

TRANSCRIPT: CAROL HALLSTROM

Interviewee: Carol Hallstrom
Interviewer: Orion Teal
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START OF INTERVIEW

Orion Teal: Carol, if you could tell us your full name and your date of birth and age, just for the record.

Carol Hallstrom: Sure. Carol Rogoff Hallstrom, born in 1942, which I now know makes me sixty-eight.

OT: [Laughs]

CH: A proud sixty-eight.

OT: [Laughs] Great. And this is April 16, 2010. Where were you born?

CH: I was born in Brooklyn.

OT: Did you spend your whole time there growing up?

CH: I grew up in Brooklyn.

OT: What neighborhood?

CH: Near Prospect Park, near Grand Army Plaza, the daughter of immigrants, which I think I finally figured out had a pretty profound impact on the choices that I made; a community of first generation immigrants, many, as my family, from Eastern Europe, the children of Jews who had escaped the pogroms. My father was born in the

Ukraine, the first of five children in his family, who had stories of his growing up, his coming to this country and the impact on him of being a young Jewish man and the kind of discrimination faced after arriving here. [He was] conscious of both the opportunities that he had that he never would have had had his family not immigrated, but also very conscious of the [’20s] and choices he made, opportunities that he had. How he was received as a Jew and the pain and the struggle and how that was imparted to me, not very directly. But the importance of the survival and the ongoing fear, quite frankly, as I think is the case of many first and second generation Jews, was that there was never a safe place. I think that provided for me a context of the need to attempt to ensure that there were fewer people who continually felt that they too had no safe places to grow and mature and fulfill the potential that they had. I think that was a direct link from me to the choice to become engaged actively in the Civil Rights Movement.

OT: How did you become aware of racial issues or the Civil Rights Movement?

CH: I think there were a couple things: The young President in 1960 issuing the call—I was in college—in combination with accounts of the early sit-ins, certainly, in Greensboro, and I think the combination of those really worked on me. I first became involved with the Northern Student Movement in 1961, 1962. I remember going to meetings up at Yale, at Sarah Lawrence—some of these are very fuzzy memories—linking with some folks at Morgan State in Baltimore, working in Philadelphia with Fellowship House [and] a woman by the name of Marjorie Penny. I never hear her name. She was a better person than I will ever be and she helped organize a lot of students in that area to begin to travel on weekends down on Route 40 [for] sit-ins, public accommodations testing. That was my first exposure to the Eastern Shore of Maryland,

with the Northern Student Movement, and Tim, or maybe it was Bill Strickland, who mentioned some of the work done. Working with Peter Countryman, we put together in 1962 a tutorial project in north Philadelphia and a group of us, wonderfully, naively, [experienced] early struggles of gender and race within a group of young people attempting to work in a values consistent way. We lived in an old church parsonage in north Philadelphia and worked with students in the schools and began to understand that there needed to be a greater strategic effort with the institutional part. It was good but not enough to work with individual students. Challenging the school board, a reasonably progressive [Sound drops out from 6:22 to 6:26] It was an introduction to try to look at larger issues, try to think more strategically about the work being done, beginning, for me, to look at organizing and organizational issues rather than the service side of issues.

It was the exposure through the work on [Route] 40 that led me at some point to Cambridge, Maryland. I was in and out of there for awhile but then went back to Cambridge to live with Gloria Richardson, with her mother and two kids, in the summer of '63. We, under Gloria's leadership, took on a lot of direct challenges to the events at Cambridge. I remained a naïve young person for a very long time. Now I'm probably a naïve old lady. But the Eastern Shore was a revelation to me, that a place that's so close to Washington was such an isolated community. It was easy to get arrested but it was challenging to determine what to do around that beyond the public accommodations work. It was where I was first exposed to some SNCC folks. I worked closely with Reggie Robinson, and it's been a blessing for me to be able to let Reggie know [again] how critical he was to me [making] a series of decisions that eventually took me down to Mississippi, that made me decide at that time not to pursue my graduate studies at

Columbia. The uniqueness of the moment necessitated working full time. And my choice to work full time with SNCC—only after the fact, I think, have I come to realize how significant it was to be part of a distinctly black-led organization, to be able to be taught by black leadership, to be able to see the world through very different lenses, not just because of what I and others chose to do in such hostile environments, but to confront much more directly the depth of the existence of racism, the hostility, the hatred, the vitriol, all of which made me feel a responsibility through the rest of my life to take on work that was directly challenging not just racial discrimination but coming from an underdog community. [This work] defined frankly the rest of my life, for good and ill. I have never, unlike many of my colleagues, really spoken very publicly about this work.

A young lady here came up to me the other day and she asked me if I was the regional director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews in California? Yeah. Was I the person who convened these residential, anti-racist training programs? Well, yeah. And she went on and I eventually recognized her and she went on to tell how she got here, this beautiful young woman—it's wonderful to see all these young people here—she drew the line for me of participation in these programs that I was running fifteen, twenty years ago and what impact it had on her life. I guess for me it's that continuation that has seemed so terribly important, without in any way minimizing, Lord knows, the work we did. I was on the SNCC staff for I guess about three years. The challenges again creating for me a sense that I couldn't leave knowing how much I grew from that and was transformed by that without then believing that I had to carry on that responsibility. I've learned here that maybe that was more unique than I realized, that because of both the strength and the vulnerability that so many of us experienced and

came away with that a lot of people were treated in different ways. While I did not maintain but with a few people ongoing contact—I had to process a lot of this apparently on my own. The work decisions, the professional decisions to maintain very engaged in issues around race, around gender, around immigration, to continue to be in many ways an outsider pushing on institutions, has characterized most of my life and I'm only able to reflect on that at this point, and that frankly has surprised me.

OT: Tell me a little bit about the organization, sort of your timeline, I guess, for the organizations you worked through. So Fellowship House was how you got involved in Eastern Maryland.

CH: I think so, that and Morgan State, and all of that coming out of my work with the Northern Student Movement.

OT: Okay. What organization was that through, the Northern Student Movement?

CH: It was based actually at Yale and it was largely white students, in the North, obviously, looking at what is our role. A guy sadly gone, Peter Countryman, who was really the springboard had become a very close friend and because of some of the links among and between some of the colleges and universities, I think that's how I got to Morgan State. And Augie Meyers, another name that I never hear mentioned, who helped shape and determine how to use us, what do we do, what's accessible, what's available. In 1961 I wasn't ready to leave college and go off. I was still very much trying to understand what for me was a values based pull. I have no illusions that I had a sophisticated political construct of what was happening in this nation. What I had was a push given my immigrant experiences that carried forward and a pull simultaneously

because of the courage of some young people unknown to me but who spoke to me nonetheless.

So from the Northern Student Movement it was not a very great leap then to hitch up with SNCC. When I was in Cambridge, again intending to return to Columbia, I never quite made it back to graduate school at that point. I went on the SNCC staff full time in 1963. I've just seen here for the first time, in how ever many years it is from 1963, this guy named Jim Monsonis, who was running what was a very small little SNCC office in New York. The office was housed in the ACLU offices. I remember Mel Wolf, the ACLU, across the hall, and it was kind of the beginning. I don't think we were officially a Friends of SNCC—I mean the organization, which was never exactly, as I'm sure you've learned, known for its organization prowess—but we had this little operation and much of it early on was directed to the early thoughts around the '64 summer. It was before the New York SNCC office became a more formal part of the organization and before there were more clearly defined roles. I went on to work with the office in New York as it became more structured. Much of what I did for some time was working with high school students, looking generationally forward to a role for these kids. I ended up taking an integrated group of kids down to Mississippi by bus from New York, in late 1963, early 1964. I think of it now as insane, trying to do this, trying to prepare the kids, their families, and also trying to figure out how to keep them safe.

OT: How did you explain that to their parents, what they were doing?

CH: One of my great strengths, and I'm sure great weaknesses, is a certain degree of directness, and so certainly wanting them to understand that there were risks and wanting to try to minimize the risks, but as we knew even then with the ideals that drove

us, that drove me, that one couldn't eliminate those. I do think at times that was mad. I took these kids down to southwest Mississippi. I took these kids out to E.W. Steptoe's. Steptoe was and remains a hero of mine. I returned to southwest Mississippi to work full time, living with the Steptoe family. E.W. and Mrs. Steptoe kind of created an opportunity for these kids to begin to get a picture of what we talked a lot about, the experience in the South. Among those kids was— [Pause; crying] It was a bright group of kids, Asian, Caucasian, black. Ted Gold went on to become very involved in SDS and was one of the kids who died in the explosion, and I've often wondered, irrationally, my responsibility for that. I know it's irrational but it's so emotionally, obviously, very powerful: "do I have some responsibility for that?"

Anyway, there are a lot of young kids who maintained or developed into those who had a sense of responsibility for a larger world. In that New York office I traveled back and forth, had the opportunity to meet a lot of additional SNCC folks as they would come up to New York, and it became apparent to me that at some point it was necessary for me to go back to do field work, much as I had done in Cambridge. I think it was probably after the Atlantic City, after the bruising experience with the MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party]. [This was] the first real exposure to me, being in Atlantic City, to the compromises of how politics really works. I [thought] the values that this massive, but in reality very tiny effort, would be able to—[through] the truths of Mrs. [Fannie Lou] Hamer, of others—even at that point, 1964, create change. And my own experience with Hubert Humphrey, with Joseph Rauh [demonstrated] a willingness on the part of some people, or many people, or most people—not just a willingness, but a capacity—to filter out the truths coming from the experiences of people who tried to

operate by the system's rules and yet still not having those rules be able to transform. I guess I hadn't really understood the way the compromises in the political process worked. I found that really, really bruising personally. I think that too created both a greater resolve in terms of the life work that I undertook, but also, sadly, developed a kind of cynicism about the mainline political process, and I don't know that that's ever completely gone away. As I watch this presidency, and perhaps the unrealistic expectations that some of us have brought to a campaign that after many years of not working on political campaigns. [I wonder] whether it's unreasonable expectations that I and others bring or whether it's again a series of compromises that sadly feel as if they're too great, in this year, in this decade, in this century, that that level of compromise is still apparently necessary. It makes me sad.

In any case, I went down to southwest Mississippi and it was perhaps still the most dangerous part of the state. E.W. Steptoe was a cantankerous old guy and just taught me lessons about courage, about a persistence that again I've embodied, and I don't know that I ever thanked him. He lived across the road from a guy named Hearst. I think he was in the state legislature in Mississippi, a guy who it was widely believed was directly involved in the death of Herbert Lee. Steptoe had to be so cantankerous. He was one of those people who before there was a SNCC, before there were white folks coming in, back in the '50s was part of the NAACP. I don't know how he lived. He was a continuing voice, and the courage to have continually spoken about issues of access and equality and voting. It wasn't about lunch counters at that point; it was about survival. It was about a way to attempt to participate in a process that was about a redistribution of power or a redistribution of resources in southwest Mississippi.

I remember when I first entered Mississippi and I was appalled that it was a beautiful place. I didn't want it to be a beautiful place, and it was. I remember all the rides back and forth between New York and Mississippi, I don't even remember with whom, but over the years, and we'd drive and get further and further south, and, "Okay, whites down on the floor, blacks get seen. Blacks down on the floor, whites get seen," because it was just so fucking dangerous. We'd go into black communities because we could be safe and we'd be given a place to eat or a place to sleep on these trips.

E.W. opened up his home. Mrs. Steptoe—it was an old fashioned time—did what E.W. said. E.W. had nine kids. There was one, Shirley, I think, was the one kid who was still at home. Beautiful kid, sassy, spirited kid. One of the older kids, a grown woman by then, was a school teacher in McComb. McComb to us was the big city and we'd go to McComb to some juke joint or something. But that was Steptoe's base and our focus was on voter registration. We had one of those vehicles that Friends of SNCC folk had bought. It was a big old blue pickup truck. I'm a little Jewish girl from Brooklyn; I didn't know a lot about pickup trucks, but I learned. Steptoe would never let me go out without a gun in my truck and he used to insist. He used to take me out to teach me how to shoot a .45. Now I have to tell you, I was really little then. Lifting a .45 was enough of a challenge; shooting at cow patties was a real challenge. I think Steptoe knew that I would probably never use that gun and whether it made him feel safer that I had that gun. It was under the dashboard. It was like a magnet, so it was easy to pull out. No matter what the situation there was no way I was going to pull that thing out, but that was important. It was really important.

Most of those houses, there was no plumbing so we had an outhouse and we had a pump, and I suspect, or else I've learned like most of my colleagues, black and white, we became part of families. So you made your bed and you washed the dishes and you went out and figured out about food. Steptoe used to think it was pretty funny. We'd go out to kill squirrels. He used to tease me, "Oh, you've only see squirrels in Central Park." We'd go out and we'd kill these squirrels and he taught me how to skin these squirrels so we could eat.

Steptoe was a deacon in a little church, and of course the church was central to everything we did. Pilgrim Baptist Church was a one-room church not very far from Steptoe's house and it was where we held meetings, where people came not only for church services but where we talked about voting, where we had voter registration classes. There were a handful of people around—some people say Amite County, some people say *Amite*—but around the county, I remember the Weathersby family as another strong, brave group of people. Mr. Weathersby kept a big garden and it was a big deal for us to go there and get fresh tomatoes because Mr. Weathersby would always make sure we had fresh tomatoes. Then we'd go to the Simmonds family, and they were the only black family in the county with a phone, and the Simmonds always kept a freezer full of stuff from her farm and so it was a treat to go out there and get fresh blueberries, or whatever she was growing.

I remember Juanita Griffin, a tough lady, beautiful woman. She was with me one time, actually it was in her car that I was driving, and we were working on agricultural stabilization boards, which were critical in these rural counties for the allocation of crop resources, again something I knew nothing about. We would go out to encourage people

to vote in these elections, again determination of how resources were allocated. I had in the car with me a guy from New York, a friend from my Friends of SNCC days, a guy who used to write for the *Village Voice*, again sadly long dead, a guy by the name of Jack Newfield. I used to argue with Jack about you got to come down here. You can't just keep writing a theoretical sort of Northern liberal view. You got to come down here. So Jack came down to Mississippi and was with us in the car. We were on some back road in the county, had maps, had lists. We knew a lot of folks [and tried] to begin these conversations, me and Mrs. Griffin.

Driving on one of these roads we're passed by a pickup truck that had a gun rack. Didn't think much about it and just kept on, and these red clay roads weren't really wide enough for two cars, kind of a lane and a half, and they just about always had these big ruts on the side, these big gullies. Very shortly after that truck had passed us it had gone up ahead and it turned around and was coming right at us, and I swerved the car. I remember this car as being a Pontiac. Why I remember that is a mystery to me. We ended up in the ditch. The truck circled back around and came up next to us and the guy took the shotgun out and just said, "Do you know my name?" And of course that was not all that uncommon, but scary nonetheless. He started talking about being friends with "Martin Luther Coon" and he started threatening and [Pause; crying] told us to get out of the car, which we did. I felt the responsibility to get all of our material, to not leave lists of names, and we were able in getting out to shove this stuff in whatever bag I had. Mrs. Griffin was next to me, Newfield was in the back, and I was just able to say to them we had to get to a blacktop road. We had to get to a road where we had a chance of flagging down somebody who would get us out of this. We got out of the car [Pause; crying] and

I just told them we just had to walk. We had to walk past these houses. And so this guy—I later learned his name—walked behind us with the shotgun and we didn't run. We just walked. I don't really know what the distance was, and the whole time he was just behind us and just kept threatening what he was going to do. It was: "Martin Luther Coon, you're friends of Martin Luther Coon. He's not here to help you now. He's not here to help you now."

And we did get to a blacktop road. There was a logging truck and there were a lot of folks who were back and forth between Louisiana—we were right near the Louisiana border—and Mississippi. This black driver—again, we were easily recognizable [Laughs] and I'd been there for quite some time by then—picked us up and [I told him] I needed to get to the Simmonds house and get to that phone. He took us there and of course we had all these little protocols in SNCC about who to call and what to do and we did all that. It included calling the local sheriff, then the Department of Justice—you needed to check off a box almost. The sheriff was a huge guy who seemed to me then to be fifteen feet tall, I suspect maybe not quite that tall, a guy named Daniel Jones. Like a lot of those sheriffs he was not a guy who was going to do us a lot of good, but before the FBI would get involved—the FBI was in McComb—you had to go through this local sheriff.

So I made the calls from Ms. Simmonds house and my recollection is that she took us back to Steptoe's, and it was not very long before the local FBI folk came out. The way I remember it is that the head of that McComb office was a guy named Timmons, he was from Shreveport, and the way I remember him is, like a lot of the FBI folks. He came up the road to Steptoe's house and it was that, "Well, E.W.,"—now

Steptoe had not been with us—but the same lack of respect [Crying] and the same dehumanizing behavior, and again I don't know that I expected more, but maybe I did.

That encounter with the FBI became, I learned subsequently, a way of tracking me over time. I've learned all of this through a Freedom of Information Act request years later. I kept getting these contacts with the FBI periodically which made no sense to me. It wasn't as if they were producing much in this investigation. Mrs. Griffin eventually left the state, and I had left and gone to law school and pursued lots of other things. There were years of these odd phone contacts from FBI people. Now I think a lot of my colleagues were a lot swifter than I was in figuring this out, that at that time this was not a friendly, supportive, and helpful organization. I was a little slower about this. So looking at the FBI role in relation to the disappearance, the deaths, of Andy [Goodman] and Mickey [Schwerner] and James Chaney and kind of understanding and getting delayed outrage, certainly at the way that role was presented formally, or through "Mississippi Burning," to the world. It was years later when I had in other context contact with the FBI. Every FBI agent I encountered having to work through this thing over and over and over again.

I felt some responsibility for Andy Goodman as well. I'd been one of the people who'd recruited him. I was one of those folks who went out and spoke at a lot of colleges early on to try to interest these kids—I called them kids; I was two years older than they were—to come into this. While I was closer to the Schwerner family and very close to Nate Schwerner, it was Andy's death for which I also felt a lot of responsibility.

The crucible in SNCC that when we were very small before the '64 summer was always in the midst of that moving forward a lot of tension, and I would say confusion

internally, issues of gender and of race in the midst of a society that was sexist and racist and hostile. Not surprising that we too were trying to figure this all out so it was a lot of experimentation of all sorts. There was a lot of testing out of roles defined again by gender and by race. But the interdependence was so strong. It had to be because there was no one else but this little pocket of people, and it was always a little pocket of people. Years later—and I think part of my reluctance to speak about it—this young woman I mentioned earlier who's here now said, "You never talked about this," and the revelation for her that that was part of my history and what led me to do the work I did with the National Conference and running mediation programs and challenging the government on these immigration issues. Part of it was that I came to hear people talk as if they were part of this but had never been, and people who created their own stories, the "I marched with" stories. Perhaps because of the responsibility, rationally or irrationally, that I felt particularly for some of these deaths, for some of the madness that people went through, the Dennis Sweeneys of the world and others. When people for whatever reason felt the need to create these stories about where they were when they weren't, in my own attempts to be honest about my role I had to sort that through in quiet places. So I had a very public, professional, go-to [role] as the person in many of these cities subsequently. [I was] a voice when it came to issues of social justice, but my personal struggle to sort out those beginnings and not wanting to be, in part as a white woman, coming out with lots of confusion and hurt, but also not wanting to suggest that [it] was anything part of a black-led by necessity revolution. I've come only slowly, and this has been wonderful, a remarkably and surprisingly wonderful, embracing time, further understanding of both

the significance of my role but also not making it more than it was. I don't know if that makes any sense to you.

OT: Yeah, definitely.

CH: And it's reaffirmed for me the decisions to continue in odd ways to be an outsider, to be told by police departments, to be told at times by the Department of Justice, by the immigration, by all those places where I've continued to take on institutions. Executive director of the Law Center, staff attorney at the Center for Criminal Justice, and regional director of the National—all those titles and appointments by the federal agencies or commissions—that they were the right thing to do for me, that accepting the responsibilities of those decisions. It kept me true to be some of part of that continuing responsibility.

My son encouraged me to come. I was fearful that we were going to have the continuing battles: The "I'm more radical than you are," the "I'm a black person, I can tell you this," "I'm a white person, you can't--." I didn't want those fights anymore. I wanted to continue to work to resolve for me some of what I needed to understand about both what I did and didn't do, about some of the very significant and intimate relationships with black and white colleagues, some of which were never resolved. I've been embraced here by black and white colleagues in ways that I had not really anticipated. My son said to me, "You can always leave." [Laughs] It was a very brilliant insight on the part of my son. I hadn't thought about that possibility. [Laughs] I can leave. And his parting words to me were, "Try to have some fun," and I thought well that too is a novel concept, and of course we had a great deal of fun. Because of the focus on

so much of those intense and complex relationships frankly I'd forgotten how much fun we had.

OT: What sort of ways would you let off steam and have fun in those situations?

CH: We did a lot of pretty bizarre things, some of which do not need to be repeated here, and certainly not for posterity. [Laughs]

OT: [Laughs]

CH: Beyond some of the testing out of relationships, and I will simply leave that nice, general phrase, the role that the music played for us, our ability to find places. I remember we were in Waveland, one of the infamous staff meetings. I think it was 1965. And it was tough and it may have even been when Bob [Moses] felt that need, that powerful need, to make sure that a cult was not going to develop, and so there was the intensity of that. It was where a number of women finally began to speak about—in spite of what Tim Jenkins has said—about some of the gender issues, about the dominant male leadership, largely black but a few white guys who felt equally able to keep us down. Stokely [Carmichael] was allowed to talk about the position of women in [Sound drops out from 50:28 to 50:33]

I remember George Green, I don't remember who else, but a bunch of us got in a pickup truck and drove over to New Orleans, drove over there because that was a safer place. We went over there to drink and to talk and to hug, and it was a little safer. We had done that from southwest Mississippi periodically as a way to just be able to dance, to feel that we weren't going to get shot because we were together, and we were young people with all the hormonal impulses as well as the need, a recognition that we needed to find ways to tell jokes. We needed to find ways to see ourselves. And it wasn't just

those of us who had roots in the North; it was those of us who were our friends and our lovers and our colleagues from whatever communities we were in. It wasn't just the music of the Movement, it was all those groups. I think this is why I still go to anything with some of these old guys with their bling and their weird red and black and yellow suits and the guys doing the "doowah, doowah" in the background, because it was part of who we were that gave us outlets. I remember Marshall Ganz and us sitting outside of the Freedom House in McComb, smoking away, but singing along or making our own music in a place that, God knows, was not safe. But it was safer for us than Liberty or "the rural," as we used to call it. But it was that music of—I don't know what the groups were. Otis Redding. Good Lord, I'll hear that music now and that's where it takes me back. But it helped. It was therapeutic.

We used to give ourselves haircuts. We'd have these sort of big gatherings, being the barber or being the barb-ee, if that be the case, or going to the pool hall. A lot of that was the cement, at least for me and subsequently for others, so we could come together and embrace the fact that we were alive and endlessly mourn the fact that there were others who were not. The impact on me of working with Herbert Lee, Jr., this kid, whose father had been shot down in Liberty—think of the irony of this, "Liberty"—and this bright kid. We'd just hang on. We would just hang on. Sometimes we'd go with him or his mom.

So for me over the years that was always the touchstone. Marshall [Ganz] would always tell me there were finders and minders and grinders. For me there's great glory in creating these community mediation programs, keeping stuff out of the judicial system. And, first being attacked by the bar association as taking their clients and eventually

having alternative dispute resolution become an accepted part of our life in the society. It being institutionalized in ways I'm not always comfortable with because to me it still needs to be in communities, and seeing it live and grow over the years. But when it could live without the fights that I needed to undertake to make it happen so then I could walk away from that and take on the next thing. Much of it for me came around immigration and immigration rights and advocacy and drafting legislation, and we're at it again because that's an issue I don't think we're ever going to resolve in this country, just as I'm not sure we're ever going to resolve issues around race. But the continued need to say, where's the next spot, where's the next stop, and there was the threat, the continuing threat.

I'm grateful. In retrospect I am enormously grateful. I don't always know how I got to make the decisions that I did. I just thank Danny Lyon for his photographic work because there was always a truth in it. To say to Danny "thank you" for that because when I was hearing, whether through some very brave colleagues whose self-aggrandizement was something that was, and quite frankly is, still hard for me—that's what they need to move on with their lives and God bless them—but Danny's work was always a good grounding for me over the years. I have to thank Reggie Robinson, tell him now that he's got his little paunch. He was a skinny, wiry kid, but he helped me make those choices as the first real SNCC staff person.

Karlyn Forner: Let me jump in for a second, because we're running out of tape.

CH: And I can just-- [Break in recording]

KF: Okay, we are on again and ready to go.

CH: The opportunity here to directly speak to some people who either had a particular impact at the time or who in my reflection I recognize at significant decision points for me had an impact, and being able to tell them that, and recognizing that we may never come together again like this, that it was time for me to be able to reengage.

In Cambridge things got pretty tough. We were under martial law for a very long time and certainly some of it was frightening, but that decision even then to know that there was something that you really were going to die for. And Reggie was a person for me. He was a mentor to me. He probably wasn't older than I was but he'd been involved more. When I made my decision not to continue at that time my graduate studies, to defer all that, in large part because of this young guy who stepped up. While he may have been part of, at least in my mind, a tough group of guys who made it difficult for Gloria Richardson to assert her role in ways that I think would have been appropriate, he also allowed me to see that there was work to be done and to which I could contribute, and I wanted to let him know that. Frank Smith, who was very dear to me through the Mississippi time. There are just things to sort out. Penny Patch, Faith Holsaert were people I met and knew when we were students. We were still in college when we started that work on Route 40, we started those sit-ins. Young white women like myself, young white women who made similar decisions very early on and who came away with some of the same confusions and hurts and wounds. And who, as white women, had difficulties, and perhaps still have difficulties in sorting out our role and overcoming fears of speaking directly about the challenges that we faced as young white women, and the legitimacy of being able to talk about that without in any way lessening the significance. After all they, like me, made a decision to be part of a black-led organization and like me

I think accepted the legitimacy. I never had a problem with fully supporting the need for the organization, for SNCC to move in the direction they did, though not the violence, but to pursue as a black organization. As an organization that had continually attempted to, early on, create a place for all of us the way in which those disconnects occurred was very hard.

As white women, the challenges in our relationships with black women: the resentments, our relationship to black men, and what we represented, apparently, the legitimacy of our voices, and the sorting out of the fullness of our roles as women in general, as white women in particular. I don't know that those conversations have yet, fifty years later, fully occurred. I don't know if they can. Some of us would like them to occur but recognize that with the enormous pride about the work that we did that this stuff is still there and for many of us still challenging. At lunch when Rev. [James] Lawson talked about the still healing of the wounds, I recognized that what has kept me a bit distant for all these years was not really unique to me. The tough part, the wounds, the vulnerabilities—I didn't have the fears that some of my colleagues have talked with me about these last few days, but the vulnerabilities are still there. I would still like with others to try to figure out a way to bring the SNCC staff together. As exciting as it is to see many young people fifty years later now looking at the work that was done, [for] the people who did the work, it also limits some conversations that I think could be useful and helpful, and I hope not just selfishly for me. But in my one-on-one conversations around the events of these days, in my small group conversations, I'm hearing regularly from other people who still, on the very human level—not on the very complex political analysis and economic analysis and social analysis—but on the human level of our

experiences, still have things to say and questions to ask. And they're still not feeling that there's a place to do that. I'd like with them to figure out a place to do that, recognizing that that too would be hard, but that hopefully there's enough of a softening over the years that we could do it in a way that would be respectful, that would be honest, and that would continue for those of us who have never lost the commitment to the work to allow us to continue to do it in whatever way we choose while continuing the process of continuing to find the many layers of ourselves and of our colleagues. It would be a good thing to do.

I need a tissue. Am I allowed to do that while we're taping?

OT: Of, course, yeah.

KF: Absolutely. I don't know if I—.

OT: Did we bring any? We probably should have that in here, shouldn't we?

KF: I don't think we have any.

CH: You see that? I can't believe I'm the only one who's been reduced to tears in these things.

OT: [Laughs]

KF: You are still one of our first. Let me run and get some. I'll be right back.

CH: One of the things I'm wedded to is to continue to try and make sure that what a friend of mine used to call the "2:00 in the morning place," the place where you can't bullshit yourself as well as bullshit anybody else. Without ever lessening the enormous pride I feel for myself and for others, I don't ever want to suggest to the world that I was anything more than I was. And so again I have learned over time that for those who have to talk about how the Movement would not have existed without them or some variation

thereof used to anger me. It doesn't anger me anymore because we've all figured out ways to survive to this point. But I don't want to do that, here or in the world at large.

OT: That's one of the things we're looking for in these interviews too is to find the people that haven't told their stories yet.

CH: And I've never done it.

OT: Yeah, or people you mentioned too that we could categorize as "unsung heroes," people that haven't been in the spotlight or haven't sought the spotlight.

CH: And there are more of them, frankly, in my opinion.

OT: Are there other people you can think of that you haven't mentioned that would be described as "unsung heroes"?

CH: Well to me the most important are those folks who are what's called the "local people," much more than any of us. Who didn't make the choices but who lived every day before us and after us in environments that were brutal. I don't know if Juanita Griffin is alive or dead. This was one of the bravest people I've ever known. Anybody who stepped up and was associated with us, it's not because of their association with us, but they were speaking out in whatever ways were available to them long before we, black or white, for however many months or years we were there. Those are the people who need to be sought out. There was a young black woman, high school student, from Batesville, Hazel Lee. She'd come down to live with me at Steptoe's. I have no idea where Hazel Lee is now. She was young and she was smart. I never hear her name mentioned. Simmonds, I want to say Johnny, or Johnny Lee, and I don't remember if that was her name or her husband's name, and my recollection was her husband was a logger. Her husband drove one of these logging trucks. Mrs. Simmonds, I never hear her

name, or Mr. Weathersby. There was a guy, a bootlegger, Sibley was his last name. I don't remember his first name. Talk about fun. We used to go to Sibley's and that was fun. Sibley used to drive out to cornfields and he'd always come back [with liquor]. I was not a big drinker. I probably drank more, however, during that period. [Laughs] But Sibley would always gift us with a little brew. In his own way he kept things going.

I remember—and again, I didn't live in McComb; I was out in the county—but across from the Freedom House in McComb was a house, and these were all little shacks. There was an Episcopal priest, Harry Bowie. By and large we were not a church-going crowd other than the church central focus for the organizing. Harry would deck himself out in his full Episcopal gear and he'd come out on the front porch in his little house across from the Freedom House and he'd have a little service. The Freedom House was near the tracks. You know we didn't spend a lot of time outside, it was dangerous, and Harry would have a service. Every now and then we made it a little hard for Harry to have a service, but I never hear his name and I don't know how long he was there.

There was a young woman I knew in New York, Queens College, and she graduated. Barbara Jones was her name, beautiful, beautiful young woman, and she and I sometimes together would go out to recruit these kids for the project. I suspect it was because of her Queens College connection when we recruited Andy. I've never heard. I've tried to find her. I've asked people who knew her. She disappeared.

There were folks who went a little crazy. Some of us retreated, some of us became blowhards, but there were crazy people, and not all as crazy and sad as Dennis Sweeney. My way of doing it was to charge ahead on these issues, to continue to be in those places where I learned I was never really welcome but being sort of mouthy and

educated and informed and they couldn't exclude me. I've often wondered how people who I've lost contact with survived and did they survive? There was an elevation of spirit and a brutalization of spirit simultaneously. [Pause] I'd like to find some of those people myself, or some of their sons or daughters.

OT: We have five or six more minutes, but I guess we should know when you left SNCC and what you did next. You've mentioned how the experience has shaped your life and the work that you continued to do. When did you leave and what did you do immediately after?

CH: I left, it was early '66. Now whether I left because of what was starting to brew or not I can't tell you. I don't really know.

OT: Had the feeling changed, or something about it?

CH: Certainly there were leadership changes. I had known Stokely early on enough, had some connections with him. I was not part of the great cult; I just had high respect and regard. I liked Stokely. His assuming leadership to me was terrific. He had, I mean obviously, he was charismatic, inspirational, but I liked him as a person without elevating him beyond. He was a guy, he was from New York, it was that connection. The tensions around as I always experienced even as a kind of young naïve kid, you know, we saw those tensions in the black Northern versus Southern. They were to be some of the more compelling tensions within SNCC.

Did I see a rise, did I sense a rise? I never felt unwelcome. I don't know that there was ever actually a place. Again, it was the female and white woman thing that was complicated. I think when I left it was just time to go. I don't think, in answer to your question, that it was because of a sense of emerging hostility or nationalism. I don't think

that. I had fights years later with Jack Newfield. It was before he wrote *[A] Prophetic Minority* and certainly before he took his turn we split over Bobby Kennedy in those years. My experience with Kennedy had been through SNCC in Cambridge and it was not a pleasant experience, so even though he may have been transformed, and maybe I unfairly kept him in that 1963 Cambridge place.

When I left, what was the first thing I did? I know what the first thing I did was: I connected back up with the Northern Student Movement, with Peter [Countryman]. I was in Philadelphia for a year. I got married.

CH: Peter and I—again, we'd been close before I went south (Peter never really went south)—started in Philadelphia an organization called People for Human Rights, a nice generic [organization], and I became the staff person for People for Human Rights. It was largely a white based organizing group working in Philadelphia picking up from much of the work we'd done around schools and the old tutorial project. What was particularly odd at that time, I married a guy whose mother was on the school board. It was a little conflicted.

And actually I must have been there two years, because in '68 when King was killed, the mayor of Philadelphia issued a proclamation forbidding a congregation of more than twelve people [out of] fears about riots. It quickly became apparent that that was being enforced in north Philadelphia only, the black community, so we in our infinite wisdom gathered a group of thirteen people and went forth to plant a tree—a more peaceful activity one can't consider—in memory of Dr. King. Philadelphia police had an active Red Squad then. I think they didn't even pretend it was anything other than that, and I guess the whole issue of the red baiting, and that's something I don't really talk

much about. As the single paid staff person, I think I'd advanced from the SNCC ten dollars a week to probably fifty dollars a week for People for Human Rights. No 401ks then.

We had developed kind of a relationship, a working relationship, with this Red Squad, at least to the extent that we had done much other demonstrating. There was concern, certainly, our links and unparalleled work with much of the black community that was active at that time. So I was the person reaching out to Lt. George Fencil—how could one forget—who was the guy who headed this Red Squad. George, here's what we're planning to do. We don't want any grief. So our little happy wandering group of thirteen went to plant this tree and of course we were all busted. Again this was 1968. I think it was probably my last arrest of ten or twelve arrests over a period of time, and meeting some people then who became dear friends and are dear friends now, who I was arrested with at that time, who heard my story a little bit but who knew me really because of that People for Human Rights piece.

My husband and I then moved to Massachusetts. I went to law school at Boston University. I went to law school really because of the work on the Civil Rights Movement and consciously wanted to develop a set of skills beyond my ability to be a body to be arrested, at which, I'd become quite skilled. [I wanted] to use that legal education as a stepping stone toward public policy work on how it was that there was a maintenance of a system, and part of an opportunity that led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. I appreciated all of that but I also appreciated the fact that there wasn't a lot that was changing. When I was in law school I had the opportunity with Boston school segregation stuff: Louise Hicks, a rabid white racist in

Boston, the challenges that that took; work that I chose to do then with the Boston police department around issues of justice, of the disparities in the way discretion was exercised, who was getting arrested; the bringing together of law and policy, working on the structuring of that exercise. I was, again, being the outsider and being what it took to get to the point of being able to do that work and not just being the crazy radical Jew girl, and subsequent things.

We will finish. I'm going to lunch.

OT: Yeah. I don't want to make you late, but thanks so much.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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