

An oral history from Nan Grogan Orrock of the VSCRC, 2015

Oral histories taken for the VSCRC 50th Reunion Oral History Project in Blackstone, VA. Professors Brian Daugherty and Ryan Smith interview former members of the VSCRC to obtain information about their work with the organization in the 1960s, in addition to their work with Civil Rights in general. Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee Oral History collection.
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(Unedited)

You want to, you don't care if we have name tags?

[BD] You can take it off if you'd like. We can get it. Great. So my name is Brian Daugherty and I'm a history professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. I'm going to interview Nan Grogan Orrock, a former member of the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee or VSCRC. We're speaking on Saturday, June 20th, 2015 at the 50th anniversary of the VSCRC, here at Blackstone Virginia. Nan, do you agree to be interviewed and recorded?

[NG] I do. Thank you very much. Could you please tell me your full name and spell out anything that might not be-

[NG] Nan, N- A- N. Grogan, G-R-O-G-A-N. O-R-R-O-C-K, Orrock.

[BD] And what was the name that people knew you by in the 1960's?

[NG] Nan Grogan and later Nan Guerrero after I married.

[BD] Okay.

[NG] Then I went back to Grogan then Grogan- Orrock.

[BD] Okay. And can you spell Guerrero for me, please?

[NG] G-U-E-R-R-E-R-O. What year were you born and where?

[NG] 1943, Abingdon, Virginia.

[BD] And please tell me the names of your parents and if they worked then their vocation?

[NG] My father, Harold Louis Grogan, was son of a sharecropper from South Georgia, who worked his way through the University of Georgia Forester school and became a forest- U.S. forester, Ranger U.S. Forester. And then went on. After he moved to Virginia, he began doing community development and promotion work, became the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce in two or three small towns in Virginia.

[BD] And did your mother work?

[NG] She was from East Tennessee and had an Associate Degree from Sullins Sullins College] and they met because she was the secretary to the Project Director of the Norris Dam. And, and of course they had, the foresters were there doing the reforestation. So so after their marriage, she I guess the thing that she did most consistently was to do columns for the newspaper, you know, social columns updates, that sort of thing. Phone surveys, stuff that she could do from home and deal with raising 5 children. She never worked full-time outside of that.

[BD] And do you have any brothers and sisters there?

[NG] There are five of us.

[BD] And where do you fall in the order? I'm the second born, and the eldest girl.

[BD] Good. And could you tell me a little about your parents views towards race and civil rights?

[NG] They were not mean-spirited, Hardcore racists at all. We were not allowed to use any racial epithets or the "N" word. That was forbidden. And. They were good Methodists and very community involved. They were there, they were the type of people that were very engaged in church and in the community. And they liked people in general. And I didn't hold any animus toward people of other skin colors. They were not breaking color lines or in any way pushing for social change. But we were not raised to be haters at all. And they were they were widely read. We had seven newspapers come into the house. They uh, wherever we lived, always kept the subscription to the newspaper. And when my grandmother would visit from Washington, we had had the Washington Post, so we'd have the Richmond Times, the Washington Post, the Stanton News Leader, The Clinton Tennessee Courier, and the Pulaski Times, and the Roanoke Times, I mean we were literally house full of newspapers and talked about current events and politics.

[BD] And when you later went on to become active in civil rights, how did your parents view that?

[NG] They were not comfortable. The first thing I did was go to the march on Washington and I didn't even tell them until months later I finally told them I had done that and they didn't have much understanding of it. And when my, when I first went to work for SNCC, Summer of '64, I basically would just not tell them what I was doing. And but my father drove me down to Atlanta to because he had a chamber meeting in Athens and so he saw that I was going into the black community. Staying in a black rooming house and go into the SNCC office. And he was very stricken and said that, "I worked all my life to get out of poverty and you're running back to it." That was, that was how he framed it. And when the Schwerner, Goodman, Chaney were missing, he said, well, oh, they're just off somewhere. They've run off with some girls that nothing has happened to them. He was quite willing to believe a narrative that racial issues were not really as, as tough as I was making them out to be.

[BD] Very interesting.

[NG] Now later, years later my mother wrote me and said she was proud that I had understood long before she did that, Dr. King was right and that that she was proud of what I did. They weren't at the time, you know, proud. They were concerned that I was going off the rails and I was losing my bearings.

[BD] Very good. Thank you. Tell me a little bit about your education particularly like, high school years and then into college.

[NG] In what regard?

[BD] Just where you went to school, if you had any sort of interest in social justice issues or any teachers that inspired you.

[NG] Yeah, I went to -- I graduated high school, Robert E. Lee High School. I went to Thomas Jefferson Elementary and Robert E. Lee High School and Mary Washington College. So all the Virginia pedigrees. And I was always active and involved I was in the Methodist Youth Fellowship it was present, in fact came down to the Blackstone as part of that because it was involved with the, with the YWC-. Well, the Tri-Hi-Y So again, like my parents our family was

very involved in community things and and engaged with people and organizations and activities. And I don't believe that I mean, I was considered outspoken. I had a history professor who had call me Susan B. because I'd always be speaking up in class. But unless I'm overlooking at right now because I feel like time is pressing. I didn't do any, there was no social change stuff in high school. I will say this in, in elementary school, at Thomas Jefferson elementary, I actually had the occasion to when I got when, when we moved to Staunton and I started school there that that first year, fifth grade. The principle, it turns out, was somebody who had a habit of patting little girls on the fanny and being inappropriate, inappropriate touching would be what you call it. And you'd go down that this teacher and send you down and he'd pulled you around behind the desk and absentmindedly pat your bottom. While he's reading what the teacher sent. That's what the, you know, molestation. A pedophile thing going on. And so my instincts were to, I found other girls, that the same thing had happened to. And I organized a "I hate Mr. Chew club." So I had an instinct as an organizer at a young age. And we would had meetings of the club and talk about this awful principle. And none of us were had developed enough. In our understanding is that you have, no go tell the authorities. But we were organizing ourselves to, to be in solidarity with each other into a kinda take back our power that this guy was taking from us. Then, then the teacher found out that we had this club and she dragged me out in front of the whole classroom and castigated me, and you know, subjected me to I mean, she should be put in jail for what she did to me. Told everybody that, don't play with me and don't have anything to do with me and to ostracize me. And then I'd probably been run out of the last town where we lived, that's why I moved to Staunton because the awful things I did and said that I was an awful girl. And and stood there and took it. Then I went home, broke down, and told my mother and they got school superintendent involved immediately and the guy got shuffled off to the mental hospital and he had this definitely, definitely had a problem with this. So he got he got he got moved off the stage and that so that I look back years later as an adult, decades later. Well, you know, I was like, I actually had an instinct to organize people that were similar circumstance to fight against this thing that was was oppressive to somebody. Something that had happened to me one time, I don't know how often it happened to other people. But okay. So that that was yeah, that was an early instinct of mine. Is that you organize and fight when things, when you're being mistreated.

[BD] And how and when did you become interested in civil rights as a as a as a similar injustice, not as similar injustice but as another injustice?

[NG] I went to college at Mary Washington as class at '61 high school at Lee High and then started school at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg. And my, let's see. The summer after my sophomore year, I worked in Washington for the government as part time typist. Very, very typical. Go to Washington and do a summer job to have money for tuition.

[BD] And so that's a summer of '63?

[NG] That's that's the summer of '63, which put me in Washington and in an integrated workplace and making friends with black coworkers and meeting my first white liberal. The guy who ran the office was a Harvard-educated lawyer. And so on the basis of our office dynamics that summer, the lead Secretary's African American woman and she and other workers said, you should go to this March. You'd really like this, our church is going. And you should come and you should go to this march. And I and later looking back, I realize, well, we had the kind of

relationships in the office that that that encouraged them to think that I would embrace that and would be on their side on the question of civil rights. And I'm hard-pressed to remember much except that we had great relationship, great time in the office. And so I did go. I misrepresented to my aunt with whom I was living, that I had a date that day because federal government was closed down and there was all this on the news about that there were going to be race riots and you know, its come to light in recent years, how the US military was mobilized. There was such a and the DC jail cells were emptied out and hospitals were emptied out because there were they were preparing for big riot. So, so I went to that undeterred by the fact that there were going to be, supposed to be riots or something. I just thought it was the right thing to do. And when I got there, it was it was the day that changed my life because I had the epiphany that I had been miseducated, that all of this was here. Plain as the nose on your face. People who put their lives on the line. And I talked to people in the march. And I particularly saw a Danville sign and I talked with them at Danville banner and they had been beaten to the ground for trying to register to vote. And this made this huge impression on me that, my god, this is right here in the same state. Where I go to school where I was raised. And I had the luxury of not having to know about it. And I think I'm a smart and I'm educated. And this whole reality is out here that I'm just sheltered from. And I've been miss- actively and deliberately miseducated as a white Southerner to, to not know and understand the depth of this issue and this problem. The fact that people are putting everything on the line and risking their, their livelihood, their home, their family, their safety, their very lives to fight back against this. This is of a, of a magnitude that I've never even considered. When people are moved to take these kinds of steps to, to fight segregation. And so that, that day was a I made a vow. I'm gonna, I know which side I'm on. And that I'm going to do something about it that I'm going to be active now I trying to duck TV cameras because, you know, my family did not was there and but it was it was a it was a life-changing experience, massive, like moving with a glacier of people you know, down to Constitution and, and in my experience in talking to the people there in the march and being overwhelmed by the numbers of people and where they came from and the stories that people and the struggles that they were coming from and the communities I really for me overwhelmed the experience of the speeches. Of course you know that, I Have a Dream speech was made that there and I heard of that day, but I was already rocked back on my heels by my experience in the march and connecting with people and the march, the the, the things I was sorted out in my head. So I ran into a girl from the Mary Washington that day. Totally accidentally she was at the march and Susie Soft was an upperclassmen. And she said, well, you've gotta get in the race relations committee when school starts. And I didn't even know about the race relations committee. So that's what I did. I went right into race relations committee that's run by the YWCA. And which I think was a real kind of singular voice of moderation on Southern campuses, southern girls campuses. Certainly because they had the slogan that to end racism by any means necessary. And so I got, came back and immediately got very active and recruited more people. We started doing connecting the black community in Fredericksburg and doing the tutorial work, recruiting college students to to go into the community and an assist in programs. And that spring of '64, The Y took us down to Atlanta. And I've learned from other people and VSCRC just this weekend that that happened with them too. They were in the Y on their campus. Randolph-Macon, another example. They had an opportunity to go to Richmond

for that, kind of, to do voter registration and have a real intense weekend this spring break over Easter. So then they brought us to Atlanta and we I met Dr. King. I mean, he was there in the basement of Ebenezer, in a classroom talking about non, non-violence. And first time I had heard of SNCC, met people from SNCC and then stayed in touch with them and registered voters in neighborhoods that I would later represent as an elected member of the General Assembly, in Georgia, decades later. So that was a, that was a pivotal experience with the Y, And that's where I learned about Summer of '64, Mississippi summer '64. And so we came back to school organizing to get ready to go to that and SNCC people stayed in touch with me back at school and so as soon as school was out, you know. Another one of the another classmate we, we went to Atlanta and walked in SNCC office and sat down and started working. So I was there that entire summer, including part of August in Greenwood. Um, because the MFDP challenge went on and so a lot of people left. We were working the night shift in the SNCC office. We covered the phones and that's when you got all the calls about church burnings and cross burnings and cars being chased and all the things that happened under cover of dark.

[BD] And so then just to clarify, so you were in Atlanta for the beginning part of the summer and then you spent a good part of the end of the summer in Mississippi?

[NG] In Greenwood. That's right. Filling in for people that, you know, the the the staff, the older staff, the senior staff went with the delegation to Atlantic City for the image MFDP challenge. And then ultimately my mother made me come back and finish my last year in college. I was I was prepared to stay. I was gonna drop out of college and and not go back. And she really she sent relatives to pick me up

laughi[NG] Not to put too fine a point on it I was collected up and taken back to Virginia. And then and then we and then we continued to organize. So that senior year was a very, very active year because we about by Christmas time. But you know, before Christmas, the fall that year, SNCC came up and and convened us in the conference at Hampton Institute to launch organizing in black counties in Virginia and Howard Romaine and I were two of the folk that had been part of the Mississippi project. There there were likely to have been others, but that's that's who I knew of. And he was organizing students for social action at the UVA campus here as a graduate student. And so we had our race relations group in Fredericksburg. So we had this vision and began actively building out activist networks on campuses around the state. And SNCC was up here traveling the Virginia campuses as well. We were we were very much a collaborator at the people on the ground carrying out the SNCC vision of expanding the Mississippi project. So building on that model.

[BD] Ok. And can you share a few of the other names of individuals from the Virginia campuses and or from SNCC that were in Virginia?

[NG] Well, Stanley Wise was the main staff he was the central staff person that returned repeatedly from SNCC. But the organizing conference in December had Jim Forman there from SNCC. And um...

[BD] How about Bob Moses?

[NG] Well, yes, and I don't have much memory, about Bob being there, but Bob was there. And one of the let's see, over time, Willie Ricks came through that we had, we had repeated visits. Stokely Carmichael came to Southside. This was after we were up and running as project. I believe Mike Mike Simmons, maybe Bob Fletcher, Ralph Featherstone. You know, really at least

half a dozen different different folks who we're engaging with us. In an ongoing way. And so so that senior year was -- oh so it is Howard Howard Romaine and and and his wife Anne Romaine and I don't know. Were they married at the time? They were, yeah yeah. They got married. He had to be reminded that he had totally forgotten.

[BD] And who else from the Virginia campuses was involved?

[NG] Well, Butch Montgomery, Duke Edwards, there were there were an array of people from UVA who who, I don't know in what order and what sequence and who came when. But there's a big contingent from UVA. And, and and I frankly am not, I no longer have a clear memory of who attended from Mary Washington besides me and I know Erin Sims had gone with me down to work in the, with SNCC in the summer of '63, but she did not return to school and Betty um, Betty Grace Cummings, was my roommate in college. She was active alongside me for all of the the four years and then came to Southside with us as well, she was from Lexington, Kentucky.

[BD] And I'm curious about your view of Virginia at the time and, I understand your work go into Georgia and Mississippi and so on. Did you feel that those problems were more pressing than what was happening in Virginia? And I'm thinking here before the creation of VSCRC?

[NG] Well, that was not a nexus. There was not a nexus in a target in Virginia. There were there was the SNCC office and the summer project and those who are those were galvanizing events and ones that they were recruiting actively people to come and participate. And then the vision of a black belt counties in Virginia that got that got raised by SNCC. The fact of being able to go back home to your home state and work in your home state on the ground and build a network of student activist and participants in Virginia was a compelling vision. And as I said, Danville had been a bellwether event for me, a connected -connection for me at the march on Washington.

[BD] Were you familiar with what had been happening in Prince Edward County at the time? Was that something that you are aware of?

[NG] Well, you know, I was I would be hard-pressed now, to tell you when that came on my radar screen. But it was, I mean, it was a national phenomenon. Now, there was an earlier time that got my attention in Clinton, Tennessee, my mother's birth place. John Casper, a racist had whipped up animus. and that was '56. Yeah, that was early and the school had been bombed. And I was aware of the of that happening because it was my mother home town and and my mother decried it. You know, it as all I ever heard about that. I only heard the perspective of decrying that because you have the radio commentator, I forget his name but organized school kids to send pennies to rebuild that school. What was his name? Mm-mm.

[BD] Was it Cronkite?

[NG] Nope, nope. It was a big name like Cronkite before that. It was in radio. Sometimes I'm able to recall it but but there was a national campaign of school children sending pennies to rebuild that Clinton School. And so yeah, it really backfired. So let's see what.

[BD] Well, let's go back to that last year in college. The conference at Hampton Institute in December. And then we have the creation of VSCRC. And if you can tell me, what was your role in the spring of '65 as you guys worked toward the summer project, what was the what was the goal of what was happening and so on.

[NG] Well we Bill and Betsy Jean Towe were also at Hampton and we always laugh and called them -- they were the adults in the situation. They were in their thirties and my god, they had a

car that had health insurance. They had car insurance. I mean, they were they were adults with jobs. All of the rest of us are just coming straight out of college or dropping out of college. And and so Bill was a real backbone person. They were in the Tidewater area then if memory serves me. But he did the, he did the research and created the analysis, the demographics of these six targeted counties. Have you all ever seen those? Yep.

[BD] And how do you spell his last name?

[NG] T-O-W-E. He was a native of Wilson, North Carolina and he just died in the last two years. He worked at Soul City doing their financial record keeping for some years in North Carolina and he ultimately spent, spent a career running things through the Housing Authority in Durham. And they settled in Cary, North Carolina, and both of them passed away in the last 6-8 years, less time than that. When we had the SNCC reunion at Shaw University. Betsy-Jean died the year after that and then Bill, Bill died a couple years ago. So they were very prop- a very singular assets to to the work. They were the steady hand and keeping all of the wheels. All those, all those arcane details that are so important, but not necessarily compelling to everybody. They were critically important people.

[BD] Ok. And what were you doing during your last semester roughly?

[NG] Well, well, we were in the active contact with the efforts around the state to be recruiting students and SNCC people were actually traveling campus to campus. That spring. We were continuing to build the Race Relations Committee at Mary Washington and, and making efforts to recruit people there. And there were meetings on a regular basis to continue to organize the you know, the plans and details for the launch into the counties. But we were absolutely locked in. I as an individualist, completely locked into the day I graduate we're heading to Southside. Yeah, that was a total commitment to that project work. And at some point, we were trying to remember when, when we chose our structure and our leadership and I know Butch Montgomery was president. The first, maybe the only president. We were, you know, just, just, just as today, young activists, not being all that engaged in a whole lot of structure, infrastructure, but getting out there and getting the job done. So we had we had a structure and I at what point we set it up, I would- it has been lost to me. At some in 1 of those meetings, I got designated as the project director. And it's funny that all of that is just kind of a blur now. We were also after the SNCC conference at Hampton, we we were working on getting assistance to Mississippi and there was a clothing drive and we took our Christmas break with Howard, and Anne Romaine and myself and I'm sure there was somebody else. I don't know. But anyway, we drove a great big van down to Atlanta to take full van of stuff that was going to be taken to Mississippi. Now, I went on to Mississippi, to Laurel and worked in the freedom house, freedom with the, with the, the Hattiesburg SNCC office, whatever it's called. Wind, who's a professor in Florida now, was the director of that full-time. And so I was down there over Christmas and actually got arrested with a group for integrating The Welcome Inn, believe it or not, and got locked up and that's when SNCC call my parents and my father to get bail money. He said, wow, I couldn't do that. I can't I can't I can't bail her out. And months later, I don't even know how long. Six months later some he said to me, did you all ever get that fruit basket because we were in we were in jail- You heard this. We were in jail over Christmas that we were in the jail. And and I said what are you talking about. He said, well, I called down there to the Chamber of Commerce and suggested they might send you all a fruit basket out to the jail. Which is like, oh,

I didn't know you were that clueless imagine the you know. The false picture that you're labored under to think that, It's like you just not, you're totally clueless about what's really going on in the real world. So anyway, it always struck me as kind of sweet, but, that he made some effort to do something. But also clueless. So did SNCC eventually bail you out?

[NG] Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We yeah. We were bailed out after a few days. And then- Is that the first time you were put in jail?

[NG] In Greenwood I got. No, in Jackson I got picked up. Taken down to for a booking for making a U-turn in front of the Coval office on Lynch Street, which again what stupidity. Right. But I just got I was like the same day that I got in the state. We were going, went over there with Tamio Wakayama who was with the SNCC photographer and he was driving and I'd used his car to go out and buy some cigarettes and made a U-turn in front of the office. So the lawyers came and got me out. That was uneventful. And no jail in Greenwood. But yeah, it was in Laurel, Mississippi. Laurel. And then, you know, so so that was Christmas and then that whole second semester of the year was filled with both work in Fredericksburg when the Pettus Bridge Bloody Sunday happened, we like other of our student buddies, based on other campuses, we did a, a protest, we organize the first time it turned out that Mary Washington girls have ever done a done a demonstration, but we went downtown to a federal building and picketed with the demand that the feds intervene and get involved to stop the violence and to allow people to exercise their constitutional rights in Alabama. And that made it to the history book, the authoritative history of Mary Washington College. So that's what were were doing right up to the day we left.

[BD] Okay. So then you graduated and then you move to into Southside what county were you based in?

[NG] We all, well We went in to Lunenburg county, uh, within a week or so of getting down there. We had secured a house in Jennings Ordinary up on a highway, in some remote section and there was let us say to put it nicely, our planning skills were not finely honed because we wound up in that house that had been rented for Howard, his wife and Bill and Betsy-Jean to live in. And we were lined up like logs on the floor, living room sleeping. And we just our plan was not real thought out, but we we, Lunenburg county was where I took off for with Betty Cummings and oh, I don't know who else. Three or four of us. But what we did was we connected with Harry Washington, who was a grocer and and NAACP activist. A very smart guy. He I believe he had been in the military, but we we went straight to his store in downtown Kenbridge and went in and he welcomed us in. And I think that that same-day Nathaniel Hawthorne showed up there. He was in the NAACP, as well. And he knew through Harry Washington that we were coming and met us there at the store and then we wound up, that was at Kenbridge Victoria. Six miles up the road, and that's where we actually opened up a Freedom House. And it was local folks and the Hawthorne in particular that helped us get get us situated and, know who the landlord was and this this building in the community, small, one or two room building and that and that's where we operated Freedom House. There was, that was really probably the longest standing operation on the ground because of Hawthorne being in that county. And putting himself in full time. He was at that office every day. And we we were taken in to the community and lived with people were fed meals by the folks that housed us, and worked day by day by day.

[BD] And what sort of work did you do? Well, actually, as myself, as project director, I was doing

in addition to community outreach and really building ties with people in that community because we were embedded right in the Victoria Black community. There were houses all around us. We were solidly in the heart of the black community, of that little town. And so making ties going to churches, meeting with the thought leaders, the people that were willing to that wanted to see something happen and we're willing to connect with us and and be of help and give guidance. I also was doing foundation proposals in raising the money. I wasn't the only person I'm sure, but that was that sit at a typewriter and chunking out foundation proposals and as well as presiding over the project meetings and doing a 1001-- in the internal stuff of coordinating folks and coordinating work. And it was not that was not an easy task. I mean, we we certainly we're not going by some handbook. SNCC people came in on a number of occasions and a lot of my colleagues this weekend as we talked. Remembered clearly a lot of guidance that came from SNCC about how to organize and have. And the SNCC model of course, is to work yourself out of a job, is to activate and engage and help cultivate and lead and connect local leaders that, you know, are in charge of their own destiny and support them to lead. So we, we had a very high profile boycott. After the Klan came in and after the Klan came in, we started meeting with resistance and racial racially motivated reaction and push back. Crosses burned and and the night riders and people following all those sorts of things that never escalated to the point of someone getting killed. But our office was shot up. Somebody's probably told you about that.

[BD] Yeah, I've read about that in the newspaper.

[NG] Yeah, night rider came by. And one young man who Alfonso Stokes, who's no longer living but there was a large family. The Stokes' lived across the street from that, from the Freedom House. And there were out of 9 children, I think six were still living in in Victoria and some of them were still in high school. So there was there was that they were in and out of our office all the time and he's the one that got shot standing in the door of the office. It was his his his hair, they got parted by the buckshot. It was it was a shotgun and of course, nothing ever done about it. And actually, people knew who, who did it, lots of people knew who did it. And they were never brought to justice or apprehended for it.

[BD] And we've heard a few people say that the FBI was in the southside at the same time, and I'm curious if you could talk at all about their role?

[NG] Well, I will share with you some of this has been done to tease that today we went, Bill and Betsey Jean and I were on a fundraising trip up north where you have house parties, you have yeah, there's liberal money to be had by going to the North and making your case and finding people who put on house parties and and were interested in writing checks to us. So we were doing that and we were- there was a guy that kept surfacing at our different events and said he was a researcher on the student movement in Virginia and actually offered Bill and I ride with him from one event to another, saw him and he became a regular face on this little several day trek that we did. And we thought it was odd and we didn't. But we were wary of him, but we didn't really think about it deeply enough to put 2 and 2 together. It turned out he- we came at a certain point after we were back. In the next weeks and months, he shows up in a robe as a featured speaker at a Klan rally. And curiously enough, very much unlike Mississippi in Virginia, you could actually go to watch a Klan rally from across the street. It was a different, it was not a police state where you were going to absolutely be stripped of your rights and beaten and jailed

who turned down and, you know. It was not Mississippi where you couldn't go to a Klan rally in Mississippi because you would be, your life was in your hands. They might beat you as they did to some of us. Or rough you up or scuffle you sometimes stomp you out of the meetings. But but so we were going to Klan rallies and listened to them across the hill or across the street or whatever once they started coming into town. And that's when we heard this guy here he is and he was the guy that have been following us up there up North. And he's been identified to me today in the meeting as as as identifying himself as a Grand Dragon from Delaware. I'm I mean, imagine. And it was said in the meeting today and it's documented by people that I believe, know what they're talking about. Like the guy who wrote Bound for Canaan had you, he's here today are you familiar with that book? It's, it's, it's the, it's the story of the chronicling of the American Underground Railroad. Bound for Canaan that came out in '06 I think. And he was a young volunteer from New York, Fergus Boudreau maybe. But anyway, he's here he was sitting right beside me right? Yes. I remember him. Yes. And he he documented that there was a hearing at a congressional hearing about the Klan activity and that this guy testified before Congress and revealed that he was an FBI agent or informant. One of the two. So he was working on some many levels because he called in this Klan rally, we need to we need to tar and feather Nan Grogan and, and run her out of town, run her out of Southside. So I did not know until today that he presented himself as the grand dragon and that he told Congress that he was an FBI agent or informant. I mean, all of that's quite, you don't know quite what to make of that, how many levels of stuff was going on there?

Other interviewer] They were trying to undermine everyone.

[NG] Yea. And he and he he actually it was it was told today by Fergus that they would hold their rallies sometimes at Lunenburg court house and that he and they dared any black man show their faces on the street and Hawthorne went up there, Fergus drove him up there. He insisted going, he was going to go to that rally. He was not afraid to show his face. And they were attacking him verbally over the mic, this guy. And with all kinds of rhetoric and hostility, and there were hostile whites were coming up to him. And the state police actually came and took them and told the crowd the to disperse too, from around then and then arrested Hawthorne on a charge of molesting the wife of the grand dragon. I made it just all of this is just- it's like, what planet are we on? How crazy does it get?

[BD] There's some coverage of that in the Richmond African American newspaper, I've read a little bit about that.

[NG] Uh-huh. Yeah. And so so I've heard some stories today that that jogs some memories for me and also completely, filled up some some some voids in uh, brought, you know, deepened my understanding about what was going on. Some of the stuff.

[BD] Interesting. Can you you've mentioned-

[NG] But I'll say that we did a big boycott in response to the Klan having this, you know, The Klan was not in Southside Virginia as far as we can determine. The common knowledge was it was not there were not Klaverns. It didn't exist and they came over from North Carolina and they had the North Carolina license plates. And so we we did, kicked up a big boycott at Victoria merchants because on the, on the premise that they allowed the Klan to come in and that they did not, as the city fathers, take steps to curb their activities and make them not welcome. And therefore, there were going to be denied the business of the black consumer. So we had

carpools and driving people six miles down the road to Kenbridge and we get sued for a million dollars by the

[BD] Hornstein. I believe is the last name.

[NG] That was the attorney?

[BD] That business owner.

[NG] Well, and I think they did it under the name of like the local merchants or the chamber or somebody, I mean, there may have been an individual planner but I think it was on behalf of this Merchants Association. I mean, yeah. So so so yeah, they felt that they felt the sting, they felt the economic thing. And we had the lawyers from Richmond from the Marshall law firm represents us and it all, later was thrown out of court way on down the line. But there was a lot, there was a lot of energy around that. And people felt a real sense of power and pride that they could prevail and choose where they were going to spend their dollars. It was a, it was a big in my opinion kind of waking up the sleeping giant. And of course they had the model of Montgomery and other places, you know, with resist and don't cooperate with them. So that was a very that was a very that was a campaign that stands out in my mind, and we actually had a black preacher, I think Reverend Winston was his name who ultimately sold us out and wound up-- I mean, the stories were that he got just boxes of the finest shoes that that did come out of those stores in Victoria, I mean, so what's new? Nothing new under the sun. You know there are sell outs and opportunists. And he was one. And so at some point he operated too, because you can get the pulpit and turn people against something. And so you start preaching that it was time to end this.

[LS] The boycott was in late summer, '66, correct? That's when it was, so it was an after you went to the Stokely Carmichael rally in Farmville, is that- you were telling a story?

[NG] Well, what happened right after we went to the I mean, today I was reminded that when we came home from that Carmichael speech. You know, when we came home from that event up in Farmville, that's when we came to the the Blackstone house where Bill and Betsy Jean lived. And I lived there sometimes too. After this. It doesn't matter who lived where, but they were that was their house. That was one of our houses that we paid for paid rent out of the project funds. And the cross burners were there. The cross was still burning in some big old car that they had. And so Sarah Foster, and I were in a little Volkswagen and for God knows why, I chased them and we ran after. I don't know what I would've done if I'd caught them, but that's the I've got some instinct to fight, you know, to like, oh hell no, you're not gotta get away with that, you know. Not necessarily thinking it all the way through. Not the, not the best chess player right but. But don't let them push you around kind of thing. So and Sarah said to me that was the night we were coming back home from this Stokely Carmichael rally over in Farmville. And we were also, I was sharing earlier we went on this thing with the FBI. We took people down to a SNCC Conference in Atlanta. A student conference. It was a great conference and some people that, you know, at the at the, I check myself on whether it was pure SNCC or a SSOC conference or just exactly. I'm so glad to have these people around to be able to fact check with them. But we did take people down there. It was a long drive down, long drive back. And the FBI got hold of us some kind of way while we were down there. And I think we went over to their office, but they called us in to tell us that their their informants in the Klan had revealed that there was a plan to try to kill us, you know, murder us on the highway before we ever got back to Virginia. And so

we said well well, we'd love some help. And so our job is to tell you that this is the case there's nothing we can do about it. And so so we drove back looking over our shoulders to Victoria and made it in one piece.

[BD] So you started there in the summer '65 and then did how long did you stay working in Southside? You were there again in the summer of '66 or did you stay in the summer of '66? Did you do something in the during the academic school year in the interim or

[NG] No, I'd graduated no, I stayed there. I was there. I was there full time. And I campus traveled for SSOC. Southern Student Organizing Committee I was going to campuses to recruit for the next summer. Mm-hm. And and to get buy-in and get support, go on campuses, do programs, connect with the activists. And I also started doing that for SSOC, as well because they had what they called a campus traveler program. And so I was not alone in that. There were other people that ultimately did it as well for SSOC. And when I left South side...

[BD] Which was when?

[NG] That's a great question. Because I was definitely there two summers. And think I left in the in the fall of '66 and moved to a position with SSOC in Nashville.

[BD] And then after?

[NG] And so what happened what happened I was at the SSOC house, living there and that was maybe I don't know, probably less than a year. But we were sent to North Carolina because we were unfolding work, solidarity work with labor. And it was a great experience for me because after all the intensity of Mississippi Summer and then two years in Southside and really, really be an imbedded in the black community and being threatened constantly by the white community. We worked with the textile workers union in North Carolina, who had been persuaded by a forward-looking guy, Peter Brandon to go in there and out of all this energy of the sixties and the movement of the 60's, to reactivate old textile locals that had been in those mill towns and reinvigorate them and connect them up with the, the Civil rights movement, the energy of the Student Movement and all that. So, so we worked. There were the cannon, a string of mills, Cannon Mills, Kannapolis

NC] There was Hall River? A a string of Mills that's kind of up and down Interstate 85 that we worked with and we brought, we took mill workers to campuses in North Carolina and we brought students out in support of the organizing, reorganizing efforts. Maybe informational picket lands, that sort of stuff. And then a strike broke out and Whiteville North Carolina. And so by then my husband, Gene Guerrero , who had been a worker, had worked in SSOC while I was in VSCRC we met by virtue of being a SSOC campus traveler. And that's why I moved to, I moved to Nashville with him. And so we were assigned to part of the staff of that strike. And it it went on. It was very intense and what it was was it was white people, their first factory job. And it was black people, their first factory job. Black people's experience with NAACP and the white people's experience was the damn plant. And they were there together in the factory fighting for contract. So it was, it was, it was it really was a priceless opportunity for me to see white southerners in a different light. As people that were also working class whites, who are the ones who are trying to take you down. Burning crosses and all that.

[BD] And how long did you do labor organizing for?

[NG] That well, that's we went through the duration of that strike. And and then and then we moved to at which, the strike was not one. It was it was it did it did not conclude successfully

they were trying to get a contract. We we moved to Atlanta because Gene was a conscientious objector and they'd been denied him his status. And so he was being drafted and going to have a court case to fight. And and that's where his draft board was. He'd gone to Emory University and was from Atlanta. So we moved to Atlanta in order to prepare, make that long battle to try to prevail in his case. But he ultimately he got sentenced to five years. And then was out on appeal. The Supreme Court ruled that yes, they had the grant CO status to people even if they weren't a Quaker, if they weren't a traditional religious order, that was a pacifist. And so but there we were in Atlanta and we started working with 3 or 4 other couples to put out an underground newspaper, Alternative Newspaper, particularly driven by trying to, wanting to tell the truth about the war in Vietnam. And it was through civil rights that I came to understand why that war was dead wrong. I mean, that I picketed the White House with SNCC. They did. They picketed at the White House. On the war in Vietnam in '65 or something or early '66. So, so then I worked on that underground paper, The Great Speckled Bird with the Romaines and my then husband Guerrero and, and others. And it turned into a very long, one of the longest surviving alternative papers in an underground newspaper movement through several iterations. But I was, I was involved in that until '72, something like that.

[BD] Then after '72, how did you-

[NG] Well, I actually signed up to go to, I signed up to go a solidarity trip to Cuba. Vencenramos Brigade. And that was North American youth showing solidarity with the Cuban people against US embargo. So we went down and worked in the cane fields. We cut cane! You know? And that that was again, a great broadening experience to be more connected with international movements and, and that, and that's also on that trip. I got in big arguments with the Cubans that we worked with around gay rights. Because they had this traditional, you know Marxist Leninist view of that, that was depraved, and I would just fight with them on that. So it was a fabulous experience that was fabulous and incredible experience. And I came back much more committed to doing working class organizing and and, and went with and went. By then I'd divorced and I mean, how much detail do you want? That I went to work at a factory?

[BD] A more cur- yeah. I'm curious about where your life led you after your activism. At one point you entered into politics?

[NG] Well, way, way on down the line. I mean, I was always in politics but I was not in electoral politics.

[BD] That's right.

[NG] Yeah, yeah, I was in I was I was an organizer. And so, uh, I went into Nabisco and was workin with other like-minded leftists in Atlanta that were seeking to. What we were trying to do was the unions were racist and not serving people and the white and black and white workers were, all split and divided and the blacks were on the bottom. So I went into Nabisco and worked there. Building resistance to the sell out union leadership, trying to dump them and reform the union. And, and actually I was there 17 years and and continued to be active on doing strike support. We built building, working on unemployment issues and organizing the employed in Atlanta. I was, I was in the progressive left movement of Atlanta doing- I couldn't even name, to you all the things that we did, but -

[BD] Do you still live in Atlanta?

[NG] Yeah, still in Atlanta. And I was still at Nabisco as a, I active in the bakery workers and the

shop steward. And and as I said, but we were at war with the sell out union leadership that colluded with the company all the time and screwed over the the workforce and completely complied with the racist set up. You know, and served, the Southern job was serving the whites, not the black union members. So that, so there, there were struggles with without end and in the shop. But there was also, there was also a period of black lead wildcat strikes in Atlanta. That was a real spate of them. Jose Williams, who of course, had been an SCLC activist and lead the SCOPE work. Lead a strike- There was a Sears strike there was a strike at Riche's, a big department store. There was a strike at a Meade paper plant and we did a strike at Nabisco. And that was a big long extended battle based on a racist firing of a black worker. And so we got a few whites to participate in that. But it was a black lead strike again, and that there was a spate of them happening, demanding that better, better working conditions. But also if there was a Union like at Meade and Nabisco, there were there were long-standing unions there and they were not sticking up for black workers in fighting racism. So that was a, that was a huge extended battle. While, while I was at Nabisco and I was on the strike leadership committee and we ultimately won the strike. And mean we went out and boycotted grocery stores because Nabisco's it's a great brand you know. Chips Ahoy! Oh hell, no, don't eat them, you know. Premium Saltines, forget about them. So we went out to the picketed stores in the black community right around the plant. And then I call them Julian Bond, who I'd worked with in SNCC. I had been in communications in SNCC. And Julian came out on the sidewalk and did a press conference with us. And the next day the damn corporate jets brought them to town. They they they settled with us. We had like we had to like 78 demands, you know, we just run a muck. But it was a lot of stuff that had been hanging fire since had been hiring black workers there so so there was, there were some great victories at Nabisco and I was running for the reform slate when I got recruited actually to run for office. And that, that was on the basis of the fact that there had been this god awful proposal in the dead of night to pass a special zoning exemptions and let the damn railroad come into the heart of Atlanta, downtown old neighborhoods with tractor trailer trucks, and build a piggyback facility in the heart of downtown. Totally inappropriate land use! And I got involved because I mean, I lived over in that area, but I could tell it was they were pitting black neighborhoods against white neighborhoods. The black neighborhoods were bringing new jobs, swimming pools, community centers. Life is going to be good. And these young, white couples that had been buying up old houses and fixing them up. Were like, their screwing the whole everything up, we don't want tractor trailer trucks in our neighborhood. And they were and I could see that it was going to go badly and we could have a racially divisive issue that went on for 25 years it really scarred scarred these communities that were cheek by jowl. Old historic, There was a, there was a cotton mill community of whites, so it was a historic black community. There was a big Grant Park community, and it was a very racially mixed part of town, so I weened my baby at 12 or 13 months and and start organizing a no intent piggyback coalition. And we did that two years, took it to Supreme Court got Perez, got King involved and had to close the King Center got Andy Young to veto the damn thing when the city council passed it and got a big compromise deal with them that they had to pay for each truck. I mean, they got the thing through, but they were going to put it in three months. It took him two years and a Supreme Court case. And one of our volunteer lawyers then as now the Federal Court judge appointed by Obama so, history, history moves forward. At any rate, on the basis of

that battle, which was a two year battle. And we really built a great coalition of 25 organizations, and neighborhoods coming together black and white and avoided that racial split and schism and and maintained relations with the black community leaders who had bought into this too, didn't make them the enemy, made the railroad the enemy. But, so it was a, it was a significant and important battle. And people came to me and said, do we want to back you to run for office from that because the seat the House seat was going to vacate for just an unconnected reason. The guy was leaving and I fought them for about three months. I thought that was a ridiculous idea. Said I've gotta go and clean up my dining room table, and tell my three-year-old where I've for two years, you know, since I weened him. And they said, oh we'll come clean off your dining room table. And these two guys did come clean up the dining room table after we won the election. But at the end it was a great eye opener. I never see myself as doing insider politics and being in electoral politics, but I had seen so much crap from our city council members going along with the railroad. And I was it was appalling in a town that's supposed to be forward-looking. To see all the crap that was going on. So I was I had a strong resolve to do it because of that. But ultimately, fundamentally, I didn't see myself. That wasn't who I was. I wasn't going to run and I've talked countless women into running for office. You know, I was having the typical female reaction. Oh, not me I don't know enough. So they took me out. We were door knocking these were people that had had a citizen's party background. This view of doing progressive political work with an alternative party at which fell on its face of course. But they had learned how to run elections and they had helped in John Lewis's election to City Council just a year or two before that. And they lived in the same neighborhood and we'd all been working. Some of them had been working on that piggyback thing. So they said, and it was true, I had a great base of all these neighborhoods and organizations from this two year battle that we had and I ran and the had run off. And because I had never been active in party politics or anything like that. And they were knocking on doors. And one of the neighbors said, Nan's going to be our voice for neighborhood at the state capitol for the next ten years, we and I went ten years hell fire. I wanted to go back and get in the car and leave I had never told anybody I'd be doing that for ten years. I had just said I agreed that I'd run. And see what'd happen. I finally decided to run because I knew the rest of my life I would wonder what happened. What if I had run, I wonder if I would've won that race. And then I also felt very strongly that some opportunist crapolla, somebody who just wanted the position would be in their selling out.

[BD] That alternative,

[NG] Yeah. That would be the alternative and that that I knew I wouldn't do that and that would be true to the mission and and and that that, that it was worth going to bat to not have another opportunity to sit in a seat. But I but I've had a countless conversations since then because I went on to become an organizer of women, to run for office. Getting more, getting more women and I've actually, to this day I've, I've worked with the national women's organization called WAND, Women's Action For New Direction, and I run the legislator network. We got 700 women around the country and 50 the women in Congress came through our, through our network. So, but it all started so. I've been in that conversation countless times of women coming up with all the reasons why they're not the, they shouldn't be the candidate. You know, we think we have to know it all and be perfect and know everything. And guys just say, I went to the right fraternity,

I'm going to be the damn governor. Yeah. I mean, there's a strong gender gap there about the peoples self-perceptions that people have raised as male and female and what their societal expectation is. And that's another subset of, of being part of the social movements of the sixties is that the women's rights movement came on board in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and women in SNCC or the first woman that ever talked to me and said, let's have a meeting about women's rights. And I was of course, somebody that couldn't get a UVA because I was a girl, had to go to Mary Washington. But so I was very galvanized by that and very active in the women's movement in the sixties. Just as we were unfolding the bird, the bird. So that's been a hallmark. Civil rights and women's rights had been hallmark issues along with workers rights. For me, you know, from the sixties on.

[BD] Let me ask you one last question just about looking back at VSCRC in particular in '65 & '66, What are your kinda final thoughts on what was accomplished as a result of this particular approach?

[NG] Well, you know, it may not be often said, but we were the very first organization of black and white Virginia students coming together and working together on an equal basis for shared vision. And so that was a huge step forward. And there's, there's there's all kinds of things that happened on campuses around the state. As a result of that activism and reaching out and fostering SSOC, fostering VSCRC, going on campuses and hunting students to be a part of social change movement. And of course, it's like a wildfire back in those days, it's just like in the early sixties when the sit in movement happened and near there had been, within a year's time, there were like a 100 sit in's of college students. It's just, you know, like wildfire. And that happened on, I would say on a more subdued level, but that that happened across Virginia. And would it have happened without us, who's to say there were, there were larger dynamics than us at play. But I think organizing old campuses in the south on both campuses that were historically white, as well as historically Black was a breakthrough thing because, you know, the Mississippi model brought kids from the north. And we were in SSOC and in VSCRC organizing fellow Southerners to change the South. And I just don't think you under estimate the potency of that. That's that's a different narrative. And then somebody said today that how, that, how enraging it was to the reactionary forces, the Klan, et cetera, that we were that we were southerners and we were not taking their shit, we were not following their script. We were, we were part of building a new South. I think that in communities we had some moving input today from people here in Lunenburg County who talked about how their work and their contact with us and um. Typically high school students or maybe a little bit older, 18 years old. That of course, you see over and over in social change. But this first one's that dare to take the step and go out on the thin ice and go out on the you know, I don't know if that bough's going to break or not, but we're going at the end of that branch we're following this road. And over and over, you'll see that youth, the youth and the idealism of the youth and the fearlessness of youth. And so it was very heartening today to talk to people who represent people whose voices aren't here this weekend, but that, that change your life. They've never never been the same. It gave them a whole new way to understand themselves and that they mattered and they meant something and they had rights and by damn, they could stand up and stick up for them. There's a woman today, Dorothy Walker, I remember when she was 15 in Victoria, she was a constant presence with us moving around. She and her brother. And and she's she said she's filed and won EEOC cases over and

over and got the first made a breakthrough at a plant in her right there Victoria, Kenley, might be Kenbridge-- the Kenley

] plant and got the first black secretarial job there. But she filed, went to the EOC to get it. And she said she's never forgotten the you know, she's fought all her life. So so and Nathaniel Lee Hawthorne you know, got that boost from us. He knew where he stood and what he wanted to do. But he really leaped ahead and became, you know, emerged as a leader. In Southside, Virginia. That the very likely would not have happened had we not been there and he was still putting out the VSCRC newsletter almost eight years later. And he went on to be on the SCEF board with me and we always stayed in touch and, and he got involved in the broader movement in the South. And it's, it, we were not by any means skilled in outcomes measurements in those days as parlance, the common parlance of foundation world, you know, when we fund you, what are your outcomes when you, or of the beds, you know, what are the outcomes, what you get. So we we were not consistent and strong and good at measuring that back then. Uh, we did have a guy come from Dinwiddie County today who had worked with Robert Kennedy campaign and described registering and 600 people in 30 days, you know in Dinwiddie County, moving up to to an election. I mean, a lot of, a lot of our, I think we had um, I mean we we were in many ways primitive. We were underfunded and we were did not have a tight, tightly knit and highly thought through structure. But but we we went into counties and faced off the Klan, which we had not known would be the case. And we've got a young a young man. He was 18 then who's here today and he, he's started in in South Hill at 18, inspired by the organizers, came from VSCRC. And these people described that it changed their life and it changed who they were in the world and how they see the world and what they've done with their lives. And I will say at the same time that the forces of capital and exploitation certainly were not rocked on there. You know, they were not knocked off their hinges by what we did because you can look at Lunenburg county and you can see that the a zipper factory moved down from up north, came down to Victoria, interacting with YKK, ran and got all the tax exemptions, got all the local, you know, breaks on taxes and infrastructure put in the zipper factory, ran it for ten years till all the benefits were expired. And Sarah Foster worked there. Willie Stokes worked there that that large family I told you about that lived across from the Freedom House. They became foremen on their shifts, etc. And when they shut that plant down, they took it apart and unbolted all that machinery from the floor and shipped it to Taiwan. Willy went with them to show the Taiwanese workers how operate the zipper machinery. And so there was the hope of jobs here and there. And then it went abroad. And then what's the next big industry came to Southside. The prison industry. Sarah Foster worked out the rest of her life as a prison guard. Her sister did too. And that was, that was economic development for the rural South is fighting to get a damn prison in a, put down in a rural setting and work people for pennies and lockup half of them and the other half of them have jobs for pennies being prison guard, so so, so so there, there are overarching forces at work that, that you know, for one brief shining moment, we had Tom Perriello. What's his name Perriello? Congressmen who actually, who actually presided as a member of Congress over these benighted Southside counties or a portion of them. He got thrown out in the next election. But you know the rural South has, is still benighted. That's, so they're, they're huge, big forces that we didn't take and topple.

[BD] Well, what you did do made Virginia a better place and I'd like to thank you for what you did

in Virginia in the mid - nineteen sixties. And I'd also like to thank you for taking the time to speak with us. Really appreciate it, Nan. It's a pleasure.

[NG] Thanks. And I have been now in the legislature since 1986. I've been 10 terms, in the house and five in the Senate. So I stayed longer than ten years. But my efforts, so we made a difference. So yeah. We had met when I in Atlanta in the 1990's.

[NG] Where were you? Well, I I did my Ph.D. --