

An oral history from Tom Gardner of the VSCRC, 2015

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

[BD] Hello, my name is Brian Daughterity and I'm a historian at Virginia Commonwealth University. I'm here with Larissa Smith, Historian at Longwood University. And I'm about to interview Tom Gardner, former member of the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee or the VSCRC. We're speaking on Saturday, June 20th, 2015 at the 50th anniversary of VSCRC here, Blackstone, Virginia Tom, do you agree to be interviewed and recorded?

[TG] Absolutely.

[BD] Thank you very much.

[BD] Can you please tell me your full name and spell your last name? Thomas Neville Gardener, G A R D N E R

[BD] And I'm assuming this is the same name that people knew you by in the 1960's?

[TG] It is.

[BD] Great. And can you tell me when you were born and where?

[TG] July seventh, 1946 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

[BD] Great. And can you tell me the names of your parents?

[TG] Edward Neville Gardner, my father. And Margaret Agnes Guess was her maiden name. So Margaret Gardner was her married name.

[BD] Great. And their occupations?

[TG] My father was a dentist, civilian dentist for awhile and then and then US Navy for 30 years. Then retired and went on to teach dental hygiene in Albany, Georgia, where they retired to. My mom was dental assistant for awhile till she roped the dentist into marrying her. And then she became a pretty much full-time, very active officer's wife, social organizer, wrote a little column, gossip column for local papers. So yeah, I was there.

[BD] And do you have brothers and sisters?

[TG] I have a sister. She lives in Greensboro, North Carolina.

[BD] Great.

[TG] Married.

[BD] Great. And where did you go through your schooling?

[TG] Good thing we have an hour, I grew up in the Navy. Okay. So let's see, Fox Hall Road Elementary School in Washington DC through I think the first grade and I think second and third grade, We're in the Panama canal zone, Coco Solo, naval base. And fourth through eighth, we're in Gringo Springs, Florida. Also living in a naval base there. And then high school was in

Haddon Heights, New Jersey my years out of the south where I lost my accent.

[BD] Okay. And for college university?

[TG] University of Virginia from 1964-66, dropped out, working full-time in the movement came back, finished 69, January 69 to 71. And that was my undergraduate, in sociology. Years later, did the University of Georgia got a masters in journalism and mass communication. Years after that, I got a master's in public administration at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. And I got a PhD in communication at UMass Amherst.

[BD] Great. When did you start your activism or interest in social justice issues? Most notably civil rights. But when did you kind of become aware of some of the issues that would draw you into the movement?

[BD] Well, I think my first civil rights action was when I was totally unconscious of having grown up and on Navy bases, I always went to the balcony movie theaters because I like sitting on the balcony and a friend of mine and I when we were probably about 12, went into town and Grain Coast Springs we went to the theater and you run around the side door to go to the balcony. So that's what we did. There have been demonstrations at Saint Augustine, Jacksonville but we didn't know about that stuff. Well, apparently the theater owner called the sheriff and thought, come to Green Coast Springs they're demonstrating up there. Like these two little dumb kids that didn't know any better. We just want to sit in the balcony. So the sheriff came and they determined that we were just a couple of dumb kids that didn't know what were we doing. And he called our parents itself. But it it, it, it, it was a real, I mean, I was aware of certainly of racism and those are that these were the days when you still had white and colored water fountains. Like many people of my generation, I think at one point probably wanted to see the colored water come out of the colored water fountain and my mom came to me away, make sure I didn't do that. And I think that when is when I went to high school. I happened to be in a high school in New Jersey that was at three townships. And one of them was long side, New Jersey, which is one of the oldest all black communities form by Friedman and former slaves and so the school was about a third black. And I, for some reason, I, I was more drawn to the black students seem to talk and socialize in ways that reminded me of the South, they seem more southern and some way, so I was sort of drawn to them. They were curious about me because I was the only one with a southern accent and all the stuff in Birmingham on TV every night. So I think it was a combination of sort of shame and maybe a little bit of personal security that I worked hard on or losing my southern accent. And but I also made very good friends with just socially, I mean. So I was the only white guy in this all-black combo playing bongos. Because I had a better sense of rhythm than my friend and he he also was a really close black friend Curtis, he experienced discrimination. I would have parties and I would invite black friends And this is when I learned that it wasn't just a Southern phenomenon when I would find out from friends they couldn't come to my party because their parents said, no you can't go because they're black assimilated. And I saw him get discriminated against socially, et cetera. And so by the time I went to the University of Virginia and in 64, I was pretty aware of the contradictions, the way they affected people on sort of a personal level with my friends. And I really wanted to go with them to the march on Washington. They invited me, his family invited me to go with them. And my parents said no. And you've probably read some of the stuff leading up to the march on Washington. Now we look back as nice, peaceful Martin Luther King speech, et cetera. But The Press leading up to it

was, oh my god, it's going to be riot. They've got station, the guard and all these buildings around DC. So that was, you know, there I think my parents were not -they're scared for me to go. I think it's probably mostly my mom. She was- just to sort of back up. I mean, this is something I sort of learned later as I began to interrogate my parent's a bit. The way to describe the two sides of my family, both from small towns in Western Kentucky, what they call the Purchase area of Kentucky, near the Mississippi River Delta area. My mother was in a very large family and all the girls, the Guess girls who were sort of the choir. I mean, they, they were most of the choir and they were asked to sing, wherever they were asked to sing, they would go sing and they all had beautiful voices. So when the Klan would have rallies in that area, they ask them to sing and so they would go sing at the Klan rallies. Well, I don't think they really knew much about what the Klan was about but their father did. I think I think their father was, yeah, I never knew him, he died when I was really young. I never actually met him, from a car accident. I think he was at least a Klan sympathizer and there are some stories that would lead me to believe that. So that was my mother's side of the family, poor. But I went to a family reunion one time, and I said, Where do you all live? One of my uncles was, well over there over there. Kind of staying a few days ahead of rent collector, wherever we, you know. I mean, wonderful people in so many ways and deeply religious. I mean, reunion was just a singing, gospel reading and not with a book in front of them because they knew everything. And, and of course many of them moved, evolved from that racial, racist past. My father's father was a dentist in this small town Bartle, Kentucky. When the Klan tried to organize there, my grandfather, the local judge, and the sheriff rounded up the Klan guys who'd come into town and sat them down and said, if you ever come back in this town and try and harass any of our colored citizens, or try to organize the Klan we will ride you out of town on a rail and they meant it literally and they, you know. They had reputations as being pretty good shots. And, anyway so they just kept them out of the county. They just did not get a foot in Carla County, Kentucky. So that was what my father grew up knowing and so he never I never heard him use the N word. When I blurted it out my time like stupid kids do when they're eight or nine or ten and they hear it all around them. He really came down hard on me for that. Don't ever. So so that's that's where I came from. So when I got to UVA and saw that there were about seven or eight black undergraduates in the college of Arts and Sciences and one or two in engineering. And heard that there was a group forming, which became the students for Social Action Group. It just seemed the natural thing to do. Obviously, there was discrimination going on and I had seen on a personal level how it affected my friends and, and in high school. And, you know, people often ask like, weren't you worried about this. But I never, I never, it just never occurred to me not to do it. It was wrong and so it needed to be corrected. So that's what we're supposed to do, right? I actually think that I was, I was sort of and I recruited - a family friend of ours was a UVA grad. And he wrote the swimming coach and sent him like news clippings and my times and stuff. I think that helped me get in so I was on the swimming team that first year I was getting rushed by the jock fraternities and et cetera. And that was all over after the first year. So when the folks that the Students For Social Action Group were organizing to support people in Mississippi that had been kicked out of their homes and churches burned and everything. Were trying to register vote. I joined that effort. I think that was maybe the first thing I got involved in an organized way was the raising the money and clothes, to put an a trailer that would sit in front of Capital hall. You may have

already heard this story from other folks.

[BD] No but, I understand what you're saying.

[TG] So, it was a thing that you all set up and it was ask people to bring it and put it in the trailer. And some guys, I don't know if they were Klan, they were probably a bunch of drunk frat guys with Klan mentality. Vandalized it, wrote KKK on it with black paint and stuff overnight. Didn't destroy all the stuff in it though, we raised more. And then Howard Romaine, who was one of the organizers that Students for Social Action group had been in the Mississippi Summer Project in '64. And some other folks I think Nan from Mary Washington College and then Grogan at the time. I think they I'm not sure who else drove it down to Atlanta and then I think ultimately to Mississippi. I think they want to deliver it. So that was that and seeing some other racist resistance, it's just pushing me in that direction. I'll be frank. I was 18. There was this gorgeous blonde woman naming Anne Cook who was in that group, Howard, later married. And UVA was all male. And I thought, well, that's that's the only meeting I've been to where there's actually a female and a very attractive one. And then we had the statewide meeting and they were there were other it just seemed to me a more genuine way of building relationships with women, than going to mixers where you went to ask strangers to dance with you in the standard social pattern of the old going down the road as they'd say to meet, meet girls. So it just became, it became more and more my my group, my tribe, my social and political settings. Your people and my people.

[BD] Yeah. Okay. So then VSCRC kind of comes out of SSA . In the winter of '64 '65, did you go to the Hampton gathering?

[TG] I didn't go to any of those first gatherings

[LS] Because the drive happened after the Hampton meeting and then it sounds like you--

[TG] Right. I was part of that at UVA Yeah. Yeah. And any of the VSCRC planning meeting that happened at UVA I was part of. I don't really remember going to Hampton or the other the other meetings where people are coming to UVA. And and of course, I remember the the one, in I guess mid April was right after the bloody Sunday in Selma when John Lewis came. So this was a VSCRC meeting. But it was more than that. There was I think it's been a Freedom Singer's concert the night before. I ran across an article in Charlottesville Albemarle Tribune newspaper, but had a article about they said there was a Freedom Singer's concert. I pass it around earlier in there we were all like really? That was amazing. Apparently there was one. There was a an all day meeting in old Capitol Hall Auditorium. And John Lewis, who had committed to come, had been beaten the Sunday before. He showed up he still had a bloody bandage on his head. Other SNCC people were there and this guy, Bill Porter who lead much of the singing. I remember, I think Rob Featherstone, Stanley Wise, probably some others. And I just, I was just amazed that first of all, that John Lewis would come they would meet that commitment to come to our meeting. Even though you just got your head bashed in. So, I thought, you know, if he can do that, I can go go down to the march. And so I happen to be in DC maybe socially to see somebody or something. And while I was at the Union Station and there was a table set up and they were gathering signatures, essentially commitments or maybe selling tickets for what they called the "Freedom Train", which started in Boston and came down to DC. So I asked him, I said, how many people do I need to recruit to get the train stopped in Charlottesville? And they told me I think it was 20 or something like that. So that's what I did. I set out to organize the hell

out of the next few days and recruit and publicize it and everything else. And I got enough. I don't remember if it was 20 maybe it was less than that anyway they agreed to stop. And so I got on the train. I was little worried I was going to flunk calculus because I was skating around a, B, and D plus C minus. And there was an exam that day. And I decided I was just kind of skip the exam because this seemed more important. I got down to Union Station and my math professor was there waiting in the lobby to get on the train. I had no idea about his politics all I knew was I never understood thing he said at eight o'clock in the morning about calculus.

[LS] But do you remember his name?

[TG] Jim England, James England. And I think I got a gentleman's D out of that semester.

[BD] Is that what they call it at UVA? Well, it was gentleman C is what they call it, but I didn't, I wasn't even close enough to C. I think I passed it, but I think it probably because I went to the Selma March. I don't know. But he ,Jim England got very involved in actually in Charlottesville, there was a Charlottesville Freedom movement that got started. In Charlottesville, when he was very much involved in that, he was eventually he didn't stay of UVA and I have a feeling it had something to do with his political activism. So I went to, we- that train got there so that we we were delivered to, went out to - I'm not sure how we got from the train station to the city of St. Jude, but city of St. Jude, St. Jude church had a big space and that's where they'd camp the night before and rain and it was muddy as hell so it was like we missed all the great performances, Joan Baez, mostly we saw a bunch of soggy people in the morning. And then join that march going the last ten miles into the capital. And it was, it was, it must have been how Liberation Armies felt or something. It was like marching through the, the, the black sections of town and just seeing people coming out on the porch and bringing water and, and, and kids and just the greeting. And the just celebration. That of course this story of the march, which had already gotten so much attention because of what happened in Bloody Sunday in James Reeb's, death had a lot to do with my deciding to go as well. I have to say I was kind of moving into the Unitarian Church and that, that had an impact as well. James Reeb's, the Unitarian minister who was killed in Selma. After the call are going out for ministers and others to come down and come down with some others after, after Bloody Sunday, but he was caught walking out and beaten to death. So I think the combination of that march, John Lewis has example. I got to I was walking next to Harry Belafonte for a while refused to walk up with all the dignitaries who wanted to be with people as typical, Harry Belafonte. And then as we were leaving some, I think some Jesuit students, there wasn't BU School of Theology problems. They'd gone into this bar at the end of the town to use the bathroom or trying to get something to drink. Not, you know, assuming that, like in Boston, he could go into any bar. But wrong. They got they got really mad. So when they got to the train, finally they were just bleeding all over the place. There were people on the train, who had medical skills. I don't think they could get it stitched but they got the bleeding stopped. So I had a pretty good idea of the consequences of, of putting one's foot into this stream if one state could slip down into it. But I was also 18-19. At that age, you're immortal, indestructible. And I knew socially that that would be very different than the UVA I thought I would experience. I thought I would have a coat and a tie in the fraternities and swimming. Although my swimming was- it took me all a year to get back to my high school times. I was not maybe by 18 or 19 you used to say to your over the hill with swimming, so anyway Right. So but I wasn't I don't think they I missed me a whole lot from the

swimming team the next year. But I so I was definitely leaning toward more and more commitment. I think the other thing that really kind of pushed me sort of broke down last few varies over was sitting in history class with Paul Caston. And so here was this southern gentleman with his deep fair hope Alabama accent and his bow tie and his, you know, and it's just brilliant eloquence the kind of the kind of lecture where you can actually see the punctuation in your head. You know, it's like it's perfect. Back in the days when lecturing was appreciated. I learned in my college teaching career that it's not appreciated anymore. -- I get that all the time at VCU. Active learning.

[BD] Please go on.

[TG] I'm sorry, for the for the eloquence as good, good. I'm glad there's still somebody keeping that traditional line. Great oratorical

[BD] Larissa is yawning for those that are listening to --

[TG] It's all on the record. I just want to warn you that tape is still rolling. But anyway, he was he told us the story about him, about his participation in this demonstration at a buddies restaurant. Heard this. And he writes about his book, growing up and Utopia, which I just picked up yesterday actually had sort of flip through. Read some of it, after he signed it and his hands are trembling.

[LS] Oh, you got to see him yesterday?

[TG] Yes. Yeah, I know I went by to see him.

[LS] Yeah, that's great. Yeah. And I guess the way I think I put it in while I was reminder because I was looking at he interviewed me and I don't know much of the people he used in memoir. And I think the way I've put it in that interview with him which he included in the book was, I felt like he gave me permission as white southerner to, to get in just to go all the way. And I finished one more year. But I have to say my second year at UVA. It's not something I would brag about academically because I was full-time. So right. So I was raising money for VSCRC. I didn't go the first summer of '65. I had to work in part to support my college. So I had a job. I had an uncle who owned a barge line on the Mississippi River. So those that was the job I got. And that was pretty good money if you didn't get involved poker with the other guys on the ship, on the boat. Which I learned that having lost too much in the first two weeks I, it was horrible. But at the end of that summer, So just to back up at VSCRC, I went to the meetings that were at UVA. Not the other ones. Helped do fund-raising, et cetera. Then went to do my job. And at the end of that summer, I went to the National Student Association conference and there were SNCC folks there. Coralyn Cox I remember, who else was there? Moses might have been there. And so of course I linked up with whatever they were trying to do with the NSA congress. I helped with and and then went back to UVA and I was just really kind of all out on raising money for VSCRC. We were beginning to, we talk start talking about Vietnam. Actually, I think either the spring of '65 or the fall of '65. There was a bit of a debate in the organization, mostly because I said, we have to stop the communists. And I don't think we should be doing anything about Vietnam because we got to focus on civil rights and some other arguments that got mirrored all throughout the movement. And Howard and Dave Nolan's mother's politely were arguing with me. And I've been president of my debating club in high school. And, and I wasn't doing too well in these arguments which really bothered me. So I went and I read everything I could find out about Vietnam to fortify my argument. And in the process discovered I wasn't doing well

because they were right, I was wrong. So I became involved with some of the things. The first of the first teach ins at UVA, I helped organize, Got a little involved with Al Lowenstein, Americans for reappraisal Far Eastern policy, which I guess, I guess I probably admit, admitted with this NSA Congress. And I just recently read the book, by the way, about the NSA CIA connection. And I'll tell you later why I had personal reasons for wanting to read that. But then so that so that was a combination of doing VSCRC related things and, and antiwar stuff and then the republic invasion took place. And we had to teach of that, this began to convince me that maybe it's more than just one simple foreign policy mistake. There might be patterns here. And the shooting happened. You'd have to get it from other people. I don't know the exact date the shooting of Fawn Stokes in front of the steps of the VSCRC office and I think it was in the spring.

[BD] I think it was the fall.

[TG] Was it the fall? So I called Nan and I said I'm coming I gotta come. She said "No", actually, we really need you to raise keep raising money in Charlottesville. I don't know if she was helping me stay in school or she was, you know, you'll have to ask her about that. But I was, I mean, every church in Charlottesville, they saw me walk out the door, they grab for their wallets, you know, it was like because they knew why I was there. And so I kept doing that and just doing what I could from from there. And then decided I would go in the summer of '66 to to organize. And of course, money was always an issue. So I wrote a letter to, I was then, a member the Unitarian Church. When we had a very progressive minister there Rev. Walter Will Jones, that you knew in Charlottesville. Which had a long history given Jefferson's it was kind of neat to be part of it. I met really interesting people there like Eugene Foster who did the DNA research on the Hemings' later, years later. Some guy who was the organizer for Norman Thomas in Virginia. Anyway, I wrote student religious, I wrote to Unitarian Service committee, I guess to be student religious liberal intern of civil rights, that was what they call it, to work in the project. And eventually they accepted me. And I think I may have misspoke earlier because I think I got \$25 a week, whereas the standard VSCRC salary was like \$6 a week. So what I did is I I, I took my \$6 out and I put the rest of it into the VSCRC Treasury because that was really VSCRC staff, even though I was getting paid by similar. So they looked at the counties that had nobody doing anything but there, where there was interests. And they had been contacted by the head of the NAACP in Charlotte County. And so when I became available, they decided that's where I would go. I learned later that Russell Goldman, who was the head of the NAACP, asked, I guess it was the church that he went to in Charlotte courthouse or colon wherever, I don't remember which town it was technically called where they live. But the announcement was made that a Civil Rights worker is gonna come to Charlotte county, and we need a place for him to stay. Don't have any money, you got an extra room? And I was told people to sort of look right, left, and nobody really wanted to take this on because of fear of Klan or economic retaliation. And this, just stand up. Tall. Stately woman, Ruth Hues stands up in the back of the churches. I'll take him, I'm not afraid. And she was, she was from there. But she had moved to Philadelphia to work because there wasn't much work for black folks in Charlotte county. And she worked at the Met and Philadelphia for 30 years and then retired. So she had seen the world and it was not, you know, either internalize the oppression of fear or necessarily intimidated and she had no economic reason to be intimidated, a nice pension from the Met. So she took me in and had a

new bedroom in her house. She lived right across the street from the church, and Russell Goldman lived up on the hill on the other side street and he worked this cornfield right behind her house. I don't think, I think he owned some land but I don't know if he owned all of it. So I'm not even sure I remember whether he was one of these, totally independent farmers and he worked all day farming and then he worked all night worked this second grave yard shift in the lumber mill. The guy never slept. He was always, I mean, the red eyes fall asleep in the meetings. He just- amazing. But I had a little Renault Dauphine that my dad and handed down to me and I would park and between the corn rows, which used to be wider than, I guess mechanically, there. Anyway, that was back in the days. There was room. So I parked my car between some corn rows so the Klan, wouldn't know where I was staying and I was always careful not, you know, check my review mirror when I was heading to her house, so try to protect her. So I moved into Charlotte County and I really stayed in Charlotte County most the time. I either intentionally or accidentally managed to always have commitments or something else to do and there were VSCRC staff meetings. I don't remember going to maybe more than one or two. Maybe after the first one I said, OK, I think I need to find something else to do. It was and, I mean people there's people who had been there year round. It's just a lot of things there were arguing about and stuff I wasn't really interested. I was interested in doing the work. And so mostly what I did- am I getting too far ahead?

[BD] You're doing great. You're following the timeline just perfectly.

[TG] Okay.

[BD] I was curious to what kind of work you did and that sort of thing.

[TG] I'm glad you asked that question. So voter registration, of course, was big, always counties I went into had, and I don't remember the exact figures, but it was very low black voter registration compared to the population. So our first- the the main thing I focused on was voter registration. A woman named Bobby Jay Scott was the secretary of the NAACP. She was probably about ten years older than me, I think maybe. She and her husband lived and he may have they may have been a tenant farmer actually, I have a feeling that if I remember correctly, there was concern about her involvement. And I but he didn't he was always working and I don't even remember if I ever met him, I would just show up there in morning in my little Renault Dauphine and she'd be very nicely dressed and and we'd drive all around the county. A white boy and black woman driving all around the county doing what everybody knew we were doing and she wasn't worried about. So we kept going. And our first job is really to well, first of all, figure out who the registrars were. The county clerk refused to give us a list of the registrars. So we, by other means, started figuring out who they were and going and contacting them, going into their houses. And they were not very friendly. We each case we've had told them that they actually have to show us the registration rolls if that's the law now, because it's '66 Voting Rights Act passed. And I think they were confused we- I tried to act almost like I was from the Justice Department or something. You know, they were talking about the law site and allow chapter--verse three. So I'm not the only time I pretended to be a lawyer. And they sometimes would show us the list. We'd go through the list. Both the whitelist and the colored lists, which are separate lists, of course. And one of the things that she was really good at was identify the whites who were dead. So we were able to compile a list of the dead voters. Not just Chicago where this happens, or Alabama. And then we try to get them to commit to regular times that we

could bring people to register. And some cases we could some cases it was much, much harder. We got one registrar has said nine o'clock PM thinking about you know, farming community who's up at 09:00 PM. We brought 12 people to register at 09:00 PM. Registered about half of them. Only reason I remember this detail because I went to UVA yesterday and looked at my special collections boxes that I left there, about six boxes of stuff that I donated, including VSCRC material and my handwritten report back to the student religious liberals. Because I was supposed to report on what I was doing. So that's why at this level of detail, otherwise I'd be grabbing my memory's not like David Nolan's. But she refused. It was No, I can't even remember if it was a she or a he. The registrar refused to register this one person who couldn't sign his name and said "You can't sign your name, you can't register." And I said well you need to call the clerk because that's not the law. They called the clerk. The clerk who had been forced to inform another registrar at the week before, that. No, they, they can register told, said no, you're right. No, If they can't sign their name they shouldn't register. So he said his own interpretation of the Voting Rights Act. And then we had to go up another step. I can't remember where we did that and we had to base and we basically told the the clerk or else it was the registrar that they're all going to be personally named in the lawsuit that we're filing around violation of the Voting Rights Act. If that's what they want to be spending their time with the next five years or so of litigation. Fine, but this is the law they have to be over. And so finally, the clerk and informs the registrar, now you have to register even if they can't sign your name. So we took them back and got them registered so that it was that kind of encounter of varying degrees of cooperation and resistance from different registrars. Really, and I wish I had the numbers. We're talking about this in a general session, that it would be great if we had the numbers county by county when the project started, when it ended, and then later as candidates like Doug Walter running for governor. What that did to registration It will be great to have a sort of curving data of, of all that. But it was significant. I know because I used to talk about I mean, I used to know this. But it was I don't know. I'd be just just guessing something on the equivalent of going from 50 people registered in the county to 1,000 because it was huge. That was at one end of the county. -- And I covered much of the county with her. The southern end of Charlotte County. It was it was it was different in a number of different ways. There's different kind of independent leadership there. There was a man named R.W. Puryear. So county wide, although mostly in the northern end of the county, Keysville, Charlotte courthouse, Colon. Russell Goldman, was the head of the NAACP that where he lived. He and Bobby Scott both lived up in that area. They knew people in that area. Those with people I worked with though, Russell never had time for canvassing. So it was really Bobby Scott, that I traveled with. Southern end of the county, where R.W. Puryear lived in a nice new brick house up on top of a beautiful green rolling hills driveway, owned a fair amount of the land. And was very committed to civil rights. And so I traveled with him a lot to do canvassing, I'd canvas with him. He was always either in a suit or, you know, very well dressed. He was clearly known by the, by everyone in the black community as, as you know, one of the big shot and the interesting-

[TG] He owned a lot of Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And a lot of land. I mean he had people working for him. And he did other things and owned other properties as well. You know, pretty wealthy. He also sold encyclopedias because he felt like it was really important to, for black children coming up in homes to learn, at least that the way he explained it to me. But of course, he was making

money selling encyclopedias. So we'd go to a home and we'd sit down and between the interruptions of the TV being on and that homes with now Jesus Martin Luther King, and Kennedy pictures in some cases. And I do my little rap, do the voter registration thing after we'd get a commitment. Which was usually commitment. Now of course, in the south when people make commitments their a little soft I learned this union organizing where I did training in the North and then went back to South Carolina for years later. And there was a Northern organizer came down to work with me in South Carolina. And we'd done all this canvassing to build participation in the meeting. And he said, so we said you know who's coming and went through the list of people. They're coming, they're coming, all those people said they're coming. And I said, ah ok, well, we'll see. And none of them came. And he said, I don't understand, like in Massachusetts, New Hampshire said, I knock on a door. If I say the word union, either get the door slammed in my face or they invite me in an you know, or say I'm coming to the meeting with you. Here's that people had invited me and every single time sit down at the kitchen, serve coffee, a little piece of pie, and so friendly, Of course I'll be there absolutely. And of course in nobody showed up. So he was learning about the difference of southern culture. But they would commit and most often would, would go when we arranged a pickup time, to take them to the register. Well, after I finish this rap about voter registration out would his card and his brochure. Now, do you have an encyclopedia in your home? Because it's very important, you know, I see your son over there about eight years old, I think it yeah. He's going to need to learn all, learn all this now. And so he do his little sales pitch. And of course these people back then, those days, I mean now, those things are expensive. But yeah, of course he had a payment plan. And so he he did pretty well selling encyclopedias. His slogan on his card was "Knowledge is power". And back with in '66 is one. Black Power stuff was getting started. So it was in the news, and everything. He was very much against Black Power. He thought it was offensive to me and other white folks. I thought, no its great stuff and he thought no, we don't need Black Power, we need education. We need voter registration. And I'll back up and say one of the other things I discovered that was necessary I felt was necessary and people started expressing an interest in it was that people need to learn about government if they're going to register and participate. So we organized a political education class in each county, one like eight to 9:30 Monday and Wednesday in one end of the county, 9:30 Tuesday and Thursday, the other end of the county, Red Oak and Keysville for one for the other churches, church basements, whatever. And he would often participate with me in the southern end of the county. Also discovered it, do political education classes, even though we have this wonderful little Virginia Government workbook that Bill [Tau?] one of the organizers the project, had developed to teach people about county government, state, and how it all works. But I also became literacy class, particularly the southern end of the county it was. And I recruited a Virginia State student who was home for the summer to help with the literacy and tutoring, to take people aside and go over and help explain, and also set up separate adult literacy classes. We were expanding.

[BD] Do you remember his or her name?

[TG] I don't. I wish I did. She was just wonderful. That's what name I really wish I knew and if I might try and get over there tomorrow and go around, but I don't like going around asking for names. I am doubt if I'll find it. I wish I did. Anyway. So all this Black Power was coming on everything. He would always, in his political education class He would always write, "Knowledge

is power" up on the blackboard nice little reinforcement for later when he hit them with the encyclopedia. And so somebody asked about what's all this about Black Power was. And before he could get up and talk about how terrible it was, I said, well, let me let me explain stuff. So I got up to the board and where he acknowledges power, right? And I wrote Black above knowledge. And then I wrote Black above power. I said, well, like Mr. Puryear says, Knowledge is power. Well, black knowledge is black power. So it's what you're doing right here, you're learning and it's how to have an affect on government and all things that effect your life. So it's it's simply an extension of what Mr. Puryear has been telling you for years, black knowledge is black power. He just sat there and smiled. He couldn't say a thing. So he told me later, you got me on that one.

[BD] Tell me a little bit about how the whites in Charlotte County reacted to your work there, if at all. And did you face any significant opposition? Was there any danger or that sort of thing?

[TG] Well mostly interaction was with the white officials, which I talked about earlier. In terms of registrars. I did a little bit with talking to school officials about whether the question black faculty would be hired as they merged, et cetera. And I think the school official tried to assure me that everything would be fair and equal which the black teachers told me was a bunch of baloney but it was really the county officials and the registrars that I had mostly interaction with not too many other white folks in the county. When, because of all the activity in the prior year, of course, the Klan had started to organize coming up from North Carolina. The outside agitators like constantly call those and the Klan flyers all over the place. So I and I was still going, I was going to the NSA Congress in '66 I was, I was kind of getting involved in that. I think I might have joined the SDS conference, the end of '66 as well. And so I knew that these Klan posters had value. And I could sell them probably a dollar a piece at these national student conventions a real Klan flier from the real South, they were hot items. So I tended to go around, pull down a lot of them at night. Well, it was about a week or so before going to these two international conferences and I was trying to build up my inventory. So I foolishly decided it was probably a courthouse, it was the Courthouse Square. And these old guys were out there playing chess. When I saw that there were some of them on the columns right there on the courthouse. So I thought first of all, they shouldn't be there. You know, it's my duty as a citizen to take them down, but I was just trying to build up my inventory of posters to sell. So I walked up there and just quick grabbed them down and walk rather rapidly toward my little Renault Dauphine. And I heard a "Hey!", I jumped in my car and the three guys were jumping into, like a '56 Chevy or something that was parked not too far from me. And so that's that was my one little chase scene. So that was a little nerve-wracking.

[LS] But they chased you to Victoria.

[TG] They did. You heard the story, huh?

[LS] You told it earlier today, but lets tell it on tape.

[TG] So fortunately, there were some winding roads between Charlotte Courthouse and Victoria it because every time through so they they would cut it right up to to the rear and try to get the position to run me off the road, I guess. But then we'd hit a winding and then I could take those on that little run on that little Randolph Dauphine. But they couldn't with that Chevy back going up woods. So then they'd they'd lose Then the straight away would come back up again. And then right on my tail, then we hit another winding road. So this worked all the way to Victoria.

And as I turn up the road toward the Freedom House, they turned off. And I think it's because after Stokes was shot, there was a sort of deacons of defense system setup on that street. So if a bunch of white guys with guns or confederate flags on their car started coming up, that street by the time they got midway, there'd be guns pointing out windows and they I think obviously it had heard about this or maybe just their fear of thinking that was ok, whatever. Anyway, they turned off. So so that was that's how that one ended. Fortunately. But yeah, other than that, it was just I did go to a Klan rally in I was also at Farmville a lot because there were, I went to Griffith, Reverend Griffith- Francis Griffin's church, had developed relations with a lot of people in Farmville doing, doing things. I'll tell you a separate story, about another case there. And so there was a Stokely Carmichael was coming to speak in Farmville and there was a Klan rally, and I think it was in Lunenburg county. They've been called and posters were up for it. And we talked and at VSCRC and thought it'd be good to go and hear what they say because we want to, if they're planning something, against Stokely, we'd want to know about it. So I had my dad's car with Camp Lejeune sticker, was stationed in Camp Lejeune North Carolina and they didn't know me at that point. So I drove in I parked the car with the Marines sticker and I got talking to one of the guys on the outer perimeter who's one of the security guards, you know, whats going on? How ya doing? And I drove up in Jacksonville. I see whats going on. Okay. And the guy obviously didn't know ranks because sticker, you have rank There was an o' six on there. So fortunately, he didn't he didn't know that meant, you know, cuz I wasn't old enough to be the captain. But I even made up a little story. You know, I said yea I was over at Nam and I, you know, almost got hit and this black dude actually saved my life. And so I yeah. What are you guys saying? Oh, no, no, no, we're not we're not again, no, no, no, we're not against blacks. He didn't say blacks. No no, people misunderstand the Klan we're for white people's rights. And states rights were not against, against them. You know, they do whatever they want on their own, in their own communities. So we had this conversation going on. And at some point Well there was also, there was also a black photographer, a SNCC photographer who'd come up, they wanted to do pictures. I had to do a lot of photography for SNCC. I can't remember his name. He was on this little rove hedge rove of bushes on the side of the field. He was over there taking pictures with a zoom lens. Somebody saw him and then they told the speaker and the speaker says, hey n-word over there. And some security guy starts running over there and I see him heading across the field and I think this is getting a little out of hand here. So I'm, I think I'm gonna take off. So I left and across the street were Avett and Amell, these kids from CCNY were there. And so black and white, male and female, arms around each other, kind of like making fun of all these idiots across the street. And I, sort of drove over and joined them and then this guy I had been talking to realized I was with them. And, I hear, Hey that's him! I had some people were headed for their cars and I suggested everybody leave. And so we got away from that without any further incident. And Sofie came and spoke in Farmville and without incident.

[LS] Do you remember anything from that meeting?

[TG] I remember well, it was like in an open grassy space. He was kind of down this level and people were up on this little grassy hill. There's a picture that I put out there on the table, The New York Times Magazine picture. They weren't here to cover VSCRC, they were interested in of Black Power thing. Jean Roberts, did the story on that. And so he was here because Stokely

was speaking. And I got this picture in the Times which some of my high school classmates saw when I went to my high school reunion. They said, was that you in that picture in the New York Times. And yeah, no, I just remember him giving a really great speech about his mom and domestic work and taking care of other people's kids, not having time to take care of her own. Yeah, it was a standard kind of, well nothing Stokely ever did was standard. He had his own particular style. Yeah. That's the that's the picture that was on the New York Times.

[LS] So you're there in the front?

[TG] So that's me. Yeah. Yeah. And uh, these I think were Reverend Griffin's daughters actually.

[LS] Naya and...

[TG] There's one of them yea. And yes, it was, it was it was a good speech and I think it might have been it might have been a different visit when Stokely came meeting with the people and Farmville. Well the meeting was at a woman with the, she was with the SCOPE project, maybe at night, night at her house. It's great to historians around who actually study and remember things. But yeah that night's house and we all sat around her living room. I'll never forget that day because I think it was Roger, he came driving down from Charlottesville, so it must have been before I came up for summer of '66. Because there was a car accident right in front of and there was this woman crawls up from that. Kind of didn't see it right away. But then we could see there was a car from this woman crawls up from the ditch. So we stop there and she had a compound fracture in the thigh and so we were keeping that compressed. I got some first aid training, as a life guard and stuff like that. So we were doing first aid for her while I think Roger got the car and drove back to Charlottesville to get the ambulance. And and so that delayed us getting to this meeting for like an hour or so. But when we got there were covered in blood, and everyone was like, wow! So we told the story But then we sat down we're all sitting around in the circle. Stokely and Black Power stuff had just started. I asked the question, I said so. So if, if black power means, you know, white shouldn't be organizing in black communities. What about this project? You know, because I was just about to come do this. And I'll always remember his response was, I think a lot of us were kinda hanging because it was significant for what we were all doing. Because here was this, the last, maybe freedom high integrated, classic community voter organizing Voter Registration Project inspired by SNCC and supported by SSOC and SCAP and we're still doing this going on. And so he said, he said look, you're organizing under the SNCC philosophy what's the purpose? What's the function of an organizer in SNCC? It's to work yourself out of a job, to organize yourself out of a job, empower the local folks, and organize yourself out of a job. Should you just abandon these people that have made a commitment to you and just takeoff? Absolutely not. Your job is to help them get organized and leave, just like any SNCC, organizer should So it was like completely race free, you know. It was just like, no, you're SNCC organizers do what SNCC organizers do in organize yourself out of a job. So I don't know that that was that was an important moment I think for me and later I mean after '66 as we went into 67 and stuff like that. We can pack up if there's more about the summer project. But I made very close friends in SNCC. And I remember I'd go to a conference in the North or fundraising or something. People would be like, oh it's terrible they're kicking whites out of SNCC and they can't nobody's allowed in the office. I was like really? I was SNCC office yesterday and, you know, I'm not seeing any of that. So I think there was just this unfortunate kinda misreading of the whole Black Power turn. I don't know why people took it on

a personal level that they need to step back and kind of see where it comes from historically. Look at the Mississippi challenge and look at what happened. What was going on in terms of developing leadership and especially on the national level of leadership like Joe Raul, and others making these decisions for people, you could totally understand. There's a logical extension of everything we've been doing, not a betrayal of everything we've been doing. And it was so ok. I'm sorry, you're not being appreciated for something out of white skin privilege for the summer or whatever time period it was. And you want to be just, you know, no, you're not black. And the object is to develop black leadership and black participation. It's not about you, unfortunately. So accommodate yourself to this very important development and people trying to empower themselves who have been deprived for hundreds of years of any sense of agency. And that was, that was sort of my take on Black Power. I went to a conference not too long ago in South Carolina about southern student movements. And Cleave Sellers gave this great talk, about black power. The evolution of black power. I think he's got he's one of the most articulate, I think, explainers of of that whole movement. So trying to backup our Charlotte County and see if there's anything else to say.

[BD] well, why don't you keep going and then we can look over lists. So tell me like did you did you did one summer in Charlotte County and then afterward?

[TG] So after I went to the NSA Congress the end of the summer as well as I think an SDS meeting. Clearly I have been talking with some of the NSA people about maybe working in the southern project and then they decided that they'd offer me the job. So I then, that was the fall of '66. I went to Atlanta and joined the staff of NSA southern project, southern student human relations project was the formal name of it. Bill Roberts was the director. Quinn Patton who worked closely with SNCC and I were the two travelers staff for it, essentially an office person. And I was really working for SSOC, I was really organizing SSOC chapters and being an organizer for SSOC more than I was for NSA. I had to do enough to keep the NSA people happy. And I used NSA resources to organize things like organizing conference of alternative press in Atlanta at the Butler Street Y. And got people from around the South who were doing both alternate press and student press, progressive people working as the press. I loaned my air travel card to George Ware to rent a car for SNCC traveling, which he and Willie Ricks crashed into a cow in Tennessee. A black and white cow, really as Rick's pointed out. And they ended up, I mean they had some some, they were lucky because they had glass stuff. Could have gotten an eye put out, but car was totaled and NSA heard about it. Eventually. Bill calls and says, You rented a car and I was like yea, I was trying to help and it's gone now. And a national officer, would like to know where it is because of the insurance people. I tried to find out. I never found it. It was just in some junk yard somewhere, anyway. So there were always things like, I think it wasn't unusual if people got into a position where they had some connection with an organization, with resources, you did what you could to funnel those resources to the people who are really doing the work, the most important work and didn't have the resources. And so that's how I used my NSA position. Now, of course, I also was still involved in the war. I had to decide what to do about the draft myself. And I was doing research on the racial composition of draft boards in the South. And the SNCC folks knew that I was doing that. So when when they got a call from a guy in North Carolina who wanted to challenge his induction based on racial racial make-up of this board. And perfect, I was, it was what I was doing so I

said I would go up there, well I talked to him on the phone. He wanted to know how Rob Williams got to Cuba for one thing and we talked about the racial composition. And I get up to a federal court in Greensboro, little District Court, Greensboro to meet him and help him out. I actually we couldn't get a lawyer, so I was in touch with the Law Center for Constitutional Rights, LCCR in New York. I think it was Don (G---?) I was talking to mostly, they couldn't get down there for a while, but he told me what motions to file. So I was writing out this motion. I did the research on his local board. I wrote, you know, motion for motion to dismiss, motion to quash well is like I said, I pretended to be a lawyer a number of times and I gave it to him because he had to file a PRO SE. I couldn't file a motion form. And so while I was doing that, there were two other cases and he was just kinda strange dude he had like a sort of reddish, brownish complexion, wore turtleneck and shades all time. But while I was there, another case came up. A young man named Marion Flowers, he was from Ramsar in North Carolina. He had refused induction and wouldn't explain his actions to anyone. The FBI guy got on the stand and said, you know, I tried to interview him and he wouldn't tell me anything. And his dad was there. And during one of the breaks in court, I talked to them out in the hallway and said it, well, where did you get this? You know, the idea from? And I figured out that he didn't know anything. I mentioned some organizations, I said he didn't know anything about any of the National anti-war peace draft organization at all. He said he had taken a course at Appalachian State Teachers College in Boone. And he read a book by a guy named Albert Camus, which got him to thinking. And he couldn't figure out why he should go halfway around the world to kill people that didn't do anything to him. His dad, hard bit mountain guy, you know, they don't like the feds in the mountains of North Carolina anyway, because they're mostly revenueurs, right? They've been running moonshine liquor away from those guys for years. And he didn't see any reason why a bunch of bureaucrats in Washington it should be able to tell his son to go kill people. And I name in your basic logic. So you refuse. So when we went back into the court, the judge sentenced Marion to two years in prison. And and then they did the they were going to recess for lunch and said, "All rise", and I didn't stand up. And it was somewhat deliberate it was deliberate? I was showing my contempt to the court. I heard somebody say are you going to stand? I didn't know it was a judge because people were standing in front of me, I don't know if it would've made a difference, but I said, "no." And so everybody left and I was getting ready to leave because part of my NSA job, I was going to meet with a woman. I think she was at the women's college, no, she was at Guilford and they're organizing a tutoring program for black kids in town. And and so I was going to meet with her and the count, the bailiff comes up to me and says, I need to get your name and you need to sit here in the defendants bench on the other side of the bar. And I said, well, actually, I have a lunch date with somebody across town back, alright? And he said, no, no, no. You're staying here. So I sat there and I got my name and judge came back in. And before everyone else came in and some people were in the courtroom. And judge read out an order that said I've been guilty of disrupting the order and decorum of the court and obstructing the administration Justice guilty to criminal contempt 30 days, boom. So there's great speech that I had in my head about how I hold this corporate contempt. You sentence people jail for killing people, you sentence people to jail for not killing people. You don't know what you're doing. You know, righteous speech I didn't get to make it. They just sentenced me to 30 days. They took me by the arm, I think I said, Merry Christmas on the way out, it was December. And I

went to, they took me to a federal marshal, I guess, court marshal, drove me to High Point North Carolina where they had a Federal section of the County Jail, because I was in the Federal section in the county jail. And while I was in there, Charlie Webster of the American Friends Service Committee in High Point. One of the names that you might run across if you ever do anything, on peace work as well as Bill Jeffreys is another AFSC office. In High Point. He came to visit me in jail. He brought me this clipping about my being arrested and they said in the article that I was there helping a man named Ronald Stephen Holmes, who had been the only white person in many civil rights demonstrations in high point in the early sixties and had been beaten severely as the only white in these civil rights demonstrations. And he had like dyed his skin or something. He was convinced that he was black. Or to use the contemporary term, he identified as Black. And here I was filing these motions and doing it was based on racial discrimination, to this draft board and he was white. So he neglected to mention that detail to me. So I actually wrote him a letter saying, you know what, I think I have your solution for the draft and it's called 4F. Yeah. Yeah. So I think you should actually see someone involved in the psychology profession or psychiatry profession. And I think they can help you get out of the draft. And so that so that was my big fight against racial discrimination in the draft. And while I was there, I got, you know, it was it was it gave me grace, the thing, you know, I've spent most of my life just collecting stories that I could use in my communication law class or other classes when I became a professor and this was, one of my students- thats the things they remember. They don't remember anything else. The story you say like ten years later. Tell us that story about contempt of court again. That was a good one. But I was in with all these boot legger because all of my other, my jail mates were all bootleggers, a jolly bunch to be in jail with, if you have to be in jail. And they wouldn't, they close the cell doors, individual cells during the day. And so we're out this common space time as long as this, but about. Probably you cut it off here. The cells would be over here. And so that all of us, as all space we had a whole day, couldn't get back to your, your bunk couldn't take a nap or anything. And I started a hunger strike in protest of of Marion Flowers conviction and Holmes been into it for about two days. And then I eventually changed the demand to be, the leave the doors open. I figured that would be the most popular thing with my cell mates. And so I tried after awhile to get them to join me because I said, you know, if all of us go on a hunger strike, it'd take a couple of days. And we'll win this thing and I they said, oh yeah, I can't the food ain't great here by I and I said, well look, I've been, I've been, I haven't eaten now for six days, seven days, whatever it was. And I said I could whip all of you right now in push-ups. Yeah. I so I said, well, if I do will you join me? So I did I was still in fairly good shape up and they joined me when they push the trace back, all but one of the jailers went nuts. And in, somewhere in that time period, they, the preacher came to preach to us about our sinful ways. And I'd gotten gotten country word in Boy Scouts. In Sunday school. I mean, I knew my Bible fairly well and, I was quoting bible verses back to him and you know, the real sinners are out there. You know, the White house and stuff like that. Not these folks in here, and everybody watching this. The preacher was all taken back, that's not the usual response. And he finally went and beat a hasty retreat. And then one of the guys comes up to me afterwards, as you sure are good with words. You think you could help me with this letter to his fiance? Yeah. So then I'm writing Dear Mary Sue, I know I said I wouldn't make another run, but your uncle said this car beat any revenueers out there. And if I could just get a little more, I

could get that ring, we get hitched, and I sure hope you'll wait for me and. So finally they, we won. Then finally we after two or three days around, I think it was like two days after everybody joined us. They said Okay, fine. I'll leave the doors open. So we won that. And so having won the right to keep the doors open all the time, they then move me to another cell so I wouldn't cause any more trouble. So now I'm going to cell block with just one other guy who is in for murder, right? Could you close doors now? You know what I mean? But he'd murdered his wife and most guys usually don't kill other people just their spouses. Anyway. So that's my jail story from from then anyway

[BD] Okay, let's get back to civil rights here or just...

[TG] We're trying but war is happening, you know?

[LS] At some point in time, maybe in a separate interview I'd like to ask you about Charles Nunnally in Farmville

[TG] I would like to tell you, but Charles Nunnally and I can do that in this interview because that was a VSCRC thing.

[LS] Okay. Do you mind? Okay. Great to hear.

[TG] So Charles Nunnally, young man, I think he was maybe about 20 or so. 19- 20, he was past high school age. He was denied student deferment because he was not he was too old to be in high school. Why was he too old to be in high school? Because they closed the schools. He was the sole support of his family. His father was physicals physical issues, disability issues. So he was going to school, you could go to school, he was going to school, working at night, you know, working hard. And here they're trying to draft the guy. So so I got involved in that. And that's one reason why I was in Farmville And I thought, well, you know, I have a friend who's a friend, another UVA alum, UVA Law School alum who is now in the US senate so I'll just write him as a fellow UVA guy, you know. So I write to Senator Edward Kennedy, I explain this whole thing. And I also got the Unitarian Church involved since I was so working with them, we got fellowship

unintelligib[LE] delays. So we had a number of the sort of usual suspects. But the most significant one was Kennedy's office, he jumped right on it and communicate with General Hershey's Director of Selective Service about this case. And I think essentially the staffer told me that this is basically what the senators message was. Do you want to have a public hearing about this and we can talk about the racial makeup of boards and we can talk about the injustice of this guy being drafted, or do you want to take care of this case? And of course, Hershey immediately, you know, told the the local board director to give them him a deferment. And so we got him out of the war. But that was a great, I ran across some of those letters in my when I did my little review yesterday. Oh, that's right. I put some of it out on the table. But my correspondence and stuff, I made some pictures with my iPad that I can, you know. It's a nice collection you can't make, you can't grab things out of file and make photocopies.

[LS] I know some of his siblings.

[TG] Really? Is he still around?

[LS] I don't know I'll check for you though.

[TG] I would love to know that. I would love to in touch with and that would be fabulous.

[BD] So okay. Last last few questions here with this is, what kind of work or career did you become involved with since 1970?

[TG] So I went back to school and finished in '71. So we're skipping all the, I went from the NSA Southern project to full-time on SSOC staff to do these peace tours of Florida, et cetera, and became Chairman of SSOC So I, I worked full-time in the movement for the next 2.5 years. I was the southern coordinator for the grape boycott farm workers. I was southern field coordinator for Vietnam summer. I was responding to the Orangeburg Massacre in South Carolina. I was on the southern committee against repression with Bill Kunstler and Arthur Kinoy and SCEF and SCLC and SNCC. People were doing these class actions in various cities, fighting the way the police were doing and harassing things against people. So I was still very involved with SCEF, with SSOC, with SNCC you know, for for those two years. And I went back to UVA to finish '69 to '71, and then. And so I was there for the Kent State, Cambodia invasion, Jackson State and we shut down the University of Virginia. Mostly and with coat and tie demonstrations, you know, admit women.

[LS] Because you were on Student Council? I got on student council. We swept the college elections that year of Virginia progressive party. I went after the I got on organizations publications committee where the money was. Where the money is, is the important thing. Law students had been squealing off about two thirds of all that money. Take their guests to the Boar's Head Inn to grease, their careers, and to spring court clerkships and all that stuff. I cut that budget in half. Later I was swimming in the Y in Greenville, South Carolina where I was doing union work. These guys were also swimming next to me at lunch. And we got talking and figured out he was at UVA Law School and he says, what's your name? Tom Gardner. You're Tom Gardner? I ran against you! I said, I didn't run for student council in the law school, he said no, but I ran against you. So they didn't like me. So I graduated in '71 in the process of '69 - '71, we got very involved with General Electric Workers in Waynesboro who had organized a united electrical workers local, progressive union, antiwar. And we actually had, they actually sent the president of their local came to one of our anti-war rallies at UVA, spoken at Newcomb hall ballroom. I remember him just getting up, he said, because he didn't know a lot about the war, but he said, I struggled about what I was going say here. And I just came to conclusion to ask one question. Is it good for the children? If it's not good for the children. Why are we doing it? War is not good for the children. So he joined the local. So we had this union Solidarity anyway that attracted me to to UE. And they were looking for new organizers and and they came and talked to both Al Long and myself Al lives in Norfolk. It went like this, I don't remember being here it wasn't a VSCRC project. But he was involved with Virginia Weekly at UVA and all that solidarity stuff. We did a lot of other union stuff too. We got arrested in Shenandoah, Virginia under the strange a picketing law which had been declared unconstitutional, saying it's somebody not involved in the plant per union could not be on the picket line. Let me try to explain to the cop. The chief, Charlie Hammer was his name, said you know, that law is unconstitutional. He said, not here it isn't. Swept us off into jail. So I took a job with UE as an organizer and I went up to Massachusetts for my training actually same neck of the woods as I am now. And then went back to South Carolina to work in Charleston and Greenville on two General Electric turbine plants, organizing the organizing efforts there. We'd won in Charleston, didn't didn't win in Greenville at least not when I was there, I haven't checked recently. And so that's that's that was my work. For a time. I went through the organize the working class period. A lot of new lefties did and, and I joined some of my former comrades from UVA, including the

woman I was living with at the time but we had separated from the end of the Union stuff. But I was going back and forth. Anyway, we all moved into a house in Norfolk and got jobs at plants. So I got a job at General Electric television plant in Portsmouth and worked on organizing and IUE. There was IUE campaign going on there. And I worked on that for a while still a SCEF board. And I said, I forgot to mention I stayed very active with SSOC even when I went back to school until SSOC was dissolved in 1969. At this meeting in Mississippi, which I did not go to. Recently confronted Mark Rudd about it when I went to the March- the May first thing in DC and I went up to him and told him, thanks a lot for helping destroy the organization I helped build for five years. And I hadn't seen him ever, I didn't even think I'd meet him back then actually. But he and Mike came down SDS invasion to destroy SSOC. And he was very gracious about it. We actually happened to have very good mutual friends. He's now in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We have these very good friends that were friends of his. So I started with that I said, hey we're good friends with Hilary And by the way, thanks for destroying the organization. So anyway, later that night I was talking to him and we ended up hugging and he said, You know, you were right, I was wrong. And it was just I just needed to hear that, you know, it was like such a weight out of my little dark hate spot that I had kept for a long time. And it was just, I don't know, it was interesting that reunions like this or the SSOC reunion and people will still bicker and go back and forth about how I'm going to take a break or something stupid like that. But it's a, it's a beloved community feeling. And there had not been a reunion of the antiwar, national antiwar until this past May first. Part of the reason for that is that the sectarianism and you all hated each other by the end of it and nobody wanted to see anybody. But anyway, so that's, I backed up. So after after the work, I was working on the union stuff, working the plant. It pretty much decided I wanted to spend my entire life working in a factory, organizing workers if they want to organize more power to them. But I felt he needed to do be doing other things. And I had been doing a lot of stuff around prison issues. And this revolt took place in a prison in Southern Alabama. And there was a death penalty case that came out of that, as well as other prisoners indicted. And I was in touch with people through the SCEF board who were organizing the Defense Committee. And basically I quit my job at GE, went to Alabama and helped organize the Defense Committee and made a big national international thing and you'd probably get to get off death row and you know. Won some, lost some. A guy got hanged in his jail cell before a trial because they knew we had gotten, Len Weinglass was coming to represent from California and we got the word and I think they just decided they were going to execute him right there not follow the trial. So I did a lot of prison work in Alabama and then I eventually decided. And I was going back and forth between Atlanta then I'd move to Atlanta. Worked other jobs, truck parts, warehouse, selling Kirby vacuums for awhile, not really selling them, but going around vacuuming my friend's houses and getting them to sign things. And I thought, OK, I spent all this time trying to organize demonstrations to get a little ink in the press, why don't I just be a journalist? And I had been a movement journalist for all these years writing for the Virginia Weekly, Great Speckled Bird. And I went to Nashville, organized and interviewed Dolly Parton, Porter Wagner and Gary Scruggs we were writing country music articles. And so I had a little, a little a, a folder. So I went back to school to get a masters in journalism and I became a journalist. And eventually the Senior Political Reporter of the Montgomery Advertiser. I covered George Wallace's last administration when I applied to the Kennedy School because I was

worried about Reagan blowing up the world. I thought I would do something about nuclear arms. I had a letter of recommendation from Julian Bond and George Wallace. So I think that's how I got an admissions committee. Said we gotta be somebody because, you know. This is ridiculous. But and then I went to the Kennedy School, did that and then worked for the union, I was director communication for the Union of Concerned Scientists, which is based in Cambridge, working on a Star Wars stuff, nuclear power safety. And eventually decided it was time to think about teaching. Now I had plenty of stories to tell them. I went to UMass to get my PhD, 12-year PhD because I had a daughter that came back live with me, no longer married to her mom. And I had a full-time job building this organization called the Media Education Foundation, which produces videos about, media literacy videos essentially critiquing media and all kinds of different progressive stuff. In our attempt to help build that organization and then finally took a teaching job at Westfield State University, where I've been for the last 14 years.

[BD] Where in Massachusetts?

[TG] Westfield, Massachusetts, which is about 20 minutes outside of Springfield. I live in Amherst and it's like a 45 minute commute. So I get to listen to lots of books on tape. And I teach in the Communication Department, things like communication law. Which is why I scribbled on your copyright form.

[BD] Not my copyright from.

[TG] Their copyright form, waiver form. And I taught a seminar this past spring on the US Vietnam War era which started the Civil Rights movement. That was the best course I taught ever since I've been there. It's was a great, it was an honor seminar, different majors and did a lot of role-playing. Anyway, it's great course. I teach crime and media an online class. Michelle Alexander's New Jim Crow and all these criminal justice majors, HIPAA stuff that they haven't been hit with in earlier courses. So I'm loving it. I'm absolutely loving it. I mean, I can imagine even ever I can't really afford to retire because it's not like I spent the early years of my adult potential working career actually worrying about money. I didn't have to, because the socialist revolution was going to happen by time I was old and we'd have free medical care for everybody the elderly would be taken care of and, you know, why worry about that? So now I have to worry about it. So I'll probably be working.

[BD] Yes. I wish you guys had accomplished that myself.

[TG] Well, yeah. Yeah. You have a few years to work on that, good luck.

[BD] Thank you. We appreciate that.

[LS] You could argue it's our job to complete the revelation.

[BD] No that, I think that's what he's suggesting, which is probably true.

[TG] Somebody's going to have to do it. We thought it'd be a lot different.

[BD] So looking back, what did you all or you personally, what did you accomplish? Via your time with the VSCRC project in particular, what, what what do your kind of final thoughts or analysis of, of VSCRC?

[TG] Well, we used to have jokingly say, Well at least we organized the Klan in South Side Virginia because they certainly responded to the project by organizing. But I think the conversations here today have demonstrated that we've made a big difference in a lot of people's lives, or at least a small number of people's lives in terms of making a big difference, maybe a small difference in a larger number of people's lives. We don't know the exact numbers

of the registration county by county. It would be great if we did. I remember watching the returns in 2008 election. I had a betting pool with the head of the political science department and the president, the University. He was a political science guy. And Virginia was hovering on the edge and I looked and saw what counties had not reported yet. And I said, he's got it. Then he said, I don't know Virginia... I know which counties are about to report and he's going to get those. And I couldn't have said that in 1964. So, or '66. So I think we, we made a difference that way. I think we opened up. We brought the movement to South Side. There were pockets all over the south, South Carolina and other places that just never got there. And even though today, there may be a lot of things about Lunenburg County and other places that feel like they were back then. But a lot of it's economic. It's not the opportunities and possibilities. Not that there's not still racial discrimination. But I just think that the notion that people could stand up and work against those either on a personal level or are in an organized way with something that we helped encourage. Personally. I think it was a learning experience for all of us that by the grace of local people who are willing to put up with us silly, you know, immature, white do- gooders. They took us under their wings and they, and they helped us grow up. And that's not what the purpose of the project was essentially, but I think on a personal level it was that these were I said on my Facebook page before coming down here after the Charleston shooting, I said that these are the people like the people who took us in and were our mentors.

[BD] Well, Tom, I'd like to thank you for what you did in Virginia in the 1960's. And I'd like to thank you also for taking the time to share your memories with us today.

[TG] Well, thank you for doing this and a pleasure. Thank you.