

TRANSCRIPT: NANCY STOLLER

Interviewee: Nancy Stoller
Interviewer: David Cline
Interview Date: April 16, 2010
Location: Raleigh, North Carolina
Length: One audio file, approximately 102 minutes

START OF INTERVIEW

Nancy Stoller: I assume I should be looking at you?

David Cline: Yeah, just look at me. Ideally you'll forget about this. That probably won't happen because there's a very large camera a foot from your face but, yeah, ideally just have a conversation.

NS: Okay.

DC: So today is April the 16th and this is David Cline. I'm in Raleigh, North Carolina, and if you would introduce yourself, please, and say when and where you were born.

NS: My name is Nancy Stoller. I was born July 16, 1942 in Newport News, Virginia and I grew up in Hampton, Virginia.

DC: Can you tell me a little bit about the family in which you were raised and your background and whether you can see anything from your childhood that may have led you to what you did later?

NS: Sure. My parents were both born in New York City, they were both Jewish, and I think my father grew up in a somewhat liberal household, my mother not quite as

much. My father got a job that brought him to Virginia right after he got out of college and they moved to this town, Hampton, and both of them were opposed to segregation, and there were very few Jews in the community also, and my parents were interested in trying to bring a certain kind of environment into our household, which was in contrast to what we were surrounded by because in the town that I grew up in everything was completely segregated. Schools were segregated, all the public accommodations, the neighborhoods were to some extent segregated and in a different way mixed. In my house my parents made it really clear that people couldn't say anything derogatory, you couldn't use any really negative words about black people. They taught us to respond when people would give excuses for segregation. I remember talking about riding on a bus and asking my mother how to respond when somebody would say to me "the reason the buses are segregated is because black people carry knives and it could be dangerous if you're white and you sat with black people." Her response was to say "people that say that, they don't really know anything." The approach of my family was just--they were kind of rationalist people--was it's all about ignorance, prejudice comes from ignorance, and they drummed that into us and drummed that into us. I remember--.

DC: Did that make sense to you as a kid?

NS: Well initially, because they believed the issue was prejudice and you can counter prejudice, and they'd experienced prejudice. For example in our town Jews couldn't go to the country club, they couldn't do this, they couldn't do that. When I was in high school, my high school had sororities but Jews--I didn't understand that Jews couldn't be in the sororities, etcetera, and they would say "that's just ignorance; they don't know." But when I was in junior high I remember this guy was in my class, his

name was George Wythe, which was the name of some famous white Southerner also, and I remember he was so prejudiced and he was so smart at the same time and something told me, "it's not ignorance, it's not stupidity, it's something else," and I always kept a hold of that.

But in regard to my family I just want to tell something else, and that is that although my father was more kind of retiring--he would come home from work and read and so on--my mother was involved in the local community and she and some other folks ended up desegregating the League of Women Voters. She went to a League of Women Voters meeting and it was all white and she had heard--. I don't know if she had belonged to the League of Women Voters in the North or what, but she said, "isn't this the League of Women Voters? Everybody should be able to come to these meetings." I don't know if she was naïve [Laughs] or what, but after a process they opened up the meetings and that was the beginning there. She was also involved in desegregating the Girl Scout council. I didn't think too much about it when I was a kid but I'm sure I was affected by all of this.

DC: Do you know what the process was to go about desegregating these things? How was she recruiting people? Do you know?

NS: I think in the League of Women Voters she asked, where were the black women, and there was one--. And people said, well, you know--. I don't know if they said--. I don't know exactly what they said, whether it was they don't vote, or we don't have that, but she found another friend, and this woman--her name was Margaret Harrison--her family--. She herself had come from Chicago and she was married into the Harrison family, which is the same family that produced some presidents, and her

husband was the minister of the main Episcopal church, which is kind of a leading church in Hampton. She was very strong, I guess I'd have to say, in the community because her husband was an elite person, so together my mother, who brought this, I think, why-shouldn't-it-be-that-way attitude and Margaret, who could stand up to critique, were able to somehow open up the meetings so that African American women came to the meetings.

With the Girl Scout council I know what happened was there had been--. There was a black Girl Scout organization that existed in Hampton and then there was a white Girl Scout organization, and I don't know if up on the state level or where there was some communication, some national communication, and what my mother did was to make sure that in the local council for Hampton that all of the different troops, even though the troops were still segregated, that all the troops would be represented in the council so all the troop leaders would come together and meet, and that was kind of a matter of arguing about how things just should be done. So I think that's how those things were--.

DC: Started at that level, right.

NS: Yeah. And those are the two things that were actually pretty significant. This was in the '50s, you know, and anyway, I think I picked up some of that. When I was in school, like in junior high and high school, I was kind of known as an argumentative person [Laughs] and one of my teachers thought I should be a lawyer because I would often take this point of view, and it wasn't very popular in my school with the teachers. Can I tell a story of something that happened when I was junior high--

DC: Please.

NS: --which really affected me when I became part of the Movement?

DC: Yeah.

NS: So I was in junior high when the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came out in 1954 and we had a social studies class and in that class sometimes they talked about current events but it never was really anything big in current events. One day our teacher came in, I remember it was a guy, and he announced that the US Supreme Court had just issued this ruling saying that classes would have to be desegregated, that the whole school system would have to be desegregated, and he was really serious, and, oh, we never talked about anything that really happened except for this, you know. Then he said to us, "But don't you worry because this won't happen until both you and I are no longer part of the school system." In other words the Supreme Court made this ruling but it's not going to get put into effect. I remember I was in total shock because in class we always say what the Supreme Courts says you do, [Laughs] you know, but not in this case. They're not going to do it. As it turned out, in terms of my high school, the high school wasn't desegregated until after I left, which was over five years later. And some of the schools near us were shut down because the school districts in the counties refused to open them up, and that struggle actually did go on throughout that time.

Later one of the things I did when I was active in the Movement was to work in Prince Edward County in Virginia, which was one of the counties that was involved in the *Brown* court case, and for me there was something really very moving about working in Prince Edward County, even though it was horrifying to know that when I was there, which was in 1962, people still had not been able to go to the schools at that point. But I'll never forget that day in class when we were told this would never get put into effect.

DC: Right. So questions of race and prejudice were raised for you in these ways.

NS: Yeah, and also my parents used to take us to Hampton Institute, which is now Hampton University, to go listen to culture, like the symphony and musicians who would come to town. And I always thought that we were so lucky that my parents didn't care about going to a black institution, because the symphony didn't come to any white institutions, and we were often one of maybe two or three families that were white that would be in the audience at Hampton Institute. I think also for me that maybe helped me to get a sense that there was something about black culture that was something that educated people loved, and I admired my parents, [Laughs] and also that there was something special, that if I could cross over this barrier that I could be exposed to things that were not available to me in the white world. So that was another kind of exposure that I had.

DC: Did you identify as a Southerner or a Virginian or as some sort of other category in between?

NS: Well, when I would make some of these comments, [Laughs] like, "Prejudice is bad," or something like that, one of the critiques of course that people would make to you is, "Well you're just a Yankee," and I would point out that I was born and raised in the South and even if my parents were born somewhere else you couldn't call me a Yankee because I was a Southerner. An interesting thing for me was that when I would go to New York to see my cousins they would always tease me for my Southern accent, and when I was in the South I would be teased for not having enough of a Southern accent, [Laughs] so I used to try to modulate it.

DC: [Laughs] Right.

NS: But I think when you have a difference of opinion sometimes people will use whatever they can to de-legitimate what you're saying, and I think that was part of it. I'm aware that if I'd had different parents of course I'd have been a really different person. Yeah, I would have turned out--. I don't know how I would have turned out. [Laughs] There's no way you can ever tell that. But I always felt that logic was something I could believe in and I was always taught to challenge--. Maybe that's also part of some of the Jewish tradition as well of argumentation being not only acceptable but rewarded, up to a certain point. [Laughs]

DC: In which case you're a wiseacre. [Laughs]

NS: [Laughs] Something like that. Or you've just gone too far, or power comes down on you. When my teacher said, "You're so argumentative you should be a lawyer," I didn't take that as a criticism. I took it as a compliment, and I think in a certain way he meant it as a compliment even though he wanted me to stop talking. And I didn't become a lawyer, but I thought it was a compliment to my intelligence, and it encouraged me to continue and debate and to have confidence in my own opinions and not be afraid. That was another thing about being Jewish, I think, is that my parents, who were both atheists, sent my brothers and me to a kind of Jewish Sunday school because kids on our street when we were little, like five and six years old, used to tease us. Literally they did taunt us by saying, "You killed Christ," you know. [Sing-song voice] "You killed Christ!" That was in response to why--we explained why we didn't go to Sunday school, because we were Jewish, and when we came back home my parents had this big discussion about whether we should get educated about being Jewish. It was interesting because my father didn't want us to get educated about being Jewish, [Laughs] because

he was so--. He wasn't religious even though he came from a Jewish background. My mother thought it was important to protect us so we would understand a little bit more and we could at least say what is it to be Jewish. We were quite distressed because--I mean every Sunday we had to go to the synagogue. [Laughs] But I'm glad that I learned something about that background.

DC: Were there other--? Did you go to a synagogue or anything like that as well?

NS: Well the Sunday school was part of the synagogue and in this whole area of Hampton there were only maybe thirty or forty Jewish families out of--. When we lived there, there were maybe seven thousand people in the town and then the surrounding area maybe twenty thousand, so there was one synagogue that was an orthodox synagogue. There were no reformed, no conservative, no other Jewish institutions, and so everybody if they did anything belonged to that synagogue. The rabbi included everybody. He didn't care who you were, you were part of the community. And that was also a really good thing for me to experience, I think. Nobody went to services in my family, my brother didn't get bar mitzvahed, but we went to the Sunday school to know something about the community and maybe meet some of the other people. I think that my parents, a lot of their friends were Jewish and I think that's because they had some cultural commonalities. [So I think maybe it affected a little.]

DC: Right.

NS: None of my personal friends were Jewish because my brothers and I were the only Jewish kids in our high school except for one other kid, so [Laughs] all our friends were--.

DC: Now did you know any black kids growing up or have any black friends?

NS: The only black friend that I had at all was somebody I met through the Girl Scouts, through participating in something called the National Girl Scout Roundup, and her troop--. We had a patrol that came from our town, and she was from one troop and I was from another and we got to know each other. But other than that I never knew any black people.

DC: And then you went away to school?

NS: After I graduated from high school my parents were--. My father got transferred to Washington, D.C. for his job. He worked for the government. He was kind of a space scientist. My mother was in charge of moving us, or finding a place where we'd live, and she insisted that our family would not stay in Virginia because she considered it such a racist place to live. It was fascinating to me that she would make that decision because I had grown up--. Even though I knew she was critical I never knew how much she disliked it, that she wanted to move out of the state, so we were either going to live in Washington, D.C. or we were going to live in Maryland. As it turned out we ended up moving to a little community called Bannockburn, which was in Bethesda, Maryland, Montgomery County, and it was right down the block from the Glen Echo amusement park, which is where I got involved in that part of the Movement, which I can tell you about later. [Laughs]

But meanwhile, that happened the summer after I went to college. So I went away to college. I didn't want to go to college in Virginia and I applied to a bunch of colleges and one of the ones that I got into that I chose to go to was Wellesley College, which is right outside of Boston. So I went there, I was really nervous because I went to a public high school, and so on and so forth.

DC: And you had your modulated Virginia accent.

NS: Of course.

DC: At Wellesley. [Laughs]

NS: Not only did I have a modulated Virginia accent, but when I got to Wellesley I got put into a speech class. I said, "What am I doing in a speech class?" and it was explained to me that it was because of my accent, so I refused to stay in the class. I was so irritated and I felt really alienated when I was there because I was a Southerner, because I was a public school graduate. I didn't know anything about people coming out, any of this stuff--"coming out" meaning debutantes--and I felt--. I was there because I thought I'd get a really good education and it was kind of hard for me to make friends when I first got there. I couldn't really relate to people that I knew, that were on my floor.

DC: What year did you start?

NS: I started in 1959. One thing that happened was I got involved in the campus newspaper--I wanted to do something--and the first of February when the Woolworth sit-in happened in Greensboro I was working with the newspaper. And I recruited two other people from the paper and we went off the campus over to the Woolworth's right in town, in the town of Wellesley, and we had a sympathy picket. I couldn't resist [Laughs] because to me I think one of the reasons it was important to me was because I came from the South and most of the Southerners that I knew at Wellesley, they were not political at all. And I just felt it was my opportunity and responsibility at the same time. So I got these other folks and we went down there and we made signs and we walked back and forth, and of course immediately we got called into the dean of students. [Laughs]

DC: Was it just the three of you or did it grow?

NS: There were three of us and then we had maybe a total of six people, and we did it for like three or four days, maybe for the week, something like that. It was fabulous. [Laughs] We had a great time.

DC: Did you have a sense that there might be other sympathy pickets going on in other places?

NS: Oh, of course. No, we knew. We knew. It was already being covered in the paper. We weren't--. It probably wasn't three days later that we went down there, but there was already this national coverage. When I think of the Movement I think--. You know people get up and they say it's so fabulous what people did in Greensboro, and of course it's important, but the reason, in my mind, that we ended up with a movement is not just because of what people did there but because it was covered and because people found out about it. You could say it was a certain moment of time but if there hadn't been the coverage that there was, that brought it to this community and that community and then people all around the country began to hear about it. When I heard about it I already knew there were sympathy pickets and that it had spread not only to other Woolworths in the South but in the North, where you could go inside and sit down, there were the sympathy pickets. So I said, well, we have one right down the street; of course we're going to do something. Anyway, it was fabulous. [Laughs] We had a great time.

DC: And then got called in to see the dean.

NS: We got called in to see the dean and she--. You have to understand that at that time at this particular college, it's a women's college and if you went into town you're supposed to wear a skirt, and if you were wearing pants and not a skirt you're

supposed to wear a long coat that came down to your knees, and you weren't supposed to do anything to upset the local community. So we were called in and we were told, "first of all, you're disturbing the people who live in Wellesley and the college has good relations and you shouldn't be doing that. Secondly, if you think you want to do something about civil rights you should confine your actions to the campus." So what we did is we continued our picketing for the rest of the week and we started a civil rights group on campus, and that group, which I was involved with all the time I was in college, one of the first things we did was to talk to the African-American students who were on campus, and there was a quota of African-American students at Wellesley at the time. There were about seventeen hundred total students which means there were like maybe four or five hundred students entered in the first year class, but there were only three black students in that class. Now if you look at Wellesley College it's totally, totally different, but at that time there was a quota. There was also a Jewish quota, but I was unaware of it. [Laughs] I just thought from my experience there are few Jews anywhere, [Laughs] because I grew up in a place where there was hardly any, so I didn't even notice that.

So one of the things that we did was we talked to black students on the campus about what are the concerns that you have, and one of the concerns that people had was that when family members would come to visit sometimes these kind of like little boarding houses or bed and breakfasts or people in these houses near the college who would rent out rooms for visitors wouldn't rent to black family members or boyfriends or whoever would come to see people. So we decided to get the people who wanted to post their rooms for rent with the college to have them sign a nondiscrimination pledge. We

informed the dean of students that we were going to do this, and the dean of students [Laughs] said to us--or it wasn't her; it was someone else--that this was not a good thing to do because it assumed that people wanted to discriminate and that we needed to make them sign something to promise they wouldn't do it. My arguing skills came in good then. [Laughs] I pointed out, I was like, if they don't discriminate that should be a selling point. We're not forcing them to not discriminate, or anything like that, we're advertising how good they are. So we did go around and finally get the college to accept that everyone who wanted to advertise their rooms would have to sign a nondiscrimination agreement, so that was one of the things we did.

We also got involved with other activities. We got involved with the movement in the South in various ways with support and with activities that were going on in Boston in the black community, which was mostly about economics and access to jobs and stuff, but in some ways I'd say that's how it got started. At various times I was the head of the group. It was usually pretty small; it might be ten people. There weren't very many black students so usually there was like two [Laughs] and maybe five or six white students in the group, and we just organized different things.

DC: Were there other Southerners in that group?

NS: That were in the group?

DC: Yeah.

NS: I don't think so. I don't remember. It was a long time ago, you know, we're talking fifty years ago. [Laughs] You could maybe go back and find out more [28:26]. One thing nice about that group is I got to meet a lot of--. Not only did I meet some interesting people at the college, but it was part of developing my identity or who I was.

I got to meet people in Boston and I got involved in a number of Movement things through that. That's how I ended up going to Prince Edward County to work in Freedom Centers there through a joint project of the Northern Student Movement and Prince Edward County Christian Association. I think the American Friends Service Committee was also involved in that in '62.

DC: And you got involved with them originally in Boston?

NS: For that particular project I got involved through Boston. It was a summer project and they were recruiting from the Boston area. A number of the people who were in that project were Harvard University students that were either in graduate school, a couple of students from the law school; I think I was the only person who came from Wellesley. I think the Northern Student Movement chapter was associated with Harvard. I'm not quite sure. But I knew the people because I was involved in different activities. They wanted to recruit students from Wellesley so people heard that I was there, they contacted me. I brought people from Wellesley into some of these projects that happened in the city, in Cambridge and in Boston.

I also got involved in a group called the Boston Action Group, which was an economic boycott group. That was fabulous. [Laughs] That was a group of young radicals, predominantly black, who worked with the Black Ministerial Alliance, and what we would do, through BAG, is that we would identify a particular potential for consumer action, consumer boycott, let's say milk, because one involved a place called Hood Milk. We knew that this company did not hire African Americans at the same rate as whites and if they were hired they were hired in worse positions. My job was usually to do research, so for example at Hood Milk, I called up, I made an appointment--. This is an

example of when we talk in SNCC about how you just went out and did it. You didn't know what you were doing but somebody said, okay, you're going to do this. You're white; you can do this, in my case [like that]. So I called up and I said I was a college student at Wellesley, which was true, and I was doing a study of automation and I'd like to come to their processing plant and see how it went. So I got there and they took me through on the tour and I'm like writing notes and I'm writing, "Three white people, one black person," [Laughs] you know, "Two blacks, six whites," and so forth. They give me my little Hood Milk cap and so on and so forth.

So then I came back to the meeting and I said this is exactly how many people work there--and I would ask questions: "How many people work here? What do you think is going to be the impact of this kind of automation?" and so on, so I had really good information. So I report, so together people in BAG would meet with the Ministerial Alliance about how many positions we should ask for, which should be appropriate to the proportions of people in the area and acknowledging the fact that a lot of the people who bought Hood Milk were African American. So then the Ministerial Alliance would meet with the company, so they met with Hood Milk and they said, this is what we need and want. And of course Hood Milk had no idea how they knew all this stuff. But nevertheless they made these demands and they said "we'd like to straighten it out and--." Well they said, "no, no, we can't do that," so they said "we're going to have a consumer boycott." So the ministers in the Ministerial Alliance announced the boycott in church and recruited members of the church to participate. People in BAG, including me and other people, we went door to door and leafleted. So we would leaflet first one neighborhood, then another neighborhood, and the reason the boycott was so successful--

we also did one in the bread industry in Boston--it was so successful because people could switch to a different company. They didn't have to drink Hood Milk; they could drink some other. They didn't have to eat Wonder Bread; they could eat another kind of bread.

One of the things that was great is that at Harvard Business School they used to do these case studies and they decided to do a case study about these boycotts and somebody wrote it up in some big journal. They demonstrated that--it was some research that they did--that people didn't go back to the previous--. They wouldn't go back to Hood Milk, they wouldn't go back to Wonder Bread, once they got used to drinking something else or eating something else, and so people were able to use the results of our organizing to make it clear to other companies that Harvard Business School proved that this is effective and you'd better not have them boycott you because you're going to permanently lose business. Anyway, that was another--.

DC: It's fascinating.

NS: Those were some of the projects I was involved in in the Boston area. This is nothing about the South at all. [Laughs]

DC: No, it's great. Well, we're leading up, I guess, to Prince Edward County.

NS: Okay. Well no, first we're leading up to Glen Echo Park. [Laughs]

DC: Okay. You're right, yes.

NS: So after my first year at Wellesley I went home. I spent about six weeks in New York and then I came home. My parents were living in this area right next to Glen Echo and there had been a sit-in at Glen Echo, and I think it was on July 4. It's a big amusement park just outside of D.C., the only amusement park, as far as I know, that was

close to D.C., and completely segregated. A group of people connected to Howard University, the Nonviolent Action Group which was one of the groups that had already gotten active starting in February, had come out, had a sit-in. Of course people did not get in, so they started a picket line so every day during the summer there was this picket line. I got back from New York and the next day I went down to the picket line.

[Laughs] It was only about a ten-minute walk from my house. Some people talk about, you're just lucky; you either get dragged in or you happen to be on something, so I was just extremely lucky. When I got there--.

DC: But it also shows your interest.

NS: Oh, well of course I was interested. [Laughs]

DC: I mean you were on your summer vacation and this is--yeah.

NS: Yeah. So I introduce myself, I ask if I can join the line, and people say, of course, and they gave me some sign or something like that, and that is where I spent the rest of my summer every--. I had to do work in the morning, and every afternoon during the week the picket line would start at about 4:00 in the afternoon and go until the park closed, which I think was about 9:00 or 10:00, right when it got really dark. So all these people in NAG were there and the people in the organization were Stokely Carmichael, at different times Courtland Cox, Ivanhoe Donaldson, Hank Thomas, who was one of the people who were part of the founding of SNCC--he was the representative that came to the SNCC meeting in Raleigh--a bunch of other people, white and black. So what we would do is we would meet typically on the line and people would begin to kind of accumulate later after they got off work or school or whatever they were doing, so by 7:00 or 8:00 most of us would be there and there'd be anywhere from ten to thirty people

who'd be walking the line. Then--I don't remember the--. I don't think we had an office right at that time yet, but we had some places where we'd go.

DC: What year was this?

NS: This was in 1960.

DC: So after your first year in college.

NS: Yeah. Then, as somebody reminded me the other day, this guy Paul Dietrich, who was a white guy just a little bit older than the rest of us, he worked at some bar or restaurant and sometimes we'd meet there. Anyway, so after the park would close we would go out and get something to eat or go to somebody's house or something like that so we used to have nighttime sit-ins. One of the ones that I really remember well was when we went to a bowling alley in Prince George's County in Maryland, because it was considered to be a much more redneck place, and we got there about 10:00. There were two carloads of us, I remember that, and white members of the group went in and got the tickets and the shoes and stuff like that and the black members came in and we were all there. We started to bowl, nobody seemed to notice. It was a pretty new bowling alley so we kind of thought maybe it would be open. Then somebody behind the desk realized that we weren't supposed to be there, so they told people to leave, they called the police. Finally the police came and they arrested all the guys. They threw us out of the bowling alley. I remember my job was to collect the shoes and take them back, so we did everything very, very slowly in order to make it last as long as possible. I remember I was carrying the shoes back to the counter and it must have been one of these sheriff's deputies got really angry and hit my hands with the shoes, and all these shoes just flew everywhere, which I found extremely exciting. [Laughs] It was kind of scary but it was

fun also. Then they took the guys in a police car and I remember this guy, Paul, gave me the keys to his car and asked me to follow to the jail. It was a stick shift and I did know how to drive it but I was so terrified. It was so hard for me to put my foot on the clutch and I was just shaking and shaking. Then I did get pulled over by one of the sheriff's deputies and I was just terrified.

DC: Were you alone in the car?

NS: I think I was by myself. There might have been another woman in the car with me, because most of the people-- [Laughs] All the guys got arrested and I don't remember, because I was so nervous and focused on this cop. So I had to get the registration and I didn't even know where it was because it wasn't my car. So anyway I got a ticket for having a light that wasn't strong enough over my license plate. It was a classic thing. Then we went to the jail. I called the lawyer. The next day I was involved in bailing out people and taking them home, and the local paper, because I did the official bailing out, they published my name and address. I don't know if they published my phone number, but the next night somebody called up in the middle of the night and kind of threatened my parents and so on and so forth.

One reason I tell this story is because I think some people think that in the sit-in movement it was always, "okay, let's go to this particular place," or "let's go to that place," and I always thought it's in the daytime or something, but there were I think many, many occasions where people acted in almost a spontaneous way. We didn't know we were going to go bowling but we figured as long as we were going to go bowling we would either--. Our goal was to open yet another place for people to go bowling and there was a way in which we really hoped that we would be desegregating

the bowling alley, not having a sit-in and so on. The bowling alley did end up being desegregated but it was--. To me it also shows something about the kind of recklessness that people in SNCC could engage in, [Laughs] and that was part of the beauty of SNCC as well.

I also participated in some of the Route 40 sit-ins. Through NAG we did this kind of hit-and-run approach that some people talk about in Baltimore because the police are supposed to read you your rights before they arrested you, and we would go in, sit down, wait. The owner would call the police, the police would have to come and read you your rights, and then we would get up and leave. Then we'd go to another place and hope the police don't, you know. We'd try to sneak around to this other place so then there'd be another hour or two of disrupting this other place. So, I participated in those. I was in Cambridge very briefly. We just did a lot of different things. I was involved in some of the food and clothing drives where we sent supplies down to Mississippi and other places where people had been kicked off the plantations where they were sharecroppers because they had tried to register to vote or did something.

So I kind of did that all through my college years. Whenever I was not actually in school I would be doing something that had to do with the Movement. I'd either be doing something with the Nonviolent Action Group or go to Prince Edward County like I did for a summer. Then after I graduated I did go to graduate school. I took off from graduate school for about ten months and I worked for SNCC as field staff in Arkansas. That was in 1964/65. But it was my whole kind of social, political life. I was either involved in the Movement in Boston or I was involved in the Movement in D.C. or further south or in the rural South, so that's how I spent my years from 1960 to I think

'66. Then I started doing other different kinds of things that related to the Movement but they weren't part of SNCC.

DC: Well let me ask you, I mean I want to hear a little bit more about that ten months that you spent, but I also want to ask you about these other things and how you might see different kinds of Movement work relating to each other. But can you tell me just a little bit about that?

NS: About which?

DC: That ten month period.

NS: In 1963 when I graduated there was some version of the Freedom Rides going on--they always seemed to be one after another--[Laughs] and I really wanted to go. My father had just died and I told my mother I was planning to go, and a friend of hers grabbed me and said "you cannot leave and do this right now." So I vowed that the next year I would go, I would be down South, because I really wanted to be there and that was a very powerful, intense time. So for various reasons I couldn't go until the following December a year later. I didn't go to Mississippi Freedom Summer. I was doing other things, and I remembered talking to Stokely, who was a friend of mine throughout that whole period, and telling him I was interested in doing something for SNCC and what did he think would be a good thing to do. I knew they had too many people in Mississippi so I said "I'll go wherever you think there's something useful to do," so he said, "well, we need somebody who's organized [Laughs] and can take responsibility in Arkansas to coordinate the activities of our Freedom Schools, Freedom Centers, in Arkansas, so would you be willing to go there and do that?" So I said, "sure," and I went to Arkansas starting in December of '64, although first I went to the Waveland

meeting, which I would say was an incredible, powerful experience for me, even though I had been to a lot of small-scale SNCC meetings. That was, I think, a crucial meeting in the history of SNCC also, so I feel very lucky that I was there, even though it was so intense and so difficult in many, many ways, with SNCC dealing with the consequences of the Mississippi Summer, all the violence and brutality, and people were so burnt out, totally. Then there was the issue of the volunteers who refused to go home; people fought over that. There was the question of North/South, there was the question of the people who were educated and from the colleges versus local people, so all those issues; the questions of democracy and hierarchy and independence and stars versus the non-stars. All those things were being argued there and meanwhile people were just exhausted.

So I feel like for me going from there to Arkansas was like going into a really, really quiet place because even though there was a lot happening Arkansas was spared a lot of what people were going through in Mississippi and Alabama and southwest Georgia, and especially Mississippi which was right next door but a totally different world. Part of what I did when I was there was to communicate with people who were our supporters, for example in Detroit. Detroit Friends of SNCC took some special interest in Arkansas, or maybe they were assigned it by SNCC or something, and we also had good relations with the UAW [United Auto Workers] there, and the UAW sent us a bunch of fast cars and a fabulous yellow truck which got assigned to me. It was a three-quarter-ton Dodge truck and it was so powerful I had to start it in second, [Laughs] especially when it wasn't loaded. It got assigned to me because my job was to get the

supplies distributed out to Gould and Pine Bluff and West Helena, Forest City, all the places.

DC: Where were you based?

NS: I was based in Little Rock, so that was our central office. So I would coordinate the things that came in. I'd make sure that the different places had the supplies that they needed, and then within the office I also worked on the newspaper that we had which we called the *Arkansas Voice*. It was modeled on SNCC's the *Student Voice*. So I worked on that; I would set the type and arrange things and write articles and stuff like that. Then all of us in the office participated whenever there was some kind of demonstration and we needed to mobilize people so I was involved in the sit-ins that we had in the state capitol, at the cafeteria there. I think it was the most significant direct action that happened while I was working for SNCC in Arkansas.

The cafeteria in the state house was segregated so nobody black could go into this cafeteria. It was a little tiny place, as big as a medium-sized office, and it had a little cafeteria line and people could pick up stuff and then take it somewhere and eat. I think there were even some tables right outside, little tables. It was in the basement of the state capitol. The NAACP had already challenged this segregation in the Public Accommodations Act but it was just languishing in court. Nothing was happening; nothing was happening. Somebody came into our office one day or somebody brought it up and said, "this is outrageous; it's in the state capitol." So somebody got the idea that we should go down there and have a sit-in and we should do something, so we spent a couple of weeks planning this and some of the white members of our group--and I was one of them--went in and we bought food, kept our receipts to prove that we were being

served, and an African-American member of SNCC went in and didn't get served so we had this evidence, and immediately thereafter after his experience we had a sit-in right there, or a stand-in because we had to stand. We're just standing at the door. So they closed the doors.

We had done a lot of planning and we had also recruited people from the Little Rock community who were supportive of SNCC and what we were doing, so there were a number of people; there may have been twenty of us. So we had these guidelines: If they arrest you, do this; if you're just going to stand there, do that. So we're standing there and we had the lawyers and all that kind of stuff. All of a sudden-- They tell us to leave and be dispersed, and so on, and you're going to be dispersed if you don't disperse yourselves, and the next thing we knew these state troopers--because we are in the state capitol of course--come down the stairs and start beating the shit out of us and dragging us up the steps and throwing us out onto the steps of the capitol. Anybody that came back down the stairs just got beat up and thrown out again, but they couldn't open the cafeteria because we would be back down there. So that was the first day. We were like, "we can't just let them get away with this," so we recruited more people and we came back a second day. One of the things that happened was the local people who had come with us, some of them didn't want to go back and get beaten up again, so we recruited people from Pine Bluff [Laughs] and we recruited people from West Helena, but those of us who were the kind of core, the staff, our summer [volunteers]--I guess it was still spring; it was in March--our volunteers, we went back each day.

So we went back a second day and the same thing happened. It was being covered in the Arkansas papers but it was the same week as the Selma and Montgomery

march so there was no national publicity. But we felt we had to keep going back. It was kind of scary. So we go back a third day with all the people we could muster and on that day somebody in a crowd threw something like tear gas or something else. I'm not quite sure what it was. Some people said it was mustard gas but I know it couldn't be mustard gas or you'd die, but it was something. The state troopers as well as those of us who were in the demonstration inhaled this, and they didn't do it, so some of them went to the hospital to be treated. The governor was Orval Faubus at the time and he officially--of course he was the person who'd sent all these troops in there--he officially closed the cafeteria because somebody had gotten hurt, meaning his police, so it got closed. Then, and of course people were hurt and so on and so forth, but then within I think a week or two weeks the federal judge--was it the federal judge or state judge?--the judge who was in charge of this case that had been brought to him by the NAACP held a hearing, within like a week or two weeks at the most. [He] held a hearing, we came in and testified about what had happened, it was clearly a violation of the law, and the judge ordered that the cafeteria would stay closed permanently or it would have to open to everyone. That's the law. So another week later the cafeteria opened, it was desegregated, we went in the first day to test it, and it stayed desegregated after that.

I thought that was--. It showed the learning that had occurred. I mean we didn't know we would get beaten up and thrown out, but how people had almost institutionalized certain aspects of the sit-ins to know how to work it. It also showed the cooperation between say the NAACP, which filed the lawsuit to implement the Public Accommodations Act, and the direct action. If it hadn't been for the direct action it wouldn't have happened. It would have just languished and languished and languished

because somebody had to push it, but once it got pushed there was something that was already there. To me at the time the most important thing was that we pushed it, but I know that--. You can say it was a group effort.

So, anyway, there were a lot of other things that happened when I was there. Also my boyfriend at the time was African American. I later was married to him. He came to work in the summer. I was there earlier and he was assigned to a different location because people were afraid if we were together too much that because he was black and I was white it would cause some difficulties, so he worked away from Little Rock. We didn't see each other too much.

DC: Did you encounter those difficulties?

NS: No, because we were apart. [Laughs] I know one of my white female colleagues had a local black boyfriend where she worked in another town, and we were just talking about this recently where she was saying to me, "We rode around on a motorcycle together," but nothing ever actually happened. Can you turn this off a second?

DC: Sure.

NS: I want to ask you a question before I--. I have one other thing I want to--.

DC: I have to change the tape anyway.

NS: Oh, okay. And then--what time is it? Okay.

DC: It's off.

NS: So I did write an account for this book that's going to have stories of people in Arkansas that this woman, Jennifer Wallach, is putting together. So in my account I

talked about this experience where I got raped while I was working for SNCC and I think I'm going to talk about it here also.

DC: Okay, great.

NS: I mean really, as in all of history, you might as well tell the truth. [Laughs]

DC: Yeah. That's great. I admire you.

NS: It's a positive story about SNCC, [Laughs] believe it or not. From my point of view it's a positive story. I've told it to my students. I just don't want to miss my bus. That's why I was looking at my--.

DC: Are you going over to the hotel?

NS: Yeah.

DC: Okay, because I'm headed there too so I can always give you a ride.

NS: I think the bus leaves at 6:00.

DC: I think so.

NS: So I don't think it will be a problem, because it's a quarter to 5:00.

DC: [Pause while continuing to change video tape] I usually work exclusively with audio, so this is all--.

NS: It's a little different.

DC: This is a little different for me, doing the video part.

NS: Okay. [Laughs]

DC: [Pause] Okay, so we're good.

NS: Okay. |

DC: So this is tape two and it's April 16, and Nancy Stoller.

Comment [akl1]: do we want to delete this part? it's kind of extraneous.

NS: Okay. Working for SNCC in Arkansas, for me it was very different than the work that I did in the D.C. area, or I think in some ways the work that I did when I was working in Farmville in Prince Edward County. Because in Little Rock we were in a big city, and our housing where I was staying was in kind of a small apartment complex right across the street from Philander Smith College--it was a black college in Little Rock--so a lot of students lived in the housing complex also and we would go to parties. I remember also the walls in the apartment were kind of thin. Every morning I would wake up to "My Girl," the song.

DC: Right, right. [Laughs]

NS: That was my wakeup alarm. I loved it. I knew every line. [Laughs] Our neighbors taught me how to play Bid Whist, a black game that I never knew anything about before. It was kind of great to be there in some ways, although I had also stayed at different times, going out into the field further from Little Rock, in people's homes, which I think is more typical of what we think about in terms of SNCC and where you were living, with a family. When I worked in Prince Edward County I lived with a family also. But anyway, one night my roommate and I, another white staff person, a woman, we got invited to a party and I think there were some other SNCC people at that party also. After the party one of the guys that I had met there--he was a student at Philander Smith and he'd been to some of our activities and so on--he walked me back to my apartment, and when we got to the door he tried to kiss me. I wasn't really interested and he forced himself into my apartment and basically what happened next was that he raped me. The things that I remember about it, one of them is that I was in this apartment complex and there was a window in the room. He pushed me into--. It was a one-

bedroom apartment and he pushed me into the bedroom and was saying things like, "Oh, I know you're interested," and all this kind of stuff. I remember going over to the window, calling out the window, "Help! Help! I need some help! Somebody help me!" and nobody responded. Everybody in the complex knew that this was a SNCC apartment. It was not possible for people not to know because everybody else in the complex was black and in our apartment there were two white women and occasionally black and white men also staying there, because people would sleep on the floor and so on. I thought "there's nothing I can do except try to keep this guy from assaulting me," so finally, because I felt there was nobody I could turn to, I ended up with him raping me, then when he was done he just got up and walked out the door, like it was, "oh, you know, I know you say no but that doesn't mean anything." That's just, like some guys would say to the other, women say no but that's just what they say because they feel they have to say that.

So I remember I was stunned because I had been in the Movement, I knew lots of black men, I never was afraid. I always felt that--. People I didn't really know, I always felt we were in the Movement, I could trust everybody, and that was always my experience. I think that what had happened in this situation was that for this particular guy he saw me as an available person and vulnerable in some ways because I was white, and maybe appealing for that reason, but I don't mean appealing like attractive but appealing as a notch in your belt, or something like that: "I had sex with this white SNCC worker, this white woman." I mean I don't know what was in his mind, but I do know that he'd been active in our stuff and to me that was kind of like a protection or something like that. I don't know what it was.

So then my roommate came back and I talked to her about what had happened, and the question was what to do about it. I felt like obviously I couldn't go to the police. That would be damaging to everybody. If they even paid attention to it, it would be damaging to the Movement. If I identified him, which I certainly could identify him, I knew his name and everything, it would be a horrible circus, whatever it was, and it would be like--. On the one hand it could be, here's this black man who rapes this white woman; on the other hand it could be here's this white woman who's a total slut. Whatever it is it would have been terrible for the Movement. So what I did is I talked to some of the people in SNCC that I knew and cared about and thought I could trust, and after talking with them I said what I wanted was for this guy to be banned from anything that SNCC ever did and for some of the guys in our project, African American, to go tell him that everybody knew what he had done; it wasn't a secret and he wouldn't be able to keep it a secret, and we never wanted him to come to our office, he could not participate in anything, and because we were as an organization and as a collection of activities people from Philander Smith wanted to be associated with us. People were proud to be identified with us, so it meant something to say that he couldn't participate. On the other hand I also felt that--or in addition I should say--I also felt that we were a nonviolent movement, I'm a nonviolent person, and I couldn't see violence, so people did offer to beat the shit out of him, you know, and I could see how that could be appealing, but I couldn't condone that, and as far as I know it was never done.

Afterwards just a few people in SNCC knew about this in our project, and I didn't want too many people to know because I didn't want it to become a big thing, and maybe that was partly about protecting myself but it was also because I felt that these are the

kind of stories, about somebody being raped, that are part of the Movement that can be used against the Movement, could have been used then and could still be used now. To me I considered what happened afterwards a kind of success of the Movement, of dealing with a difficult situation, not turning to the police or law enforcement because you know that law enforcement is your enemy, and you couldn't not know that if you were involved in the Movement or if you lived in the black community, so the question is what is the effective and responsible way to handle this. We didn't have community boards or some kind--. We didn't have a reparative justice movement. This was the best we could do. I felt that was a lesson that I took, which I brought into my work later, which is community solutions to violence. For years though I really didn't talk about it because it's so sensationalized, or could be. This whole area's so sensationalized. Starting about fifteen years ago I started to talk about it in my classes. For years I taught in a university setting at the University of California-Santa Cruz program which trains social change activists, and part of my work is in feminist studies also. So in teaching about women and violence, one of the things that I've done in my classes is to talk about all the different kinds of structural violence that women and girls face and the different options that we have to respond to it. So at some point I started talking about my experience and why, understanding racism and sexism and the way they came together there, it was necessary to create a different solution.

The other thing is I think it was important to me to tell people that there are different kinds of experiences that people have about rape. And so often we think of a woman who's been raped as someone who's a victim, not just then but afterwards. But in my mind, especially because there's a continuum of what rape is between a little bit of

pressure and a lot of violence, that it's important for people to understand that you can respond and it doesn't matter what the forces are that are arrayed against you. There is a way to have a dignified response. So that was something I learned in Arkansas, and something that gave me a tremendous appreciation for my coworkers in SNCC, that I felt I could really depend on them in this really difficult situation. I just wanted to share it with you.

DC: Was there a sense of other stories like--? Did you hear other stories about this happening with other volunteers, within the Movement?

NS: Well you know there was a lot--. Are you talking about sexual stuff?

DC: Yeah, I'm just wondering--

NS: Or assault?

DC: --about the community that you reached out to and that reached out to you, how supportive it was and what you knew about what else might be going on, I mean if other people were having similar experiences.

NS: I know when I was at Waveland that there were some women who talked about having been assaulted while they were at Waveland, but that was within SNCC, [Laughs] and people are drunk and all kind of things happen. I think that generally my experience in the Movement was that the people who welcomed you into the community or into the organization or the sub organization you were part of treated you like a sister or brother and did everything they could to make sure that we were safe. When we think of these stories of how people brought out their shotguns or rifles to protect this or that center or make sure that nothing happened to you, to me that's what the experience was like, and I think of what happened to me as kind of a fluke that involved someone--. It

was an acquaintance rape by someone who really wasn't part of the community. It was somebody who participated in some of that, like some march that we had or something like that, but he wasn't really a part of the community, and of course this kind of demonstrated that he wasn't part of the community.

DC: Do you think that people heard your calls from the apartment in that complex?

NS: Definitely. There were people with lights on nearby. It could be that I assumed that they heard me and that they didn't. I could have been wrong. But as I remembered it at the time that was one of the things that was so hard for me. And it also brought home to me very much the fact that I was a white woman in a black community and therefore a danger to the community, and would somebody really want to get involved with this? I didn't blame the people for not responding. I want to make that really clear. I'm not the kind of person who would say, "what's wrong with them? They don't care that something's happening to this white woman." I was caught in a situation that was impossible for people to respond to, just like it was impossible for me to turn to what I'm supposed to turn to.

DC: Right.

NS: To me the nature of the story is about something bad happens and you have to figure out how to deal with it. It's not so much what the bad thing is.

DC: Right. And did you stay working in that area?

NS: Oh, yeah, I continued to work. This was early in the year and it was after that that my boyfriend--later my husband--came and I told him about what had happened, and he also wanted to know who this person was, and I refused to identify him because I

didn't want it to continue. I just wanted this person to be completely out of my life and not have to see him or anything, and if Donald had known that would have just continued. But I continued to work there. I was there for another seven or eight months or something, and I think I changed my behavior a little. I loved my work. [Laughs] I was very happy there. I loved the people I worked with. The people that I met in Arkansas were fabulous, especially out in our different projects.

DC: What was going on out in the counties?

NS: Well, there was voter registration. There was a lot of community education. There was a lot more voter registration going on in the rural areas. And then at these Freedom Schools we had kind of like citizenship courses, how does the electoral process work, what's registration about, what does it mean to vote, and we had black history courses and programs for kids, kind of problem-solving at the local level. I didn't work out in the countryside. My job was more to supply the centers with what people wanted, so occasionally I would come out for some event that we would have. In fact I saw this photo that somebody took of me where I was present where people were putting in a garden somewhere. [Laughs] It was some project where we were involved in planting vegetables, so you never know what it's going to be.

DC: And then you went back to graduate school?

NS: Then I went back to graduate school, and I continued to work with the Boston Action Group on those things, and then I got involved with this group that focused on the white community called People Against Racism, which had a chapter in the Boston area. We would primarily do workshops, educational activities about the history of white racism and also participate in some kind of solidarity activities that were led by African

Americans in the black community. That was a period of time--'66, '67, '68--when there was a rise in the Black Power Movement and the person I was married to was very involved in that movement. One of the things that happened was he was criticized because he was married to somebody white, and so we had to deal with that, and that also for me--. I was very supportive of the Black Power Movement. I never felt threatened by it. I always felt that it was completely rational, [Laughs] completely.

DC: In what way? Did it seem like a natural next step?

NS: I think that some of the people I knew that were in the Movement, white, they felt hurt that they were being rejected somehow, and to me it didn't--I didn't feel that way. I felt that it was reasonable--. I always believed in black leadership in the Movement, and I felt that it was reasonable for people to say "we want to figure out what we want to do and we're going to figure it out ourselves, and there's a huge issue over here, which is white racism, and you can go ahead and work on it."

DC: There's plenty for you to do.

NS: Yeah, there were plenty of things to do. So I always felt that was fine. I also felt that there were plenty of things that white people can do to support black organizing directly, and I continued to be involved in doing that, like that story about Hood Milk. The people that I was working with overwhelmingly were black but there was something that a white person could do, and I was happy to do that. I believed in what they were doing and I never felt like I was unimportant. I was doing what I could do, so I continued that.

DC: So you were working with People Against Racism. Was your husband in the same group or was he involved in other organizations?

NS: No, he was working with other groups in the black community that were African-American-focused. Yeah, People Against Racism was a white group. There were some black people who connected to it in different ways but it was basically--. And we would do programs sometimes which would involve African Americans because there are some things that a white person doesn't know because they haven't had the experience of being black, and sometimes it's good for white people to hear from black people as well as from white people. Often, [Laughs] I'd say it's good. So we would cooperate with people, we'd sponsor programs, etcetera, so there was cooperation but it was basically a white organization.

DC: And you're each going to your different meetings and then hanging out.

[Laughs]

NS: We'd go to our different meetings and we'd hang out together. We also had a kid. Both of our families were opposed to us getting married. His mother thought that I just wanted to use him [Laughs] and my mother thought we were going to be rejected by people. In fact when he and I got married--we got married in Boston--we were married by a minister who worked in the Arkansas project, who came up from Arkansas, Ben Grinage, and he married us in Cambridge. Oh, and the other thing my husband did, he was one of the people who ran the Friends of SNCC store in Cambridge where we would sell things to raise money for SNCC, so [Laughs] you know, family activities. But when we got married it would have been illegal for us to get married in Virginia. At that time the law still forbid marriage between African Americans and whites.

DC: So you got married in Massachusetts.

NS: Well, we were living in Massachusetts also, but just to kind of give you a sense of what the atmosphere was like at the time. So people came from both sides of the family to the wedding, even though they were suspicious. [Laughs] Everybody was suspicious of the other side. It was interesting to me also later when my daughter was born and I would take her out when she was little, people couldn't understand how I could have a darker-skinned child than me. It's interesting. It just told you something about racism, how racism operates. People can understand a person they identify as African American having a lighter skinned child, somewhat lighter skinned, but they couldn't understand how a person who they thought was white could have a darker skinned child. This is a whole other story.

DC: Right. [Laughs]

NS: We'll leave that one.

DC: So where do you want to go from here? Should we wrap up now or are there other connections?

NS: Maybe I could just say how this experience affected me afterwards.

DC: Yeah.

NS: So--.

DC: I mean we could talk for hours.

NS: There are a lot of things--. [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs]

NS: I'll just say that. So I think like a lot of people who worked for SNCC and were active in the Movement, that was a period of time in my life starting basically when I was about seventeen, because I was seventeen years old when I first started college,

until my mid-twenties, I think it's a time in your life when often some of your basic values and tastes are set. And that really happened to me, like my tastes in music were affected very much, but my basic kind of political education occurred through SNCC, I think. I had some liberal values, I was brought up to be somewhat assertive, and so on and so forth, but understanding the value of democracy in an organization, seeing how a non-hierarchical organization could work, the idea that we are our bodies and everybody has a body and everybody can use that body, the emphasis on action as opposed to theory and intellectual activity, the belief that lines and barriers are part of a system of power and oppression and that we have both the right to cross over those barriers and that ethical and moral beliefs are more important than laws; all these things I got from working in SNCC, and also the belief that you can create. You don't have to be skilled. I ended up being trained as a sociologist and the first time I ever did sociological research was when I was in Prince Edward County and people wanted to do a voter registration survey and somebody said, "Oh, you took sociology in college. You design the survey," and I went, "What? I can't do that?" [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs]

NS: And they said, "Of course you can do that." So I had to do it. I just had to think, well, I guess we have to ask people how many people live in the house, and so on and so forth, and I made up the survey and we put it out on the ditto machine and people took it out and surveyed people in the county. Well, that understanding that you can do it--. And then also I learned a lot, especially in Arkansas, about my own privilege and education and how to let go of that and not speak up, and how to transfer skills, and how to accept that somebody didn't spell the way I spelled, and that was also a fabulous

education that I brought with me from SNCC. Since I've worked in SNCC I've worked for years training social change activists. I was very involved in the women's health movement, I've been involved with the lesbian/gay movement, I work around prison health and prison abolition issues, I'm also involved in stuff around Israel and Palestine, and on a bunch of different levels. I've been arrested; I worked in the anti-apartheid movement; all these things. My interests, my willingness to just go out there and get arrested, or whatever, comes from that strength I got even those first days.

It happened to me that when I was teaching I got denied tenure because of my politics when I was at UC-Santa Cruz in the early '80s. My department supported me, the faculty supported me, but the head of the campus thought I was too radical and so on. So it got challenged; I won, [Laughs] eventually. It took about five years. In the process we did a tremendous amount of education because my work was very much--it basically came out of these values. It was about asking women prisoners what they thought of their health as opposed to talking to the doctors. It was about teaching about activism by having students go and apprentice to social change groups. It was about basically bringing the values of SNCC into academia and in the areas that I was interested. Well so when we did the organizing, the fundraising, we had a concert that would be women of color doing different kinds of women's music and we had cultural events that focused on issues in the gay community. And everything was done in a kind of multicultural, multiracial way, which gave people on the campus a chance to get together and know each other across these lines. Because I was being fired specifically for these values, people who believed in those values supported the struggle and it became a kind of feminist struggle and a struggle about dealing with issues of racism in the university and

so on and so forth. So it was a kind of community victory when we won and at the same time the campus changed because of it.

I was the first out lesbian faculty member to come up for tenure and I was denied, [Laughs] but then I finally got it. But now that campus has lots and lots of lesbian faculty and gay faculty, and it also established a kind of sense that everybody belonged. There were a lot of other movements taking place at the same time, the ethnic studies movement, etcetera. And to me I feel like I owe to SNCC my approach to teaching and research and I also owe to SNCC the fact that I got to keep my job [Laughs] because of this change in culture that I think SNCC was part of, this idea of whether it's people's history or talking to people about their own experience in institutions, as opposed to having some professional say what the institutions are really doing, you have the people who are directly affected by them saying it. So even though I'm not still in SNCC I feel that what I do expresses what I learned, so my whole life I think has been affected by that. It gave me some fabulous skills and I got confidence that these values would work, that you can organize from grassroots. People can do anything. Participating in that and actually seeing it work, to me, that's so valuable. There's no substitute for that. I hope everybody gets that some time.

DC: Well has it been--I mean this might be a hokey question, but what has it been like for you this weekend?

NS: [Laughs]

DC: Does it seem strange that it's fifty years later?

NS: Well when I heard that there was going to be the fiftieth anniversary I--and I didn't go to the previous anniversaries. I live in California also. I kept going, "I can't

believe it. It's fifty years ago. How can it be fifty years ago?" I kept going around saying to my friends, "Fifty years ago. How can it be fifty years ago?" Then I kept saying, "Well I was only seventeen. I was seventeen! It was fifty years ago when I was seventeen." That was one big part of it. And I was a little bit nervous about coming because Arkansas was kind of on the edge of SNCC, and SNCC has kind of in many ways always been focused on Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama. And also I knew some people in D.C., I knew some people here, I knew some people there, and I always felt like I was in a supportive role for a lot of things, and would I know very many people. So I didn't know how it would work. Since I've been here for a day and a half I've met various people that I knew way back when, and of course some of them remembered me. And one person, Hank Thomas, that I knew from D.C. NAG, he was speaking and he said something and I went up and I introduced myself and he told me that he remembered coming to my house and that--. Because the picket line was just a short walk from my house and he'd come over to my family house there, and I think he actually spent the night there one time. And he said to me, when we were just talking in one of these rooms, he said, "Was it your father who was a science fiction writer?" and I said--I didn't know what he was talking about. He said, "I'm sure I remember being at your house and this science fiction," and then I remembered that my father used to love to read science fiction, and Hank said, "And he liked comics, or something," and it was like these "Amazing Stories" magazines, which he used to have subscriptions to all these science fiction magazines. I said, "Yeah, that's right," and all of a sudden it was like through Hank's visual image of what we did then I was transported back into a part of my life that

I'd forgotten, I think maybe because it was so personal and my father had died very soon thereafter also.

So later in the meeting--I've run into him a couple of times in the meeting and we always give each other these big hugs, [Laughs] you know. And I feel like not only from my conversation with him but with some other people some things that kind of disappeared, like the names of some of the people that I knew then or particular places that we went that I had lost I've gotten back because they remember things that I forgot, so I feel like parts of myself I'm kind of getting back. Then the other thing is that there are people that I knew that now when I see them they look so different, and I have to say, well, it was forty years ago when we last saw each other. [Laughs] But some people are kind of still recognizable, and also people have the same personalities. Some of the people that I worked with, like Ivanhoe Donaldson or Courtland Cox, some of the other people who are here, they still have the same intelligence, the same kind of sweetness, which to me is kind of our hallmark of SNCC. I think the people that were able to work in SNCC were people who had strength and gentleness both, and it's kind of wonderful to be around people who were there and survived. Some people here have talked about this kind of post-traumatic stress syndrome, but I haven't really talked to people who seem to be suffering from it, but I feel like the people that I've talked to have somehow been able to integrate these terrible experiences and keep their affection for the world, so that's been great for me, and seeing how many people are--. Everybody is still active in one thing or another.

DC: Yeah.

NS: That is fabulous. So I feel like my community has been expanded again. It's not just the people that I know, that I work with, but it's like people who I knew then, they've maybe become again part of my family because I've touched them and seen them. So I feel like if I kind of reach out or something they're there, so that's a great feeling. I feel like I got that from this weekend.

DC: That's wonderful. [Laughs]

NS: It's great. It is wonderful, better than attending what my high school reunion [would have been like] [Laughs].

DC: [Laughs] Well thank you. Thank you very, very much.

NS: Okay, well this is kind of emotional for me, but I'm glad, and maybe you can explain to me how I'll ever be able to see or hear it?

DC: Yeah, [1:42:10]

NS: Okay. Thank you.

DC: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

Date: June 2, 2010