men are guilty, then why aren't they being punished.

JL: That's right. And Dorie wanted to be a lawyer then.

DL: That's when I light bulb went off. Why aren't they being punished? That's when I went on my quest to try to understand the whole legal system and uh, equal rights and justice under the law.

JL: Dorie used to have –

DL: Let me finish.

JL: Okay, I'm sorry.

DL: To talk, um, about the Constitution for instance. I went to my social studies teacher Mr. Clark and asked him what does the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth amendments mean. He says this has something to do with the Constitution. I went and found a copy of the Constitution and memorized these Articles and the America's creed, the Preamble to the Constitution. All of this –

JL: She used to repeat these all the time.

DL: For my own empowerment, and, uh, that was something that I felt that it could do for myself, and maybe it would rub off on somebody else, but that's how powerless I felt and these men are guilty. And I hope they don't come down here and get me, and I hope anybody else [1:00:00] and it was, Mississippi was a closed society and, and it was very true –

JL: Well the sense of vulnerability I think cannot be overemphasized. There was, uh –

DL: And we had two colleges there, Carey College and Southern and Southern was so uh, racist when Clyde Kennard tried to enroll, they built a special dorm for the student from Latin America.

JL: They had a lot of South American students too.

DL: They got – they stayed in a separate dorm. They built it for them. They built one recently for the Native Americans to live in on the same, at the same college right now –

JL: Are you serious?

DL: Right now, yes, as we speak. So, uh, when we would go downtown we would hear them speaking in this foreign tongue, but we didn't understand what they were saying, but it was a very curious kind of thing because we didn't see anybody but the people around us. And when we, Joyce and I would hear this we would want to know who are these people, where do they come from, what are they saying? And it was just wanting to know more.

JL: It was curiosity.

DL: Just wanted to know more, wanted to know what was beyond. We would go to New Orleans occasionally and to the Gulf Coast but not very far out of that little circle. The church, school, and home, and family.

JL: And with friends. But we, we also, um –

JM: Can I interrupt just for a bit, just to confirm –

JL: Sure, sure.

[short break]

JM: Okay, we'll start –

JB: Okay we're back.

JM: I just want to say clearly for the tape that the case of Clyde Kennard is one that perfectly illustrates how the white authority would, um, trump up some charge just to take someone out of the landscape where he's beginning to work with black youth and so forth, yeah.

JL: Right, right,

DL: And, uh, we did not know, uh, anything about his background [JL: No.], and the University of Chicago was foreign to us. Um –

JL: We did know he was quote, smart.

DA: Yeah.

JL: We knew he was smart.

DL: Later on we found out he was tutoring one of the Jewish kids there in Hattiesburg whose father owned a grocery, a big store.

JL: A department store.

DL: And so, uh, but he was very kind.

JL: Very quiet easygoing.

DL: And very, and Medgar Evers was the same way. Now we were teenagers and they took the time with us –

JL: Young teens too. Young teens too.

DL: – took the time with us, and this is the one thing about SNCC that I still marvel over and still think about. At my age would I follow a nineteen year-old kid somewhere?

JL: Right.

DL: And that was the way we would work. We were presenting ourselves –

JL: Right.

DL: – to the people in the community, community organizers.

JL: I think the reason a lot of these people took us seriously, most of them took us seriously was because we took ourselves seriously. And because we weren't asking them to do something we weren't already doing.

DL: Well, we had a message also that was a message also –

JL: That resonated with them.

DL: – that was a message that they had been waiting to hear.

JL: Right.

DL: And, um, the Christian Bible saying a little child shall lead them. And I think that was a part of the whole thing too, but, um, looking back at it and thinking they had lived hard lives, had worked very hard, and to get, uh, people to leave their jobs, a waitress in a café or –

JL: Working on a plantation.

DL: Housemaids and sharecroppers to go to the courthouse in Indianola, Mississippi where Miss Fannie Lou Hamer went in August of 1962. To get a busload of people to go and risk their lives and their jobs and everything else to go there and stay all day long, uh, is something that I marvel at right now, wondering how did it happen –

JL: Where did they get that umph from.

DL: But they were ready for it. The time was right; the time was right. This was 1962. So, uh, we talk about Miss Rosa Parks and while we're sitting here talking, Emmett Till's death resonated because it was so publicized. I heard a little bit about Miss Rosa Parks –

JL: Yeah, we didn't hear anything.

DL: But there was not much information. All we knew is some – that black people were not riding the buses and that was about it. But when Emmett Till's picture was shown, that was what blew –

JL: The iconic photograph.

DL: Our mind.

JL: Was, that was the image for our generation, to galvanize our generation and all of us saw it. We saw it on the cover of *Jet* magazine.

DL: And, and recently I was watching, two weeks ago I was watching TV 1. And, uh, they had this documentary on uh, uh, I can't call his name right now, but, uh, on Emmett Till and Mrs. Mobley [Emmett Till's mother, Mrs. Mamie Till Mobley] was talking, was talking – Emmett Till's mother – was talking, and she was describing how he looked when she went to the funeral home. They wanted to bury him right then and there without opening the casket and she went on, she said, "No, I don't have time to faint. I don't have time to do this, cry and all this." So she described each part of his body [1:05:00] and all of a sudden I told my daughter, "I'm going to sleep." And this was three weeks ago. I could not at this age, uh, let that into my psyche. I just went straight to sleep and slept maybe two hours and then I woke up.

JL: Because just about everyone I knew in SNCC.

DL: I still can't, cannot see it.

JL: Everyone I knew in SNCC, every black southerner for sure, had seen that photograph, and it was like a clarion call for action and that when we got older we were going to avenge his death. I mean, I can remember feeling that so strongly. I remember clipping those *Hattiesburg Americans* every time there was an article about the Emmett Till case and the trial, and I kept a scrapbook. I wish I had kept it for years. I really wanted, to, I remember taking it up to my playmama's. We had these teenage girls who would be your playmama. They were like nice to you and so on, like a young sister, younger sister and mine was Modell Stewart. I remember one day taking this, this uh, uh, scrapbook to her house and I remember lying on the floor on my stomach, flipping through, showing it to her. I remember crying, um, and feeling so terribly vulnerable, but at the same time feeling that one day I'm going to do something about this. That was always the feeling that you could see these horrible things happening to people, but one day it's not going to be like this because I'm going to help to change it.

I'll never forget how the second lynching we experienced, you know, was that of Mack Charles Parker in Poplarville [MS], which is now fifteen minutes from Hattiesburg. Back then it was probably forty-five minutes on the old roads. And that was close to home. I remember the international media came to Hattiesburg because Hattiesburg had a hotel. It was the largest city in the – they called it the hub city for these smaller towns nearby. And Dorie and I would go up to town, as we called it, get on the bus and go to town and stand, we stood on the streets listening to these international reporters with foreign accents and speaking in a foreign tongue. And one time we were just pretending

we were foreign, too. We would just [speaks in gibberish]. We didn't know what we were saying. [Laughing, speaks in gibberish] Just like making up words.

I felt like they're our friends. They were, they're our friends because they're here to tell the world about this, and any time I saw anyone that I felt was exposing what was going on I felt a sense of empowerment. But, um, I remember also after Mack Charles Parker was lynched. And as I said it was so close to home that I remember my mother started pulling the boys and my father in closer, like "Fred, you'd better be" – my brother next to me in age – "Fred, be home before dark." You know, I mean, it was like that natural, that protective instinct was to make sure that – because in a way after a lynching we felt there was a lot of fallout from it. It was not an isolated event. It empowered the races because they would stand out with their chests stuck out, and they'd talk about the niggers this and the niggers that. "They should've killed that nigger. I wish I'd been there. I would've done whatever to him. I would've kicked him, too, or I would've gotten me a shot on him."

And so, it, these were catalytic agents for you know all the races and just a flourish out in the open. And so it was that you, which you feared as much as the actual event that had occurred as well, because it was like the climate coming forth. It was like Sarah Palin [former governor of Alaska] getting out here and stirring up the Tea Party you know. Like, uh, it's not just Palin, Michele Bachmann [U.S. Congresswoman from Minnesota] but, but when they come around, they start talking and then all the other people who feel like them come out as well, you know. And that was the way I felt with these lynchings.

DL: But the other side of it is the same perpetrators lived in the community and lived next door to people –

JL: Exactly.

DL: – and everybody knew who they were. Such as the man who killed Mr. Vernon Dahmer. He lived in the black community, had a little, uh, store whatever in the community. Everybody knew who he was –

JL: And you couldn't do anything about it.

DL: No, and one of the most, while I'm thinking about it, one of the most horrendous times that I experienced was when we went to found COFO [Council of Federated Organizations] in August of 1962 in Clarksdale, Mississippi. This was my first time going to the Delta after Emmett Till and all this had happened. Um, Bob Moses, um, Dave Dennis, Mattie Dennis, Colie Lidell [1:10:00], uh, and I'm not sure. Quite a few of us went up there. And Clarksdale had a curfew. I didn't know that. All blacks off the street at twelve midnight. And when we got into the church, shortly after we got into the church, here comes the fire truck. There's no fire here. And so when the meeting was over we were all subject to being arrested for passing the curfew that we didn't know anything about on our way trying to get to Jackson, and it was darker than a thousand midnights in the Delta. If you've been up there, you don't see anything but the stars.

And, um, so Dave Dennis was driving our car, and we, the police got us before we got to Mount Bayou, which is an all-black town. And so we stopped along this dark road, and the police took him to his car and talked about him, Dave's, is of mixed heritage. They discussed that with him. Then he told him he was going to take him to jail. So

Dave came and told us to follow them back to Clarksdale to the jail, and uh, because he was going to lock him up. So we didn't know anything about the Delta. And Lester McKinney, who was one of the Freedom Riders from Nashville, was driving the car. So when we got to Clarksdale to the jail, the officer, one of the officers said, "Get the F out of Clarksdale." And so here we are driving around and around it around trying to find Amzie Moore's house. Amzie Moore was a World War I veteran who had work, done a lot of work in Mississippi with the NAACP and –

JL: [World War] I or [World War] II?

DL: Uh –

JL: World War II, wasn't it?

DL: It may have been [World War] II but he would've been, maybe [World War] II. But anyway, he, uh, was known, had a reputation for, uh, trying to –

JL: Very courageous.

DL: – work in the community, very courageous man who would go out of his way. He hosted Bob Moses and so forth when Bob came down. And, um, so we were trying to find his house in Cleveland, and we rode 'round and 'round and it was daylight, like six o'clock. We had to go through Ruleville, and we had been told that Milam [J.W. Milam, who with his brother-in-law is believed to have murdered Emmett Till] one of the men who killed Emmett Till, was the night watchman in Ruleville and blacks were to be off the streets there at ten o'clock at night. And so we, when we got to Ruleville, I said, "Lester, don't go twenty and don't go under twenty." It was like, you were paralyzed with fear, and those were the conditions that people were living under and maybe some still are. I don't know but it was –

And then we said we're going to do something about this right there in the Delta, and that's how we decided that we were go work in the Delta, go and do work with the sharecroppers and bring people like Miss Hamer to the courthouse to register. And that was where we stopped right there.

JM: Exactly. Let me before – wait just one second.

JB: You did a lot of genealogy research at the Library of Congress. What were you looking for and what did you find?

JM: Can I, that's on my list of questions and we will come to it in due course.

JB: Okay. Okay. [crosstalk] It's obviously an important issue.

JM: Yeah. Thank you, that's a very – and I just want to ask a quick question along the way. I'm thinking about the work, how you were drawn to youth council and Medgar Evers. Did you ever meet Mildred Vaughn Brocksboro?

JL: Never heard of her.

JM: National official, okay, she was also a serious contributor and I just wondered, in that context.

JL: We met, uh, Ruby Hurley who was the southeastern director of NAACP.

JM: Sure. Sure. Let me, let me have you, I'm very interested if each of you would talk a little bit about your first experiences going in to do, uh, local organizing, do the breaking that you mentioned in the Delta and in that context of the early sixties, '62-ish.

JL: The difference between us was that I always had one foot in university, college, and one out, and Dorie dropped out of school. Dorie told me once, "Joyce I can't stay in school and know my people are suffering." And I was always trying to

figure out how I could do both. So when she left college, I was very upset, but at the same time I knew that was her calling, and I always did my movement work alongside my campus work. I was more campus-based in a way. And, but still spent time, you know, out in the community organizing as well.

DL: Well, the experience that I just described to you about going into the Delta in 1962. This was also the time that James Meredith was enrolling in Ole Miss. So it was a particularly horrendous time for uh, the state of Mississippi, and I made a decision, I had left home that summer. Joyce went to Chicago [1:15:00] and to California with my, our Uncle Fontaine [Thomas Fontaine] and I decided to go and work with Bob Moses in Jackson for my freedom. As I told my mother on my way out my door with my little orange suitcase –

JL: This is funny. She waited until –

DL: Wait a minute. Let me tell my own story please.

JL: Go ahead.

DL: Um, I said Mother –

JL: All right. [Laughs]

DL: Well shouldn't I? I said, [laughs] "Mother" – I packed a few little pieces. I had a little small orange suitcase. I said, "Mother, I'm going to go to Jackson and work with Bob Moses and get my freedom," as I was going out the door to go downtown to catch the Greyhound bus. And Mother turned around to look, and, but Mother had other children there, and so I went on downtown and got on the bus and went to Jackson and to the Freedom House on Rose Street. Um –

JL: And Mother turned to me and said – "What she say? She's going where?" So I was left to explain where she was going.

DL: And you went to California that summer.

JL: Well, I went to Chicago to work, and then I went with them to California.

DL: Um hmm, and so, um, that particular summer was the first summer that I had really dedicated my – my whole life has been dedicated to the cause. And from what I experienced that particular night on the roadside, there in the Delta and curfews, which I had never heard of, made me more determined to do something about the social change in that state and throughout the United States of America.

Um, and the other thing was that this energy that the Freedom Riders brought to the state of Mississippi. See, these were young people. We had been at Jackson State and, uh, James Meredith was one of our strategists at Jackson State –

JL: We knew him.

DL: And uh, we had gone to demonstrate on behalf of the Tougaloo Nine [students from Tougaloo College arrested for attempting to desegregate a library in Jackson], and tear-gassed, but James uh, Meredith was a great strategist, very clear-headed, levelheaded but we had no idea he was going to Ole Miss.

JL: No, he never mentioned it.

DL: But then, we were tortured, socially and otherwise at Jackson State. The –

JL: We got expelled, too.

DA: Yeah. And see Medgar Evers' office was across the street. And every Wednesday we would go over there and talk to him about our freedom, which was

abstract, all we wanted to know was about our freedom. We're going to get our freedom one day.

JL: [talking simultaneously] We also asked him, asked him about what's going on with the Movement, about Negro rights around Mississippi because I wanted – we'd ask him. And he said, "Well I went up to the Delta, or I went – " One day he came on the campus and brought me some money because he had been at Hattiesburg and was in a grocery store and saw, met Mother. I don't know how they got to know who each other was, but she gave him some money and he brought it on campus to give me. Um, and we wanted to be a part of the Tougaloo Nine. We asked him if we could, we could join; he told us there was going to be a demonstration. We asked, "Can we join? Can we join?" At first he said, "Yeah, that would be good." And then he said, "On the other hand no, because – " he started thinking about it. He said, "You would be expelled immediately because you can't sign out to go to the public library." And he said, "Why don't you do something on the campus?" And Dorie was president of the dorm council and she always prayed before everything, events occurred, and we decided that I would, she would call me up to give a prayer. And I was –

DL: It wasn't by design.

JL: No. I talked about the dark days.

DL: It was a dorm council meeting, and I asked her to pray and –

JL: But it was, because –

DL: It wasn't by design.

JL: I talked, okay, I talked about the dark days ahead.

DL: And the, the matron of the dorm was one from the darkest ages, from the cave days.

JL: Miss Rose was her name.

DL: And she immediately went and told the dean that a prayer had been prayed, and we come from this little small community, the Bible, and this grocery store.

JL: And everyone prayed before an event. They still do in the South, you know.

DA: They wanted to know about the prayer, and of course we got very combative at that point. How dare you question a prayer? And I, we didn't realize that we were going to talk back and the leadership thing started rising up and we defended ourselves. "Oh no, you're not going to question us and question our prayer."

JL: Dorie said, "How dare you question my relationship with my God?"

DL: And so forth, so pressure started building, and when we decided to march in, on behalf of the Tougaloo students, we were tear-gassed and we had an early, uh, spring break. [1:20:00]

JL: He called it a spring – the president, Jacob Reddix [President of Jackson State] called spring break early to calm things down. But we came back a week later, uh, Walter Williams, who's now a judge in Chicago, had been expelled. He was the president of student government. He was expelled, and it was toward the end of that semester that we were called in by the same dean, Oscar Rogers [Rev. Dr. Oscar A. Rogers]. He died two weeks ago.

DL: Oh he did.

JL: Um hm. We talked to him, uh, and made peace with him last year.

DL: You didn't really make peace with him. You were still trying to find out why he did what he did.

JL: Well, I did. I wanted to know.

DL: I made peace with him, but he was sick and she was still –

JL: I made, no, it wasn't personal. I was trying to find out who, how did, did the president tell him to expel us. It was, for me it was a matter of getting to the bottom of –

DL: He wasn't, he didn't divulge any information.

JL: No.

JM: He didn't say?

DL: No, no. But, um he, now this man had attended Tougaloo College –

JL: Right.

DL: Harvard University, and a divinity school. You would think that he would have some liberal qualities about him, but he was enforcing the law more than [JL: Right, he was enforcing the rules.] anybody.

JM: Yes, as you think back about that, your explanation, the most likely explanation for the expulsion would be?

DL: Expulsion? He told me, Dean Rogers told me that, uh, and you heard him say that we were the most intimidating people and we mocked –

JL: We mocked the president.

DL: He saw the president walk past and we mocked him, and he had never –

JL: I got behind him and [gestures, hitting microphone] –

[Crosstalk]

DL: He had never felt, he had never felt so humiliated by – that red light is on over there. Uh – [break in interview]

JL: Your questions, since we've been talking.

JM: We're back after a short break. Let me, let me say on the record that Corinne Bishop has joined us, John's niece. Ah, uh, Dr. Ladner, Miss Ladner, I want to ask just for a quick description of, um, the Freedom House in Jackson. Its. its rhythm and its character.

DL: Oh, it was a unique place and having grown up in a large family it was not uncomfortable for me. Um, the cast of characters, which included Lawrence Guyot. Colie Lidell who was from Jackson and who had attended Tougaloo and was also worked for Medgar Evers would come and cook for us because although I grew up in a large family, I didn't learn to cook. I had to take care of the children, the younger children –

JL: And I cooked.

DL: And the, the house was I think initially rented by the Freedom Riders.

JL: It was a big white, white, white structure.

DL: Paul Brooks, and Kathryn Brooks, and Diane Nash, and James Bevel –

JL: Lester McKinney.

DL: Lester McKinney. But, um, it was a place that everybody could stay under one roof, and, I was looking at some notes that it had come across recently about how we would question each other and talk about strategy and so forth. And it was a learning experience, because I was learning – my first, let me back up. My first, experience meeting the Freedom Riders was like, "Oh my God where have you been. Where have

you been?" And it was at the Masonic Temple upstairs by Medgar's office and, uh, Tom Hayden, Charles McDew, Marion Berry, John Lewis –

JL: Dion Diamond.

DL: Dion Diamond and Diane. All these young people were there and it was like, "Oh my God. I've been looking for you since I was fourteen years old." And so, um, they, they stayed in state to do organizing. And that was the, uh, the catalyst that we needed to continue the work that we had, Joyce and us, all of us had envisioned there in Mississippi, and it took them to come in to just break it open and they had the support of the local community, Women United, who – Women Power Unlimited had organized for the Freedom Riders. They had a lot of, uh, advocates there for the Freedom Riders from local community. So the network was vast, and once the Freedom Riders came in that gave the infusion and the power and every Friday we would go in, uh, to do –

JL: At the end of classes.

DL: To do community organizing and to learn. And that was on my – I was on my way.

JL: The first time, I remember the Freedom Riders in depth, I remember seeing them over there. But I also remember them on campus. We got to Tougaloo. The Freedom Riders [1:25:00] had come back for their hearing, and it was early September, and I saw all these people, whites and blacks, sitting out on the lawn and just, I mean, relaxing and so on. And I remember asking, um, someone, I think it was the roommate, "Who are those people out there? And she said, "Oh those are the Freedom Riders." I said, "What!?" It was extraordinary because we had wanted to go on the Freedom Ride

and our father and uncle told us we couldn't do it. We had gone to Chicago for the summer –

DL: To work.

JL: To work, but we wanted to join the Freedom Rides. The reason they told us we couldn't was because it was so dangerous and that was the last time we ever asked anyone if we could do anything. From then on we just went ahead and did it.

DL: Someone told me that they saw a record where George Russell Moore had put me out of the court. Um, I, I attended a trial with one of the Freedom Rides and one of the police officers were, was telling so many lies. And I was sitting there, looking. The judge kept looking at me and then finally he said, [knocking like a gavel] "Will the young lady in the black dress get up and leave?" And I got up and stomped and threw my head and went on out the door. But, it's recorded somewhere because someone told me they saw it. But it was one of the Freedom Rider's trials, but it was so transparent, the lies were so transparent until just couldn't help but sit and marvel. I'm one who usually gives myself away by looking. And –

JL: Your expressions.

DL: Yeah and –

JL: Rather severe.

DL: And, and –

JM: But someone caught that on film, you said.

DL: No, no.

JL: It's written about.

DL: Someone has written, yeah.

JM: Written about, yeah. Yeah.

JL: When I was in the jail, when I was in jail, Judge Cox, federal Fifth Circuit, was so evil, he referred to us as niggers you know in the courtroom –

JM: You had mentioned.

JL: And I had, when I went to, back to Jackson for the fiftieth Freedom Rider reunion last summer, I met a young black man who replaced Judge Cox. It was the most amazing thing. I couldn't believe. He said, I told him I said, well, he was introduced at this, uh, dinner that he was, um, on the Fifth Circuit, and I went up to him afterwards and I said, I said, "Oh," I said, "I was tried by Judge Cox." And he said, "I replaced him." I said, "You've got to be kidding." I said, "This is poetic justice I've ever heard of it." I couldn't believe it. It was truly remarkable, fifty years later.

JM: Let me ask you – I'm sorry. Let me ask you both to, to, all the work that, all the work that was done in Mississippi that you were right in the middle of, especially Miss Ladner, um, and voter registration, the MFDP. Maybe we could enter into that, and then touch on that very, very important work by letting me have you, um, say a little bit about the Victoria Gray Adams.

JL: She's our cousin. We remember her from the time we were little kids because what was so remarkable about her number one, is she was very beautiful, a pretty woman. And number two, she went away to college. Now we knew people who went Alcorn College, Jackson State. She went to Wilberforce. And we said, "That's far away. We want to go away to college too." She was –

JB: [requests a break]

[short break]

JL: Victoria Gray Adams.

JB: We're back.

JM: Wilberforce, you were just mentioning.

JL: She went away to college and she, I remember we were little kids at the time, but I remember it so well. And I remember also when she, she went to live in Germany because she got married to Tony [Adams], and when she came home from Germany, it was another way of looking at her as a very exotic person because she'd lived abroad. And we were, it's in college when she became active in the Movement. Um, first by be – working with SCLC's ,um, um citizenship education program, and then she joined SNCC. And she, she, we were away a lot of the time when she was doing her work but, um, but she, she gained stature as she got more and more involved. Um, she was always Victoria, our cousin Vickie.

DL: Well, she was number one, an independent um entrepreneur.

JL: She sold cosmetics and –

DL: And –

JL: Hair products.

DL: She was always open and engaging and very, very intelligent and uh, never uh, put herself above the youth. She was always on the level –

JL: Right.

DL: And would listen to what you had to say.

JL: That was a common characteristic of all the people who, older people.

[1:30:00]

DL: And so, uh, when she came in, it was, uh, she was in Hattiesburg for a long time. [Lawrence] Guyot was in Hattiesburg. I didn't, I chose not to work in Hattiesburg because of my residency there. But, uh, she joined up with Guyot, and Frank Smith, and some others, and she would come to Jackson in her high-heeled shoes and her tight dresses [laughing].

JL: She dressed well, too.

DL: And, and, uh, *very* skilled orator, a very skilled orator.

JL: She was really smart.

DL: Very bright and, uh, magnetic personality.

JL: Personality.

DL: Magnetic personality.

JL: I used to –

DL: When she died, uh, it really pained me, it still pains me. When I got to meetings, I look for her because we always sat next to each other. And, uh, something that is just part of me. But, uh, she was a teacher, and, uh, confidante, uh, uh, strategist.

JL: She was proud of us, too, because she knew that we were little kids who came out of Palmers Crossing and, um, made our way slowly into the world, and she had a sense of pride in her little cousins, you know.

JM: She, I'm sure she was, and I know she was in fact, in Atlantic City.

JL/DL: Yes, yes.

JM: Summer of '64. Maybe you can use her presence there as kind of an opportunity to talk a little bit about Atlantic City and MFDP and that moment in the Movement's, uh, evolution.

DL: And a little bit about how we got there, too, because it took a lot of blood, sweat and tears to get there. A lot of people were jailed, uh, beaten, and getting there, the organizing, a lot of work went into it. And to take an integrated group to Atlantic City –

JL: But that summer –

JM: Tremendous violence that summer.

JL: That summer –

DL: Bombings and so forth. And also Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman had been murdered, and that was another thing.

JL: And we knew Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney from the Mississippi movement. They were staff people, you know, who were always in Jackson at the staff meetings. Mickey wore a little goatee. He and Rita had just come down that January, I guess, from, uh, I know he had been at Brooklyn College. Maybe she was as well. Um, they hadn't even gotten seasoned. I mean, they were seasoned because it didn't take long to get seasoned, become a seasoned volunteer. Because you were, it was a baptism of fire. As soon as you got there you got thrown in feet first.

Uh, but I remember all the debates that we had about whether, about how to approach, uh, how to – see all of our projects were, there were two, two types of projects. One is that we were actually doing the strategic work of helping to get people registered to vote, to, to gain power. And the other level was to take some of those same events, as well as create others, that could be sort of pushed out to the national stage [clears throat] to bring attention to the injustices in the South, in Mississippi. Now the, for example, I remember Freedom Day in January 1964 in Hattiesburg was the precursor to Freedom Summer. Um, and the MFDP, we, you know you could only organize for so long to get

people to register to vote before you bring attention to the fact that these same people, not only can they not vote, but they can't be apart of the political, um, party and so we started organizing uh, organizing the –

DL: And we had the mock ballot. If I could vote, I would vote for Lyndon Banes Johnson. [JL: Right, if –] And you had Barry Goldwater.

JL: The freedom ballot we called it as well.

DL: And so went all over, I know in Natchez we went all over Adams County with these, and we had to take, have these as testimony to also attest to the fact that we weren't registered to vote.

JL: Right. We documented everything.

DL: And this was taken to the government as well.

JL: So in each area –

DL: And then we had the precincts. We organized the same way you would any um political process.

JL: Precinct meetings and then the district wide and then the statewide, um, um, I think it was early August that we had the state –

DL: Danny Lyons's, in Danny Lyons's book [*Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*] –

JL: Let me finish.

DL: Um, there's [1:35:00] a picture of Freedom Day and Miss Baker, Ella Baker is given the credit for MFDP, or the concept of MFDP. She was our leader, and we don't, didn't follow leaders but she was the one that came up with the concept.

JL: We respected her because she taught us how to, how to listen to each other. But she also taught us um she, she, she respected us so much that she would stand along the side of the wall in meetings and we'd argue and argue and argue, and then she would uh, uh, someone would call for the question, you know. And she would guide you with an unseen hand to eventually arrive at some kind of a consensus.

DA: More importantly she separated the students from the SCLC. That's how SNCC came into being.

JM: Exactly.

JL: Now, now, I remember the statewide convention was held at the Masonic Temple, uh, this was the statewide Democratic, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party convention. And after the delegates were chosen, then we, I remember riding up to Atlantic City in a convoy of cars with Cleve Sellers [Cleveland Sellers Jr.] and Ivanhoe Donaldson. And each person in SNCC had a skill and I, I like to think of the drivers, the skill, the very, very important skill that was, that was acquired, that was used to drive, as a driver. SNCC driver of the Sojourner Fleet of cars. Ruby Doris Robinson named them the Sojourner Fleet by the way. Because you had to be able to drive in very dangerous places. You had to get in and out of places like Dorie was describing earlier, being up in the Delta. And you had to outrun the cops, and we drove in a convoy of cars up to Atlantic City. We stopped in Denmark, uh, South Carolina at Cleve Sellers's parents' home, and we showered, changed, and his mother cooked a great meal. Then we went on to, second leg of the trip on up to Atlantic City. And we had walkie-talkies, too so, you know, cars we traveled in a fleet together. So I think it was about three cars together. I'll

never forget that trip up there. Um, and then once we got there, I remember we stayed at, I stayed at the Y [YWCA]. Uh –

DL: And I stayed in a little small hotel.

JL: Yeah, there was, that was the convention, the black, the FDP's Hotel, Convention/Hotel.

DL: And we had the burned-out station wagon on the boardwalk.

JA: Right.

DA: For everyone, for the whole world to see.

JL: Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman.

JM: Can you explain that just a little bit more what that burned out car was?

DL: It was the car that uh, Mickey, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman were driving when they were, uh, killed by, arrested and killed be the sheriff and deputy and local people in Meridian, uh, Philadelphia, Mississippi.

JL: They burned it up, the car, afterwards.

DL: The Choctaw uh, natives found it in the swamps, in the woods there in Neshoba County.

JL: And we towed that car up to, uh, Atlantic City, put it on the boardwalk and, uh, different people stood there and explained what it was, uh, as people at the convention stopped. And I remember being, standing there and people wanting to know what is that, what is that, and then once you told them this is what the three Freedom Riders, uh, three civil rights workers were in, driving when they were, before they were killed, then it just took on – I mean it was the symbolic manifestation of just the most utter type of fear and they could understand.

See one thing we, we understood in the Movement, and I'm not sure how, as young as we were, how we understood, came to understand that but we showed people what it was like as much as possible. It was a tactile thing. Like lots of photographs, a lot of booklets we put together. We uh, freedom ballots, uh, uh, uh, literacy books, teaching plantation workers literacy. You might have a sentence that one sack of cotton weighs eighty pounds, another weighs whatever, and the total is 160 pounds. But if we used, used things from the environment. And so taking that car to the boardwalk in Atlantic City for everyone to see that this is what the freedom, the three civil rights workers were driving, and then you know, you've heard that they were murdered. Their bodies were found. And they burned this car like this, and people were just, wow. They said, "We can understand why they, this Mississippi segregated delegation shouldn't be seated."

DL: And I had seen them at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, uh, as they were leaving to return to Mississippi because they, we had gotten this call that the church had burned [1:40:00] and Mickey of course would, and James were, would immediately return. And, uh, Andy jumped in the car. He was a volunteer. He had not been to Mississippi before. So, uh, we went out to the car and told them to be [crosstalk] careful and word came back that they had not been heard from through the WATS line [Wide Area Telephone Service, a precursor to 800 numbers that allowed subscribers to make nationwide calls for a flat fee], and, uh, I remember in the meeting uh, volunteers were running around full of energy, and then we said, this is very serious, very serious. And uh, Herbert Randall captured pictures of me – you may have seen it with my arm out wearing a white blouse, um – and he explained to me what happened was I was talking

and explaining the seriousness of what was going on that we knew that they were dead. And, then I took it outside and continued to talk, and, uh, then he captured a picture of me sitting there with my head bowed. We all knew they were dead because you had so many, um, hours or minutes to check in.

JL: Correct.

DL: Once you didn't check in then we would start calling and uh –

JL: 'Cause.

DL: But we blamed the federal government for not intervening earlier and they could've been saved because I heard recently that some of the cooks who worked at the jail had told people in the community that uh, they had –

JL: Get the word out that they were in the jail.

DL: In the jail and, uh, they didn't. And that was something that we had to live with and really –

JL: It was awful.

DL: Really, really, really disturbed us.

JL: You know, what I often have thought about over the years is, is we were so young to have been exposed to so much death and so much violence and some people, what we call our walking wounded. They didn't survive it intact. I mean they, the Movement destroyed them. I won't say the Movement destroyed them, but they were the casualties of the Movement, and we don't talk about them enough. But [clearing throat] but, for, to be eighteen, nineteen, twenty, if you were twenty-five in SNCC, you were older, considered old. But to be eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old and you're exposed

to all this danger and all of this violence and all of this fear all the time, uh, it's a wonder that as many people survived as did. It's truly remarkable I think.

DL: When it came to burn – uh, attempting to blow our house up, our office up in Natchez. They blew up the wrong house. According to the fire chief, I asked him whose house was that, it was ours and they had burned, bombed, threw a Molotov cocktail in this, uh, café that belonged to an integrated couple, according to the police chief. He had known them since he was a kid. Jake Fishman and his black mistress, and, uh, so we, there were a mob of people there. We got word that our office had been blown up and so we ran over there. Every white person in Natchez knew it was going to be blown but us. So when we got there, they were standing all around. It's like in an alley. And we had to go through there and, uh, Mr. Archie Curtis the funeral director, was there with his attendant. So we had, felt that we had to go inside and get the names of the people who had signed up with us to, on the four-by-four cards, and prior to that John Doar had sent, been sending two justice department officials down there, young white guys with sawed off shotguns. They let us see them. They said they weren't coming anymore because, uh, it was getting too dangerous. They would come to check on us every week to see if we were alive. And so they weren't coming back, and this is when they attempted to blow up the office.

But to make a long story short, we went – Mr. Curtis said, "I'll take you all in there to get those names and nobody's going to bother you." And so we went inside. We had to turn the light on and come out. We went through the mob of people and got in the car and drove back to Mr. George Metcalf's boarding house and the phone rang all night until I told this woman who kept calling, "Dorie, you M.F. [motherfucker], this and that."

I said, "You know what, Little Richard is coming to the town." I said, "Do you like Little Richard?" "Yes, I like Little Richard." [JL laughing] I said, "Well, if you don't call no more, I'll get you a ticket." "You will Dorie?" I said, "Yes, I promise you I'll get you a ticket." "Okay, Dorie, thank you so much." And it was –

JL: There was a lot of danger. I remember –

DL: Insanity. Insanity.

JL: Right. It was schizophrenia.

DL: And so –

JL: I mean split psyche, that Cash, W.J. Cash wrote about in *Mind of the South* it's so appropriate here. I remember being in Greenwood in spring of sixty, sixty uh, four? Or was it [1:45:00] '63? [19]'63. And, and uh, the police, not the police, but I worked in the SNCC office all day that day, and I was one who didn't mind doing office work. So, uh, and then that night left, I left the office about almost midnight, went home, learned that they'd blown up the office that night. Next morning got up and found out about it and went in there and cleaned up all the files, retrieved everything possible and I don't think, I mean aside from the momentary danger of it. You say, "Oh that's horrible.' But we didn't skip a beat.

You know, he next day we were out there again trying to get people to go down to the, going with people down to Greenwood, Leflore County, um, courthouse to register to vote. And these police dogs are chasing us and then comes, along comes somebody hollering, "Where's the pay phone? Where's the pay phone?" I said, "Ask," um, I said, she said, "I want to call the justice department." And I stopped: "The Justice Department? You want to call the justice department?" I didn't know any black person

who knew anyone in the Justice department to call. So I was taken aback. I found that more curious than dogs chasing us. So I turned around and it turned out to be Marian Wright [later, Marian Wright Edelman] who was at Yale Law School, and she had spent the summer interning at the Justice Department but she was there that spring break working with us in Greenwood, voter registration campaign. And I told her about that years later and she said, "You know what, I was calling John Doar," and she said, "You know what he told me, he told me, 'Calm down. Calm down. Tell me what happened.' And I said, 'Mister, the dog's chasing us.' That was easiest thing to say."

DL: And one thing I left out about the bombing was that there was a local young lady from Natchez black, with us, she had the audacity to faint, uh, fall out on the ground and what was I going to do with this. If you choose to faint here –

JL: Right.

DL: I'm stepping over you. We're going in the office. And I'll leave you here. I don't know what happened to her, but that was the, the mindset. You don't –

JL: No, you didn't have time to do certain things.

DL: No, no.

JL: And you didn't faint. But I had the amazing capacity that I didn't know I had. I've analyzed it many years later to be in the dangerous situations and separate myself from it almost. It's like almost being out of body. Like the next morning I got up and went, cleaned up the files and didn't really deal with what had just happened emotionally, just didn't deal with it.

JM: We're, we're, forgive me, we're so relatively close to the end of –

JL: Okay, sure why don't you ask what your –

JM: So let me just, I definitely want to ask a few things to make sure that that we can capture your, your sense of a few things, um, as we close out here and I'll have time for any amount of comments from you as well. Um, Dr. Ladner, you mentioned the, the term that's used in kind of an informal way to talk about the people who suffered from witnessing all this violence, the walking wounded. And I, um, I wonder if there are any things more you'd like, either of you would like to talk about the legacy of that violence, being so close to that much violence both personally enduring it and witnessing it at close hand?

DL: Now, this day the term terrorism is used, um, it doesn't faze me because I've lived through all that. I've lived through, I've seen a bomb thrown into churches –

JL: That was terrorism.

DA: Into homes, uh, more than I can count right now so, and being chased. I never, I didn't know how to drive at the time, and I would always sit in the back seat of the car because, for fear that whoever was driving and another driver sitting in the front seat, for fear if a guy would come by in a pickup truck with the rebel flag and a gun –

JL: Shoot, you ducked.

DL: The next person would take over the wheel as Jimmy Travis was shot in, uh, uh, Mississippi.

JL: Outside Greenwood.

DL: Um, in 1963?

JL: Um hmm.

DL: So, um, there are some things that flash across my mind like PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] at times. Um, and you don't realize it until it surfaces. So, but,

the violence part, I, when 9-11 [the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon] happened or when, that, it doesn't affect me in the same way because I, I personally lived through it. So I don't get all upset.

JL: You've been so sensitized to it.

DL: Yeah. It's, it's something that happened and I don't, I'm not condoning it, but it's something that you just sort of –

JL: It's more violence.

DL: In your whole psyche and –

JL: I don't think I've dealt with a lot of things that happened. I think I just sublimated a lot of stuff. And I believe [1:50:00] a lot of it went into my work.

JM: Ah.

JL: I believe that I worked very, very hard because I loved working but, and I pushed myself, I was, I was driven, just very driven in my work. And I think that a lot of it came from not only from being very active, engaging mind that caused me to want to, you know, seek more knowledge and write books and do research and so on. [clears throat] The administrator, teacher, and all those things. But I think also it was to keep me, I didn't have to remember a lot of things either.

DL: And I spent several years working Level One trauma unit and uh, for me it was like an out of body experience, although working with sudden death and all this kind of stuff I was, like, prepared to work with it. And although I said I never wanted to say that I've gotten used to the sight of blood, that means I'm not longer a human. But I was sort of desensitized to a lot of stuff that I saw, tragedy. Tragedy.

JL: I'll tell you but in spite of all that, my very worse moment in the entire Movement came on that, early that morning, six a.m. or so one morning my mother called to say Mr. [Vernon] Dahmer was killed. This was '66. I never will forget it. I was in graduate school, in my apartment. And I just stood there and broke down and started screaming and crying. After all those years of, of repressing so much, what I couldn't understand, because I was always, I never reacted entirely emotional to things. I was almost visually filtered through my mind first, in a way. I couldn't understand how he had lived through the worst, the most fearful terror-ridden time of the Movement and then to die after all of the violence, uh, after the most violent period. That I couldn't reconcile.

JM: Let me, uh, let me –

JL: Oh one more thing about Atlantic City.

JM: Please.

JL: Uh, we were assigned to work with, to, to, uh, to lobby with different members of Freedom Democratic Party delegation and I was assigned with Mr. and Mrs. Hartmann Turnbow. Mr. Turnbow, we always called his wife Ms. Sweets, Sweets. And we were to lobby the Oregon delegation with Edith Green, Congresswoman Edith Green and Senator Wayne Morse. And I'll never forget going into the hotel, into the suite, not uh, a beautiful suite in this hotel, like a penthouse. Edith Green was wearing a beautiful caftan. And Mr., Mr. Turnbow presented the case of the FDP very clearly and then Mrs. Turnbow was very quiet. She never said anything. She was carrying a brown paper bag. She had a pistol in it. I always thought that was so fantastic. I thought that was a gas, man. I loved it. I loved it. [Laughing] You know, their home had been blown up. And

he was accused, was jailed for being the bomber of his own home. So she didn't trust these people in Atlantic City. She had a gun. I thought it was so – you know, when you're young you see the irony in all kinds of stuff. I thought that was great. [laughing]

DL: Well, most people had guns.

JM: Yeah.

JL: A lot of people had guns and they didn't say anything about it.

JM: You just mentioned the irony that, that there, there are, uh, I don't know if it's irony, quite, but that there are so many layers of complication to sort out in relation to the question of, of, um, your experience that, that came out of the genealogical work which is that, um, of course there is this whole contemporary white side of the family so to speak. I'm very interested in your, if you'd like to –

DL: Well, it came from living in my mother's family especially. I didn't live around my father's side because they all, had all moved to Chicago and California. And my mother and her brothers were always different, meaning that they were mulattos or Indians or whatever. And, um, they would talk about their life, and uh, Ben Woulard was a, um –

JL: Grandpa Ben they called him.

DL: Deputy, was the man who caught the Copeland gang.

JL: The Spotter.

DL: But, uh, so – they called him a squatter, yes.

JL: Spotter. Spotter, like you spot these crooks.

DL: So, uh, I was intrigued and also was intrigued by my mother's family because they were different from most people in the community, the hair and the coloration and so forth. [1:55:00] So, uh –

JL: They looked Indian.

DL: And uh, I uh, after listening to Canadian Broadcasting one night in 1992, they were making a movie in Jackson, um, *Freedom Song*. So I, they announced on the radio that, the Canadian Broadcasting, that the archives are open in Jackson, Mississippi for black people. That was 1992. They had finished all the slave records and that you could go in and use them. So I took the opportunity to go and start doing the research. All of my mother's re – uh, siblings were alive at that time. They lived to be eighty, ninety years old. And I started collecting information, and the more I got into it, it became like a disease, which it still is. So, um, to make a long story short, um you know when you're doing research, people are also doing research, the same kind of research, and someone saw that I was researching the same great, great grandfather that, uh, this family was. And so, they were approached and said that you may want to know this or may not want to know it. Uh, the one in Georgia was approached by a lady in Alabama who is doing her research so she said, I want to know. They had a sister in England, so of course we want to know.

So I received a letter from England, from London, England saying that we may have the same great, great grandfather, and I would like to communicate with you and send photographs, exchange photographs, and that's how it happened. And, uh, we met in Mobile, Alabama. And, uh, we met again in 1998. And we had a reunion, two reunions. And we went to the family cemetery where my mother had grown up in

Balance, Mississippi, Wayne County, and, uh, to look at the cemetery and also to eat. And I spent a great deal of time going into cemeteries looking for, uh, Benjamin F. Woulard who was born in 1805 in Rockingham, North Carolina. And we didn't find him, but we found Benjamin Woulard, Jr. who was in the Confederate war. And from the information that both sides get, collected, was that Benjamin Woulard had around eleven children – no, thirteen, and –

JA: Five by our grandmother.

DL: Five by our great-great grandmother Mary who was described as a black Creek Indian, but she probably may have been Seminole, coming from that part. And they had both, they were both born in 1805, and they both came from North Carolina to the Alabama, Mississippi territory together and they lived together. And the first child, Frank, was born in 1825, and our great grandfather was born, uh, Jerry Woulard was born in 18-uh,-70, around 1869, 1870 and he was the father of my grandfather, Joseph Collins Woulard. And Joseph Collins Woulard married Martha Gates –

JL: Our grandmother.

DL: Our grandmother and she, uh, they begat eleven children and my mother was the fifth of eleven. Annie Ruth. And mother died, mother was born May 14th 1921, and she died uh, January 23rd, 1995. Now my father's side is so –

JM: Um hmm, um hmm.

JL: He's got something. Stop

JM: Forgive me. I didn't mean to interrupt, yeah.

DL: I thought she said he had something.

JL: No, he was – [crosstalk]

JM: If you'll forgive me for the interruption. Um, I'm just interested in your thoughts about this experience of – if you'd like to share, I've got another question, too, I can finish with if that's not really something you want to talk about. This, this element you know in the '90s of encountering this part of the family, this distant part of the family.

DL: Oh, well we knew it was there all the time. It was never –

JL: They were surprised about our existence. We weren't surprised about theirs.

DL: But my mother used to have relatives coming to visit her, Cousin Annie Ruth so –

JL: And he was white.

DL: So, yeah, so there was no deal. And my sister Joyce and I are probably the only identifiable black Ladners in the country. Those who claim the color.

JL: So the resistance comes on the white side.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JL: I mean the, the white, white, well Woulards don't want or the descendants of the Woulards can't find any other white Woulards, and they, they make all kinds of excuses as to –

DL: Well, they just melted and the Ladners, this large Creole family in Louisiana, which includes [2:00:00] Brett Favre [longtime professional football quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, and a Louisiana native] and Jimmy Buffington [jazz musician James L. Buffington] and many of the Favres do have integrated, uh, reunions. Jimmy Buffington is from that line and so forth. But, uh, they decided early on that they would rather stay in the white race than the black race.

JM: I have one final question and we're at the end of time. I'm sorry that we don't have lots more time because I would enjoy being with you for that. Um, are there parts of the civil rights narrative that you really think need attention to be recrafted or adjusted?

DL: Well, mine is –

JM: Or deserve more attention?

DL: Well, mine is mainly the schools, the children to know the history, the history part, because in Texas I think is an example where you're having revisionist, uh, do work and uh, throughout the whole curriculums of the country. Not only in elementary and high school, but college students don't know.

JM: Yeah.

DL: So I think that that's my main concern.

JM: I'm worried we need to wrap up.

JL: Yeah, my last –

EN: Guha [Shankar, of the Library of Congress] has just told us that security is clearing the building [note: because it was approaching 5:00pm, the Jefferson Building's standard closing time]

JL: Oh, okay.

JM: Okay, I'm sorry. Forgive the abrupt end of our conversation but thank you so much. It's been a real privilege.

JL: Sure.

[Microphone noise and background talking]

[Recording ends at 2:01:26]

END OF INTERVIEW