

Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee: Lisa Anderson Todd
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Interviewer: Emilye Crosby
Videographer: John Bishop
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Emilye Crosby: This is Emily Crosby of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and I'm conducting this oral history as part of the Civil Rights History Project, which is being undertaken by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African-American History and Culture and the American Folk Life Center of the Library of Congress and John Bishop is here with us today. And we're interviewing Lisa Anderson Todd and it's June twenty-fourth, 2014.

Lisa Anderson Todd: 2013.

EC: 2013. June twenty-fourth, 2013 at Ms. Todd's home in Washington, D.C. Thanks very much for doing the interview with us today. Can you tell me a little bit about your family and your early background growing up?

LT: I'm the daughter of a corporate lawyer. My father was Carl Anderson and my mother was a psychiatric social worker. They came from the Midwest after my father got his law degree,

to New York City. And we—I grew up in Summit, New Jersey. When my father got a corporate job in New Jersey. And I have two older brothers. It was typical 1950s suburban living. My mother never worker or she worked one year when I was in eighth grade. Went back to work, but she decided after one year that she couldn't do it all. She had her full responsibilities at home. My father didn't participate. They were interested in public service. I have that example, but they were not particularly liberal. My father was a Republican. He was afraid of signing documents because of the McCarthy scare. He remembered that. My mother grew up poor, one of six children in Hibbing, Minnesota, and I think that influenced her and influenced me in having an interest in the poor and the excluded, the downtrodden, although in growing up I did not participate in any of that. I did not have exposure to local blacks. There were blacks in my junior high school, but they were not my friends.

EC: So your mother is from Hibbing, Minnesota?

LT: Yes.

EC: Hibbing has an interesting history doesn't it? I mean, there was—I mean I think that part of Minnesota had some strong organizing as well as the poverty you mentioned.

LT: My understanding—it was very ethnic. Very ethnic community. The Slavs didn't talk to the Finns.

EC: [Laughs]

LT: But it was a very wealthy community.

EC: Hibbing was?

LT: The iron ore mines made facilities available. The Hibbing High School today is a model with a swimming pool. And my mother benefitted from that educational experience. She went to Hibbing Junior College and then transferred to the University of Minnesota.

EC: So that's interesting. I mean I knew that—you know, the iron range, but I wouldn't necessarily have thought that would translate into public facilities for everybody.

LT: Yes, yes.

EC: So when did you first become more aware of racial issues, or interested in social justice kinds of issues?

LT: I was influenced to get—to do the kind of work that began me on that journey to Freedom Summer by spending a summer in northern Sweden on the Experiment in International [00:05:00] Living and I lived in a remote area with a family for one month—traveled with a group of ten kids and at the end of that summer, I said, “What do I want to do next summer? Well I'd love to go back to Europe.” I was following the example of my older brother, and he had gone on an American Friends Service Committee work project in Italy and helped build a school. And I said to myself, “I don't want a vacation because that's what my Experiment summer was like. Next summer, I want to do something.” I said to myself, “There are plenty of problems in the United States. I don't want to go back to Europe.” And I researched work camps and I was very fortunate to be able to sign up for two work camps, the summer of 1963. I participated in a project of the Ecumenical Voluntary Service of the World Council of Churches at Tougaloo College. We did maintenance work for the college that had not been done before. In the course of doing that, we were learning about the Civil Rights Movement. We went to non-violent training workshops. We heard speakers in the Social Science lab, and we had an incredible day on August 1, 1963, going up to Greenwood to the SNCC office at the invitation of Bob Moses and going to a mass meeting that evening. We split up—our group of ten so—I guess there were three or four of us that went to Ruleville and had a dinner at Fanny Lou Hamer's home.

EC: Wow.

LT: And she told the story to us of the beating in Winona and I can remember her saying—and I wrote in my diary that she said, “I didn’t know that flesh could be so hard.” And going to the mass meeting that evening was an incredible experience for me. We had been to mass meetings in Jackson, but that was so different.

EC: Can you describe it for us?

LT: The reception that we got from mostly women, the welcome, the sense that—and the feeling you had that these people were risking so much to want to register to vote, when the sanctions were so severe. The risk of the night rider shooting in their homes. The loss of a job, the loss of credit that they needed to run their farm, or whatever. And there they were saying to us, “We appreciate your being here and your interest in us,” in a situation where I understand they did not know friendly white people. And we were friendly white people. So we were accorded a special attention. We sang “We Shall Overcome,” arm-over-arm, holding hands. And it was emotional for me. And then I said, “What am I going to do?” You know, these people will expect that I go back home and forget. And I didn’t want to forget because it meant a lot to me.

A number of the kids in the group, we took off for New Orleans, had a little weekend and one of the women in the project was going on to Greensboro, North Carolina, with me. On the—we just happened to be—have signed up for a second American Friends Service Committee project and we [00:10:00]—there were 18 of us. We lived in the basement of a church. We were there for voter registration. We only worked from, I think, five p.m. to nine p.m. House-to-house canvassing. The registrars were cooperative, they were right in the neighborhood ready to take the person’s application. There had been demonstrations in the spring. People were very receptive to going to register to vote and we were able to register 803 people. Mostly Democrats,

but some Republicans. And what I gained from that experience was an understanding of my black peers because we had a group of—one guy, local guy, Pat Patterson and the girls from Greensboro: Randalynn Johnson, Alfreda Artis, and Bunky Dansby. We had a lot of fun. And Karen Pate, the gal from Oregon that I traveled with from Mississippi. It was such a contrast to Mississippi and it made me comfortable in the black community.

EC: How was it a contrast with Mississippi?

LT: We were special in Mississippi. We were white. When I went to a mass meeting in Jackson, our group—I don't know whether it was the whole group of ten students or fewer of us—Spotswood Robinson, the head of the NAACP, was speaking. They sat us on the stage. You know, we were the only whites in the crowd. And there was, there was a fear of traveling and being white in the black community in Mississippi in 1963. We were being careful and in Greensboro, there was much more freedom. The other thing that I was fortunate to do in Greensboro was go to parties and learn about black men. The parties started at 11 o'clock and we had this—our little group of friends and we got to talk about—when we went back to the church, we were all living in the same basement of the church, and it was no big deal. So the summer of '64, that was not a big deal for me. I had kind of done that. I had explored relations with black men and I knew that it was just like relations with white men. So it's no big deal, [laughter] although historically it is.

EC: Maybe between individual people, but in the larger context. Maybe between individual people it means one thing and in the larger context it has a different kind of meaning.

TL: Um-hmm.

EC: Can I go back and ask you a little bit more about—in Mississippi you talked about doing the workshops on nonviolence. And you're out in Tougaloo and going to mass meetings. Can you talk about what the workshops—

John Bishop: Can we hold up for a second.

[Recording stops and then resumes.]

JB: We're rolling.

EC: So can you tell me about the nonviolence workshops in Mississippi and then also who the, other people that you remember meeting at Tougaloo while you were in Mississippi. Can you tell me about that?

TL: I think CORE was largely doing the work in Jackson in 1963. I met Dave Dennis there. I remember asking him—I remember because I kept a detailed diary that summer—asking him why were children used in the Birmingham demonstrations? Because that was controversial at the time. The spring of 1963, when there were the hoses and the dogs were out to stop the demonstrators. He said, “We want children to learn about how to stand up for freedom before they learn other things from their parents.”

EC: That's interesting. Yeah. [00:15:00]

TL: Memphis Norman was heading the Social Science lab that summer. I regretted that I did not meet Dr. Baranski. He was apparently on vacation. I did not meet John Salter, who was not on campus at all, but we spent a lot of time with Ed King and I looked at his scarred face and thought that that was related to the tremendous sacrifice he was making to be a part of the Civil Rights Movement as a white Southerner from Vicksburg.

EC: So you must have been there shortly after Medgar Evers was assassinated?

LT: Yes. I read that story in *The New York Times* before I left home and, interesting story, getting on the plane to fly to Jackson by myself, not being a frequent flyer, I looked out my window and the engine was on fire and I didn't know what that meant because I had not been doing a lot of flying. But we landed, not at nearby Teterboro, New Jersey, which would have been a problem, but went back to Newark and my parents were still there. That was a moment of truth. You know, wouldn't it be easier to stay home? [Laughter] But we got on another slow flight and I had a lot of time to think about what I was getting into. But we—. I went ahead and it was so instructive. We had two, two black students in the group, Ivory Phillips, who's become an educator in Jackson. I've seen him recently and Thelma Sadberry, who I understand lives in Detroit, but I have not been able to connect with her. We had speakers that came to us in the evening. Timothy Jenkins spoke to us about the status of the pending Civil Rights Bill. Jane Shut, a remarkable white woman from Jackson, Mississippi, was so impressive, the work that she was doing through the church, through the interracial prayer groups and on the advisory council. We had an evening at Dr. Bidel's home. Alan Chalmers, I think it is, from New York spoke to us. He was very pessimistic about when Jackson was going to change and become less of a segregated city because they did not have a corporate structure that would influence them from outside, as Birmingham had.

EC: Okay. So, do you remember—can you tell me the actual dates that you were in Jackson that summer? Or at Tougaloo?

LT: I think it was July six to August three.

EC: So the big demonstrations were pretty much over and done with by then.

LT: The federal government had influenced Jackson to stop demonstrating, to stop direct action protests, to move into voter registration. They would—as I understood it, there would be a

way that foundation money could support SNCC's voter registration work. That that would be less confrontational with the local government. In addition, the NAACP decided to stop providing bail for any, for all the demonstrators who were so quickly arrested and so mistreated in jail that they needed to get out. Charles Evers had come in [00:20:00] to take over for the NAACP and they were beginning demonstrations again, but on a small scale and not wanting to be arrested. And in the nonviolent workshops, where CORE people were trying to recruit, they were not getting very good participation and the explanation, possibly, is that the students had been so mistreated in jail that they were not ready to go back and demonstrate again, knowing that they were not going to be getting out quickly. The bail had been doubled in the amount.

EC: You said you kept a detailed diary. So do you remember, do you know from your diary whether—what kind of conversations were going on in the community or among activists about the national NAACP's decisions and these issues of what was going on in the aftermath of the assassination and all that?

LT: I didn't have much contact with local people. I remember, or I have read in my diary about Dr. Bidel's position that people were critical of the NAACP coming in as outsiders, distinguishing their approach from that of CORE and SNCC, which who came in and lived in the community, and stayed in the community and became a part of the community, and took the same risks that the community was taking. And that that was more effective a strategy to encourage local people to register and participate.

EC: Well and it's interesting because of course in—. My understanding is that the North Jackson youth branch of the NAACP, which was working with John Salter and Medger Evers and Ed King was really crucial, so that there is a real split between the local NAACP, especially

the youth, and the national organization and so I don't know if you have heard anything about that at the time.

LT: Well, I think you are absolutely correct. That was—. That would be my understanding also. I think the position of Johnny Frazier is interesting there. I have seen him since and he came out of Greenville.

EC: Yeah what did he say about it?

LT: Well, what—I don't know what he said at the time. But my, my favorite statement from Johnny Frazier is that when he said to me, "Thank you for coming to"—but we're, we are getting ahead of ourselves.

EC: Yeah, okay, yeah, alright. So you had these two experiences with Tougaloo—well actually are there—what was Bob Moses like? How did you meet him? Did he come and talk to the group or did the invitation come? How did the invitation come to go to Greenwood?

LT: He was on campus one day and we were anxious. We heard about SNCC, one of the first days. But I'm not sure who it was now that was on campus where the—that was on campus. And Bob Moses did not want to speak to our group because he had to leave. There was a dance that evening at the student center. Bob Moses was at the dance and I was very annoyed that he wouldn't talk to us. But it was natural for a—for him to invite us to see the SNCC headquarters. That was where all the work was being done out of Greenwood at that time.

EC: So do you remember—so what was Mrs. Hamer like, you said that she told you that story? She must—it must have been a very recent event at that point.

LT: Yes, yes. She [00:25:00] stood in the doorway. She cooked us dinner. We're sitting outside at her home and we invited her to sit down and eat with us and she said that the first time she ate with, in an integrated group was at Tougaloo. I mean that she had done that. I think she

registered to vote in 1962, in the spring. I described her as a short, fat woman with her hair sticking straight out or something.

EC: [Laughs].

LT: When she greeted us, you know, like who is this? I had no idea who Fanny Lou Hamer was.

EC: So what was it like? So you have no idea and then you meet her. What was that—

LT: Her—the way she spoke, is absolutely captivating. She talked about—her water bill had increased so much and I think she mentioned that her home had been shot in to when she was sleeping somewhere else. I had a sense right away of how powerful she was, how courageous she was. She understood the attitude of white people. I think, I think it's my anecdote from my diary that, or else I've read it in a book, that if you had a shade tree, you wouldn't want to just give it up would you?

EC: Nope. [Laughter] Kind of gets right to the heart of things, doesn't it, when you're in the Delta in Mississippi.

LT: Right, right, right.

EC: Were there other people that you met in Ruleville or Greenwood that you remember?

LT: No, no.

EC: You mentioned that at the church it was mostly women.

LT: Yes. You, you know, just walk around the corner to the Williams Chapel where all their mass meetings were, I think. And there was a reverend there. I don't—I guess Charles McLaurin was speaking. There were some SNCC guys that went over from Greenwood to Ruleville and I felt comforted by that because they would know what to do. Where we were going, you know.

EC: So after that summer and you have these two different, very important experiences and you're in school at Cornell at the time.

LT: Yes, yes.

EC: We haven't talked at all about what your college experience was like other than these programs off campus. So what were you involved in at Cornell and doing at Cornell?

LT: Cornell was a difficult adjustment for me, because I had been at an all-girls independent day school in Summit for four years and here I was thrown into this huge university by myself. And I did not find the people I expected in my immediate living surroundings on—in the dormitory—my first semester. I was unhappy. Second semester, I pledged a sorority and found a group of very interesting women, diverse women. Our sorority was pledging Jewish girls at a time when the national did not expect that to be the case and it turned out after I left that as a result of that, the Kappa Alpha Theta at Cornell lost its charter and went local, with the support of the Cornell administration. But because of rushing Jewish girls, and avoiding the requirements of getting two references, one from any Theta alum and one from the alum from the girls' hometown, they stopped rushing the year after I left.

EC: So was it those kind of attitudes that drew you to that group do you think? [00:30:00]

LT: That were—

EC: Were those the kinds of attitudes that drew you to that group in the first place?

LT: Yes. Yes. The diversity and, well, you know, just some crazy individuals. We—you know, it was a lot of fun. And challenging academically. I mean, I was always an over achieving student, you know. I did well in school by working hard. Not by native intelligence.

EC: [Laughs]

LT: I did not—I was extracurricular in high school, but I quickly got that out of my system at college. I was studying, enjoying the sorority, dating, I wanted to work, my junior year. My father didn't want me to work, thought that I would be taking a job away from a student who needed to work and didn't want to disclose his finances, I am sure, to the university also. But somehow we got around that and I had a job in the library for one semester. I didn't—I was not demonstrating. I took a race relations sociology course my junior year. I was a, my major was American Studies Government.

EC: So was that a course that you picked or was it something that was—

LT: Elected. I elected that course with—Robin Williams was a noted sociology professor at Cornell.

EC: Was the class useful to you? Did it have an impact?

LT: I think so. I think so. For basic, basic information.

EC: And you took that then before you did the two summer projects—

LT: Yes, yes, yes.

JB: We need to pause.

[Recording stops and then resumes.]

JB: Okay, we are back.

EC: Do you think that might have influenced you to pick out those two work projects, having taken that class, or the same—

LT: It did. There weren't many options for those summer work camps in the United States, but I did choose Tougaloo, Mississippi, over Brownsville, Texas.

EC: [Laughs]

LT: And I did turn down an option to be a paid dietician on a project for the American Friends Service Committee.

EC: So what was it that drew you to Tougaloo over Brownsville?

LT: It was—it was the Civil Rights situation that was in the news and in my consciousness, but not as an activist and I—. And the summer of '63, I felt also, I was not an activist. I was learning about the movement. It was very easy, and so I talk in my diary about making a commitment. And that's what we talked about then. Which side are you on? Because it was very controversial throughout the country.

EC: How did your parents feel about you going to Mississippi and Greensboro?

LT: They supported me. There wasn't any question that I could do that. I think I—. I think it was my own money that I had saved. I worked in a department store after my freshman year in college, in Newark.

EC: So even though their politics were not necessarily leaning that way and your father was, you know, concerned about the Red Scare stuff and those—he wasn't worried about you going south?

LT: No and the other part that is interesting about my father is that he was asked to be the corporate giving chairman for the United Negro College Fund as a result of his work at his company with the company foundation and he was meeting HBCU presidents at these meetings. At one dinner he sat next to Lorraine Hansberry and he asked her what she did.

EC: [Laughs] Oops. So did he then—

LT: Also, in addition to that, he was active in the Lutheran Church of America.

[00:35:00]

EC: Okay.

LT: And I think, I think he had some—that there was reason here in the church to support me, although he was not at all vocal in his religion. He was, he was—. He went to church after he got the three kids through Sunday school and confirmed and was—. My uncle who was active in the church in St. Paul, I think, recommended that he participate in the national church and he was elected treasurer of the Lutheran Church of America.

EC: So after that summer of '63 and you're back on campus, does that change things?

LT: Yes, yes. I became active with the Cornell United Religious Work. Paul Gibbons, who was the United Church of Christ representative at CURW organized a group interested in Civil Rights and our project was to work for the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the spring of 1964. But I went to—. I think I went to some conferences and we put out a newsletter. I saw the newsletter recently. I was the editor.

EC: Did you remember that?

LT: No. [Laughs.]

EC: So what did you think of it in retrospect?

LT: [Laughs] I did have something that I wanted to do, going back to college after the summer experiences in Mississippi and North Carolina. And my roommate told me recently that I was back at Cornell my senior year a different person.

EC: Did she say how?

LT: No. I asked her what do you mean? [Laughs]

EC: What did she say?

LT: She never answered. She was off in China, you know, as a professor of Political Science.

EC: So did you have—. Were you connected with any friends of SNCC or those kinds of support work or was it primarily the religious-based group and the lobbying?

LT: I met Jane Stembridge at Tougaloo. She was there working on the literacy books that they were planning to use, a major literacy project in Mississippi and I was very impressed with her, of course, wanted to spend more time with her than we had to spend and talk. But she contacted SNCC in Atlanta and made sure that everyone in our group received the SNCC literature and obviously we were supposed to go back to our college campuses and start a friends of SNCC chapter that would raise money for SNCC work in the south. I didn't do that. [Laughs]

EC: [Laughs] Can you tell me what Jane was like, when you met her there?

LT: Interesting, sensitive woman. As I say, I wanted to spend more time with her. I think I received one letter from her later. What I remember, what I wrote down, what's—what I've recalled is that she said that Bob Moses was a saint.

EC: [Laughs.] They had a good summer together in the summer of 1960, the two of them.

LT: Right. Right.

EC: So she was in Tougaloo by that summer. I'm just trying to think of the time of that. Was she writing poetry then?

LT: Not that I knew of. I've found her book. I've got her book. I haven't read it yet.

EC: That's good. That's good. What do you remember? Do you remember much about the lobbying on the Civil Rights Act and how you did that?

LT: We took a trip to Washington, spring vacation, and sat in the chamber and I think we heard the debate on the Senate floor and we were supposed to visit individual congressmen. I don't remember that part. We stayed with some people in [00:40:00] Bethesda and what I remember is the way that man drove Rock Creek Parkway.

EC: [Laughs] How was that?

LT: Very skillfully. Very fast. In the morning at rush hour, its four lanes in one direction. And we—. And it's a winding road. And it's a long way from Bethesda all the way to Capitol Hill.

EC: Race car driver. At what point did you hear about Freedom Summer?

LT: I applied to work for SNCC in the fall of '63 and I got a letter from Walter Tillow that said that SNCC is planning a project that will include Freedom Schools and legal resources and voter registration and you should contact the Jackson office I think. So I was—. I was an early applicant and I got these notes on the letters back that we might be able to find a way to pay you, which I thought was strange. But I quickly was in the status of just another volunteer, which was fine.

EC: When you applied in fall of '63, was that for the summer or were you planning to drop out if they had space for you?

LT: I was applying for the summer. I was also—I had also taken the LSATs and applied to law school.

EC: So you were thinking of working with SNCC over the summer and then going on to law school before you knew about the summer project?

LT: No, I was thinking initially, I believe, of becoming a Civil Rights worker and working for SNCC, or going to law school.

EC: Okay, and because they had the summer project, which was sort of a contained thing, you ended up doing both.

LT: Right. But during the course of the summer, I debated with myself whether to stay and not go to law school because you have the sense that you are just beginning your work, you

are just beginning to get the trust of the community, and how could I just abandon this whole thing and go to law school?

EC: How did you make that decision?

LT: That decision was very easily and quickly made when I came home. Pat Vale and I travelled by bus from Greenville to Summit, New Jersey. Not asking for help from my parents at any point. We took the local bus from Newark to Summit and I knew there was a taxi, the Geddes taxi was right across the street from the bus stop at the train station and we took the 75 cent taxi with our luggage to, the one mile to our house and my father greeted me at the door. And I said, “Where’s mother?” And he said, “She’s not feeling well. She’s learned that you are planning to stay in Mississippi.” And I said, “I’ll go to Stanford.” What happened was three students from Greenville went back to New Jersey to recruit delegate support for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party convention challenge, and they talked to the press and the—. A reporter asked, “Are any of the students staying in Mississippi after the summer project?” And they said, “Yes, Lisa Anderson is.” My mother read that in the paper and she was upset. She was, at that point, very worried about my safety and I couldn’t take that. [Laughs]

EC: So it was bad enough for a summer, but to have it go on continuously was—

LT: And it was a difficult summer for them because of the peer pressure, the neighbors and the questions they got.

EC: So the neighborhood was not happy.

LT: The next door neighbor particularly. My mother didn’t want—didn’t want to see her because she was afraid she would [00:45:00] bring up the subject of my being in Mississippi. They did form a parent’s group and I think that was helpful. And also, one of my closest friends in high school from a wonderful family, the Sheffland family in Short Hills. Her younger sister

Nancy was a volunteer in Greenville and my mother, I think, spent time talking to Mrs. Sheffland and comparing notes.

EC: So we kind of jumped ahead, but when you knew about the project then you did an application. Do you remember an interview process? Did you interview with someone?

LT: I have—I have thought many times about that interview until I finally realized I never had an interview.

EC: You didn't.

LT: And I think based on what I had done the summer before that Jackson decided to accept me for the project.

EC: So they had a sense of you and so you didn't have to go through that process. But you did go to the orientation in Oxford.

LT: I went late. My graduation was on Monday, the 15th, and I stayed an extra day to go to a friend's wedding on campus in Sage Chapel. I think it was the first wedding I had ever been invited to by friends and so I thought that was important and I thought, of course, I knew a lot of what was going to be happening at orientation. Cornell sponsored a project in Fayette County, Tennessee, Tent City. So there was group of students driving to Fayette County and I got a ride with them and was dropped off in Oxford. And I think I arrived on Wednesday.

EC: So Cornell students were active in Fayette County? Cornell students were active in Fayette County?

LT: Yes. Yes. They would volunteer spring vacation. They would raise money through student government.

EC: So they dropped you off at the orientation. Was that—I don't have the dates in my head. Was that the first or second week?

LT: I was there the first week.

EC: So can you describe the orientation?

LT: Bob Moses stood up there and talked to us. That's—in his modest way. Standing kind of on the side in his overalls and clean white t-shirt and told us just to be there would be important and not to expect to accomplish very much. To expect that people would be slow and to write to our congressman and to write to our local newspaper and to tell them what it was like in Mississippi, that the word had not reached the rest of the country and it would be our job to tell the stories in order to first obtain federal protection because lives were being lost. And secondly to work a change so that there would be—so that voter registration would become possible.

EC: Do you remember any of the rest of the orientation?

LT: We were lectured to about nonviolence. I remember Vincent Harding being so impressive. The way he speaks and I found his remarks are on the internet, of what he actually said. We were—I believe it is he, it might have been Bruce Hanson, who reminded us of our own prejudices, that we had to face the fact that even though we were going in this great spirit of, there is no difference, black people and white people, that we might ourselves have innate prejudice. I remember the role-playing we did in nonviolence outside on the lawn. It was a great relief to get outside [00:50:00] that auditorium and the reporters and the cameramen participated. And I have—I had a—I have a note in the postcard I sent home to my parents, I guess, that—or else I only have it in my memory, but it is a distinct memory that Carl Fleming of *Newsweek* punched me in the stomach.

EC: [Laughs].

LT: And I, of course, played the role of victim not aggressor. And I understand the second week of orientation there was very little, if any, role-playing of nonviolence because the mood, of course, that week changed entirely after the disappearance of what I've always called the three boys. That's the way we talked about the three boys. But now everyone, its, I think is very familiar with the fact Chaney—all black—Schwerner, a staff, core staff person, and Goodman, a volunteer just like me. Not just like me of course, disappeared that Sunday, June 21. That Saturday they disappeared. The day that I arrived in Mississippi.

EC: Do you remember how you heard about that?

LT: No. I do not remember exactly how I heard about that.

EC: Or your reaction.

LT: I was—I was in Greenville. The reaction is how could that have happened so soon and what does that mean? That—are we all going to be now victimized? Is that—is that what—what is going to happen, over and over?

EC: How did you end up in Greenville?

LT: I think I ended up there because I was going to be in voter registration and because I had had that specific experience in Greensboro and not that I particularly asked for it. And it was dangerous for women—black or white—to be in the fields in most areas of Mississippi. Greenville is noted as being a relatively moderate city.

EC: So is that something that you were aware of at the time? That there was discussion about where women could work in the field?

LT: I don't think so.

EC: So that's more something you can think about in retrospect?

LT: That I've learned in this period of seven years of trying to write a book and reading. I've read so much now that it's—I have to—I know I should distinguish my memories of what I knew then and what I know now.

EC: Yeah, yeah, it must be an interesting process. [Laughter]

JB: I've got to roll the camera back.

[Recording stops and then resumes.]

JB: Okay, we are back.

EC: So, speaking of what you remember from then and what you know now, I know that one of the things that caused a bit of a stir among—conversation a few years back was a discussion of attitudes about working in the field and voter registration work versus Freedom School teaching. Did you have any sense of that at the time, with status of one or the other?

LT: I felt that I had status. I felt that I had—that I was privileged because I was able to have more exposure to black families, black adults. To be approaching their homes, not that I was invited inside often. But I had an opportunity to talk to adults. Whereas the Freedom School teachers were dealing more, I think, in Greenville with young children. I felt that I knew more about the politics of civil rights than the Freedom School teachers who I think, they were all white women.

EC: So why did you think you knew more than the teachers?

LT: From my summer at Tougaloo.

EC: So because you had more Civil Rights exposure.

LT: Yes. [00:55:00]

EC: Who did you work with canvassing?

LT: We canvassed as a team. One black and one white, and Pam Troutman, I think, I went with often. She was a graduate of Howard and had been recruited by Stokely Carmichael to come down. She was black and local—. Local high school students, I think, went out with us. There were some—. I'm thinking of two older men that I canvassed with. One was Charles Moore and the other was James Williams.

EC: Was that a concern for anyone in the project? That you were canvassing with black men?

LT: No.

EC: Who was the project director?

LT: George Rowell was our project director. He was from the University of Chicago. He was a graduate student, I believe, and he was there for the first month and then Muriel Tillinghast became the project director. I never knew—. I knew that George was our project director and I thought that he was not, he was not in the SNCC mode of working slowly. He was approaching this as a project, as a project that he was going to be the director of. But I always thought that Charlie Cobb was our project director. [Laughs]

EC: [Laughs]

LT: He was the project director for Washington County, Sharkey County, and Issaquena County, all three, the region, and he wasn't there very much. He was travelling in the state. He was, I think, he was one of the people who went to Neshoba County to look for the missing civil rights workers.

EC: So you thought Charlie was the project director?

LT: Right. And he told us what to do.

EC: But then you found out in retrospect, with research?

LT: Yes. I found out that—. Dottie Zellner, when I talked to her on the phone, said, “Oh, Muriel was your project director.” And I said, “Oh?” [Laughs]

EC: How did Dottie know? Was she relying on memory or documents or both?

LT: Well, it’s a fact. I mean, she would know. You know. She knows Muriel I think, from New York.

EC: No, I know. I’ve talked to her too. I just, you know, sort of—

LT: But that made me realize. And then my friend Pat Vale, she certainly confirmed it. Pat and I got to know each other on the project and have been in touch ever since.

EC: Because I think, at least for part of that summer, Muriel was working in Sharkey.

LT: Issaquena.

EC: Issaquena with—

LT: Unita Blackwell.

EC: Right.

LT: She came and went I think. Or else we probably operated without a project director.

EC: Yeah it’s just interesting because I thought she started there, at least. I interviewed Muriel last summer too. For my own work. So what was it like to be in Greenville?

LT: What was it like? I felt safe. I felt less at risk. I did not feel that courageous, what I was doing. We moved in the black community freely. We never went to the white community. There was no reason to. And it was hot. Just—we tried to canvass at any time of the day, all day long. We lived in community. That was, that was the most—probably the most significant—one of the most significant parts of the summer for me, to be living with a black family.

EC: Who did you live with?

LT: I lived in the south end. Well the first, the first couple of days, the first day, I slept on the floor of the Freedom House. There was no housing, but I was confident that Charlie could work this out for us. And there was nothing I could do about it, of course, either. [01:00:00] There were three of us stuck together, I think, the whole summer. Valerie and Lynn and I, and they were both in research, whereas I was in voter registration. We got a place to stay with a widow who lived alone across the street in a house that was just like the Freedom House. And we probably shared a bed in the front room and I looked forward to taking a bath after a night on the road. We had driven—. I had gotten a ride, I didn't go on the bus from Oxford and we had slept overnight at a house in Memphis and the next night I was sleeping on the floor in the Freedom House. And as soon as—. I mean I can see the depth of the water in the bottom of the tub and the woman yells, "Don't use too much water!" We were out of there in a couple of days. She decided that she did not want the risk of having three white women staying in her house. We went to the home of a woman who I think was more independent. She had a veterans pension income and social security. Her daughter was living with her and she was wonderful. I just wanted to sit at her kitchen table and hear her stories and talk to her.

EC: Do you remember her name?

LT: Mrs. Harden, I think. And there was a boy in the neighborhood. We went to church with her, and there was a boy in the neighborhood who said, "The Uncle Toms are trying to run her out of church because she took you to church." And I thought that was terrible. We—I moved from there, because that was in the south end and our voter registration office was on Nelson Street in the north end and the three of us lived with Jerry and Lamar Britton and they had a large brick air-conditioned house. And Valerie and I had a double-bed room on the first floor. And this place was open house for us. It was wonderful.

EC: What kind of work did they do? How did they—

LT: They owned a drug store at the corner of North and Nelson and they both worked in the store and Mrs. Britton lay on the couch in the den—the house was very open. The kitchen and the eating area and this den area and then we had this room off the side. And she said don't ever get those hot flashes. [Laughter]

EC: And you're like I'm in Mississippi in the summer. What are you talking about? What were—what are Valerie and Lynn's last names?

LT: Lynn Hamilton and I just had to look up Valerie's last name. And I want to say Horton, but I'm not sure that's correct.

EC: So did you have a routine where everyday you'd get up at a certain time and go out canvassing?

LT: No. No routine. We went to the office and we divvied up the city. You know, the areas, so we weren't overlapping each other.

EC: So you were pretty much working in the city of Greenville.

LT: Yes. A little but outside, but there was—we had a transportation problem.

EC: That's what I was going to ask. Were you walking pretty much?

LT: Yes, yes, yeah. If you could get a free ride, probably, with a black taxi driver.

EC: So when you go door-to-door, did you—what was the experience like when you were asking people about registering?

LT: Pretty much neutral. Non-committal and not interested. You know, life is okay. Status quo. There wasn't a strong response. What it turned into, very quickly, was not voter, typical voter registration. [1:05:00] "We want you to go to courthouse to register," but to—but freedom registration for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which was the alternative.

So I had a clipboard with—. And I have a picture of me carrying the clipboard. Some photographer was behind Pam and me one day and took a picture. A great picture. “Would you register for the Freedom Democratic Party?” And fill out this form and anybody could register. You were not required to be literate even, just to be able to sign your own name. And we had to explain the Freedom Democratic Party so that would be, that would be the nature of my canvassing.

EC: Did you have better response to the request for Freedom Party registration?

LT: Yes, yes. We had to assure people that this was not going to become public knowledge. And unlike voter—unlike applying—an application for voter registration, you didn’t just register to vote, you had to apply and qualify through the literacy tests, including the interpretation of the Mississippi State Constitution provision that happened to be given to you to the satisfaction of the registrar, who had complete discretion and then publicity of your name in the newspaper, the local newspaper for two weeks to test your moral character? That meant everyone knew who was seeking to register to vote. That was such a deterrent I think for people.

EC: So your impression is that people were much more willing because there was more protection around the Freedom registration, more privacy?

LT: We were more apt to get somebody to sign that Freedom registration form by saying, “This form is not going to go anywhere. We are going to keep the form.” I think that would still be a risk for somebody. But that was—that was our accomplishment, was to go back to the office with signed Freedom registration forms.

EC: So who did you report to when you would come back, you know, when you would go in the morning or when you would come back with the forms, who would you hand them off to or—

LT: I have no recollection. I guess, I guess it was probably Pat, who filled in. Pat was—went down from—she had been working as a legal secretary, as a secretary in the law school at Harvard when she heard about the Mississippi Summer Project and applied and she was assigned to be a Freedom School teacher. But she knew how to type, so she became the Freedom secretary and worked in the office. And she would have kept track of that kind of thing.

EC: So some people have talked about issues of black deference to white volunteers during canvassing and stuff like that. Did you experience that?

LT: That is why we went out as a team, as a black and white team. We did not want people to agree to register just because it was a white asking for that to be done and to—for them to defer to an authority figure.

EC: Yeah. So you mentioned earlier that because of your experience in Greensboro, you'd had experience with, relationships with black men and so that that wasn't a big deal for you in the summer of '64. Do you remember it being an issue on the project for other people?

LT: The only—no, no. The only thing I remember in terms of what about the sex on the project is that one of the white volunteers left and the word was that she was pregnant and she left with a black volunteer. Now how she knew that fast that she was pregnant, I don't know.

EC: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Can we pause?

[Recording stops and then resumes.]

EC: Are you ready John?

JB: Yeah, we are on.

EC: You mentioned Charlie Cobb. Had you met him in '63 when you were in Mississippi or did you know him then through the—

LT: No, no.

EC: Summer project. [01:10:00] So after you did the Freedom registration were you involved in the precinct meetings or any of that groundwork with the FDP?

LT: Yes. We were—there were six precincts in Greenville, where we elected precinct delegates and I was in charge of one of those precincts and we had—we didn't just have a precinct meeting, but we had a workshop before the precinct meeting for people to understand what the process was going to be. And I canvassed with Mr. Williams the day of the workshop, I believe. And maybe we had 12 people at his house or at a neighbor's house. But at the precinct meeting we got 20 people and I thought that was pretty good, although I had been scornful earlier in the summer when Freedom school teachers came back from an NAACP meeting, saying that they were ready to move and that there were 20 people there. I thought the NAACP is not moving. We need to find new people who will be more aggressive [phone rings] working towards civil rights.

We—at the precinct we elected delegates to the county convention and then I went to the county convention and was very interested in the way that was conducted because there was a local man, Mr. Chapel, who was active in the Democratic Party I think, who decided that he could run this meeting better than the neophytes, the new people coming in to politics that had been recruited by the MFDP. And he tried to get a chairman elected and that didn't work, but then he moved that all the precinct delegates who were present should be elected county delegates. And managed to get that seconded and passed. And this is local people who are looking to their traditional leaders, intending to listen to them, as opposed to thinking about what the alternatives are and pushing for an alternative. And so my—what I noted in a letter home was he got a strange bunch in there and there were some people that were very strong with the MFDP

that we had been working who were then elected county delegates. The comment that I got from a couple women at the end of that meeting was, “They step in at the end, but where were they when we were doing all the work?” They were resentful and I was glad to hear that expression of opinion because that was my opinion.

EC: So the delegation from Greenville or from—was it Washington County? Included then some of the traditional leaders because of that?

LT: Yes.

EC: And then some of the newer leaders.

LT: Yes.

EC: And the women who had been more active with SNCC and the FDP were not happy about that combination.

LT: Yes, yes.

EC: Do you remember who some of the strong local leaders were, that were working with SNCC and the FDP.

LT: Well Dorothy Jones was, worked for the Hodding Carter family, was one of the people. Edna Morton housed volunteers. I know—Pat knew her quite well. Willie Rowlin I believe was elected then. I can’t think of other names.

EC: Were women more involved in the FDP than men?

LT: In Greenville. I think so.

EC: That’s your impression?

LT: Mm-hmm.

EC: Did you think about that at the time? Or did you have any sense of that?

LT: No [01:15:00] it wasn't—. That's something that, you know, you historians think about in retrospect, but we were—. And the explanation for why women were more able to stand up to the pressures than men were—. Men were, men were going to be lynched if they did it, and women were more likely to be, not respected, but allowed to do something for civil rights.

EC: Partly I'm just curious if its something you thought about at all at the time. Because some people did and some people didn't.

LT: No I don't think so.

EC: So did you then follow the Greenville delegation to the Jackson convention?

LT: Well you skipped a step. There was a district caucus.

EC: There was a district caucus. Who was the district caucus?

LT: The second district. The second district.

EC: Okay so it's the congressional districts.

LT: Yes. So was the Delta.

EC: Alright.

LT: And it was held in Greenville. We met at the Friendship Baptist Church, which was formally a movie theater, a big place, and they came in on Sunday and Fanny Lou Hamer led the singing and it was fabulous.

EC: Had you seen her since the summer before?

LT: No, but I saw her that day and, you know, recalled my being at her home. She gave me a big hug, you know. That was, that was a highlight.

EC: So that must have been probably one of the most important district meetings then, the second district?

LT: I don't know how it would compare to the others.

EC: Because the Delta had—

JB: The Delta, sure, coming in—

EC: Would have had the strongest FDP presence. So I guess—

JB: Can I just ask, so these meetings, was this mirroring the normal Democratic Party, the congressional district offices, was it recreating a shadow—

LT: Yes, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was established to parallel the Mississippi Democratic Party and we set up procedures that would be, that would match completely what was required by state law. And—

EC: Do you remember people in Greenville trying to go to the regular Democratic precinct meetings?

LT: No, that was before. That would have been in early June.

EC: Okay, so that was before you were in—. Did you know what their experience was?

LT: I believe that's correct. They were admitted and in one precinct they passed the resolution of support for the national ticket, the national candidates and ticket.

EC: What else do you remember from the district meeting, besides Ms. Hamer leading the singing and getting to see her again?

LT: I remember that I was so enthusiastic, that this was going to work. That—to see people participating in politics. It was very exciting.

EC: How did the delegate selection process go at that stage?

LT: I don't remember specifically, but the district caucus was not electing delegates, but was coming up with a recommended list of delegates that would be, that would go to the state convention and the state convention would actually elect the 68 delegates who would go to the National Convention in Atlantic City, and I believe then at the district caucus I was pleased that

Mr. Chapel did not get recommended as a delegate. I was afraid that he would undercut the new MFDP people.

EC: But he wasn't successful at that stage.

LT: But at the state convention, I learned somehow that he got nominated by another district, but he did not get elected to go to Atlantic City.

EC: Was he at the state convention?

LT: He managed to get to the state convention. He was in the city on other business.

EC: [Laughs] He didn't want to let it go. What was his position in Greenville?

LT: He was—. He had a printing business. [01:20:00] He was a successful businessman. There are oral interviews in the William Alexander Percy Library in Greenville and I, which were just fascinating [phone rings] and one of them telling me what Mrs. Britton thought of me.

EC: [Phone rings] What did she think of you? [Laughs]

LT: That the volunteers were not—were not hippie scruffy kids, whatever—whatever words she used there, but were nice. She worried about us coming home at night, but she didn't worry about herself and the house or anything. We had—. She gave us free reign. Sometimes she even cooked dinner for us. But, that fall her husband died and she said that everyone on the project sent her a note and that the following summer I stopped in the drug store to say hello to her and I was well dressed then. I hadn't been the summer before, you know.

EC: [Laughs] When were these oral histories done? Do you know?

LT: 1978 I think.

EC: Do you know who was doing them?

LT: Daisy Bates or someone. A woman who—. Many of the people she interviewed were school teachers, I understand.

EC: Okay.

LT: Many people that were important to the movement she did not interview.

EC: Okay yeah.

LT: And her daughter Sheila Jackson is in Greenville and has not been very cooperative in letting go of whatever additional materials she has.

EC: That's too bad.

LT: The same interviews are also in the state archives. Duplicate copy.

EC: Yeah interesting that they were done that early. A sort of collection. So you were at the state convention?

LT: No, no, I was not. For awhile I thought I was, [laughs] but I read in a letter [laughs], well the first question was there was a meeting in the evening in Greenville that I went to. And I said how could I have done both on the same day? And then I saw a reference that I was writing letters and ironing that afternoon. So I was not at the state convention, but I read about it so many times that I had the sense—

EC: You felt that you were there. You thought you remembered it.

LT: I had the sense of it. Let me interject one thing about—that I should have said about Charlie Cobb. What he told us to do was to, in all of our recruiting for voter registration, to work around the local leaders and it dawned on me later that what he was saying was that we were to be finding new voices and that, and allowing new people to stand up and speak up on their own behalf rather than continuing to defer to established—the established leadership. That is what we now call empowerment. We were empowering people, and I don't think we ever used that word. And it's just like, well, everything you read now about the beloved community. We never talked

about the beloved community, that we were living in that near ideal state of where class and race and economic status make no difference, that we are all apart of the human family.

EC: So that characterization comes later.

LT: No. It comes from Martin Luther King, far earlier, that he—that he wrote about it as the outgrowth of nonviolence and reconciliation. That we would eventually arrive at the beloved community, that that was our goal.

EC: Did you have any sense in your interactions with SNCC and in the summer about the sort of different views on nonviolence and those sorts of ideas that had been debated in the group at different points?

LT: Yes we had some militant black guys on the project who were talking. [01:25:00] Were not—who were talking about the possibility of violence.

EC: In terms of retaliation, in terms of self-defense?

LT: Not self-defense, but just the anger—the anger, the lack of optimism, the feeling of helplessness, that this nonviolence stuff is not working.

EC: Now were these folks who were SNCC staff, or local people, or volunteers?

LT: They were. I wondered what their status was. They were—. They appeared to be SNCC staff. They were assigned by COFO, Jackson to Greenville. They were, I think, both new to the community, college students. And they were—. They spoke anti-Bob Moses. That he doesn't know, he doesn't know what's going on. You know, he's on his way out of the movement. That they knew, you know, what needed to be done. We had a demonstration the first week on the project. We—and this was instigated by the local chapter of the Mississippi Student's Union, the high school students—. They wanted to, after we heard about the disappearance of the three civil rights workers, they wanted to demonstrate for federal

protection. And we picketed at the federal building, mid-day, and I prepared to be arrested for the first time. And had my toothbrush or something in my pocket. And nothing happened. The police looked on, the passersby looked on. We were out there for a couple of hours, but we were clearly instructed during orientation not to demonstrate. And when Bob Moses in Oxford heard that there was a demonstration in Greenville he said, "That's not true. That couldn't be." I have that in one of my letters. [Laughs]

EC: [laughs] So did you all get—

LT: But what I was leading to was—. These two fellows wanted to have a demonstration the next week. You know, they wanted to, I think, demonstrate at the black swimming pool that whites should be able to swim in the black swimming pool. And I was opposed to that. You know, I thought we—maybe we could tell Jackson that we wanted to do it and if they, if COFO in Jackson said, "Okay," then that would be okay, but we should not do that.

EC: How did that get resolved?

LT: It didn't happen. It got dropped, but I think—. But there was a later demonstration at the federal building and that's the subject of one of the letters from Mississippi that Barbara Mutnick wrote.

EC: What was that demonstration about? What was the second—

LT: The same, I think. That was also for federal protection. The idea was that if local people wanted to demonstrate, were we going to say, "Oh, we can't do that?" Or were we going to support them because we wanted their support.

EC: Do you remember, were there discussions with sort of longer term COFO staff about the first demonstration or the second one because of that very dilemma?

LT: We had long discussions about whether to demonstrate and whether we should apply for a permit and one of these fellows called up the police chief and said we are going to be there in 15 minutes, [phone rings] so that's how that was decided [laughs]. But, okay—.

EC: So it was mainly, so that the impetus for the demonstrations is the same guys that are talking about violence, the ones that you said came from the Jackson—through the COFO?

LT: They and—with the high school students.

EC: With the high school students.

LT: Yeah.

EC: I mean I know that there were tensions in Greenwood about demonstrations and sort of SNCC was being called conservative for not wanting to demonstrate in Greenwood that summer. That exact tension that you describe. So are there other things [1:30:00] that stand out for you from that summer that you remember?

LT: Well one—. Somebody asked me once what did we do for fun? I had to think about that. What was fun during that summer? I felt that I was working very hard, that I was very committed to this work. And the, one way to respond to that was, well, somebody else said it to me first, but what I enjoyed was sitting in one of these cafes over a meal sharing a quart of beer and talking, in a group. It wasn't going to be Charlie Cobb, he never joined our group, and I don't know who the interesting local blacks were, because it wasn't just us white volunteers there, but just to talk about what are we doing? What should we be doing? What's going on? Not that we were great strategists or anything and could influence things, but we were so involved in the issues of civil rights the—. We had one event on the Fourth of July. Dr. Frisbee who was the prominent doctor in town, invited the, all the project volunteers, and I think there were 35 of us, to his home for a picnic, a barbecue picnic and the neighbors were there. That was a very nice

occasion where we got to see one another, because we had separated throughout the city. And answer questions from the, from local people. These were the middle class, well to-do established people in Greenville. But the other thing, when I've contacted the volunteers recently that we all remember is the time that we were invited to swim in Hodding Carter's pool. And we were—. This was Dorothy Jones and she asked me if I would like to stay overnight because the Carters were going out of town and she didn't want to be alone with the baby. And then, bring along some people and you can swim. Well it quickly turned into the whole project going over to swim. And we—. The girls I've talked to were trying to remember, we didn't go down to Greenville with our bathing suits, how did we, what did we do? One person thought that they had bathing suits that we could use in the pool house and somebody else said we probably just stripped down and swam in our shorts and our clothes and this was delightful. Suddenly, the party was broken up by two or three men riding into the property on horseback and apparently the neighbors thought something strange was going on and they were there to protect the Carters and we quickly disbanded, got back to the project somehow, with whatever little transportation that we had. But Barbara and Nancy did stay overnight and they would never do this in somebody's house, but they opened the drawer of the nightstand by the bed and there was a revolver in there. Barbara wrote in a letter that the place was fully armed. It was like an arsenal.

EC: [Laughs.] One revolver?

LT: I don't know what else she saw.

EC: Did Dorothy Jones face repercussions for throwing this pool party?

LT: No, that was with consent and I've talked to Hodding Carter about it so. And Charlie, Charlie Cobb referred to it in his interview at Southern Mississippi.

EC: So he remembered it too?

LT: Everybody remembered it! It was a major event of the summer. I mean can you imagine being in a swimming pool when you are a civil rights worker in Mississippi? The summer of 1964?

EC: Nope. [Laughter.] Pretty much not.

LT: Pat tells me that she used to go downtown and walk into a bank to cool off in the air conditioning.

EC: I can see that. [01:35:00]

LT: I went downtown by myself once to buy something. I found my way—. We were not supposed to be traveling alone, ever.

EC: Did you feel restricted by that?

LT: No.

EC: You mentioned a comment earlier by Johnny Frazier, when you said you were getting ahead. Is now a good time to?

LT: Right he—. What's interesting about Johnny Frazier that I learned from, I think I learned from Hodding Carter, if somehow I put together Johnny Frazier, who I met in 1963—. He spoke to our group besides speaking at a mass meeting that we went. He was the head of the NAACP Youth Chapter, that he was from Greenville. And he was—. When he was a student at Coleman High School, he wore a black armband to school because of the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision in mourning that they were not doing anything about it. Or whatever his theory was, but he was suspended. And Hodding Carter apparently wrote an editorial about this, and they met, but he was allowed back into the school because his aunt said that, well, they'd sue to integrate the white high school if they wouldn't let him back into the black one. So they let him back in.

EC: It's good to know what the—how the levers work isn't it. [Laughs]

LT: But his daughter, I think, Neshani Frazier is at Miami University and she's been a sponsor of the reunions and I saw him there somehow—. I don't know that I identified him but whether he had a nametag on him or something and I said, "Are you the Johnny Frazier from Greenville and Jackson?" And I told him that I was trying to write up my story in retirement and he gave me a big bear hug and said, "Thank you for what you did to open things up."

EC: That must have been nice.

LT: And the other person who did that for me is Dorie Ladner and I'll never forget that. And that was many years ago, when—. I don't know what the year that *Freedom on my Mind* came out?

EC: That would have been about '94. It was either fall '94 or spring '95.

LT: See I was working. I was not involved at all in civil rights activities or recollections or anything, but I knew that the film was being shown at the Biograph, the old Biograph Theater, and there was just a gathering of people. I remember Heather Booth was there. And she was saying hello to Senator Paul Simon. I remember that. But that's when I first met Dorie or knew that Dorie was in Washington.

EC: So had you known Dorie from Mississippi?

LT: No.

EC: Because she wasn't at Tougaloo that summer, I don't think. So what did Dorie—so you met her at that film?

LT: She said—. I said I was a summer volunteer in 1964 and she said, "Thank you."

EC: Have you stayed in touch or seen her in D.C.?

LT: Yes, I've seen her on a number of occasions.

EC: I think Johnny Frazier was on a list of names, one of the list of names Bob Moses was sending back to Jane Stembridge in the summer of '60 of the people that he met when he was touring, looking for, you know, contacts in Alabama and Mississippi. Anyway, Johnny Frazier was one of the young people he identified.

LT: Okay. Okay.

EC: Back in the summer of '60. So you said you were at the Atlantic City Convention? You didn't just make that memory up?

JB: Let's break for—

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay Atlantic City.

LT: I decided early on that I wanted to go to the convention and because Atlantic City is just a couple of hours from Summit, it would be feasible. So Pat and I went to our house, stayed overnight and drove down to Atlantic City and missed entirely Saturday—Fanny Lou Hamer's testimony. [01:40:00] Didn't see it on television. We did have a television at that time. And stayed in the church of, Union Baptist Temple Church, where the meetings were held of the MFDP delegation. Slept there and spent our days walking on the boardwalk talking to delegates, urging them to vote, to seek the MFDP delegation. Or we were participating in the vigils and the rallies outside convention hall.

EC: With something like that, you decided you wanted to be there and it wasn't too far from your home. Is there any kind of—do you have an official role there? Is there any kind of effort by the project to decide who's going to be there and who's not? Or what work people are doing at this point?

LT: Well the project, I think, recruited people in August. Recruited volunteers—

EC: So wanted people to go.

LT: To work with their state delegations. Now I had three people doing that in New Jersey, who left the project early to go back to find New Jersey delegates. Now I didn't know any Democratic, any delegates, Democratic delegates to the convention. So I didn't feel that I had that role and the other thing that's interesting is that Pat and I didn't make any effort to find a role for ourselves. We were freelance. We just—we knew what we were supposed to do, was to get the delegation seated however we could. But we didn't look for the organizer of that effort and I have learned that Ella Baker was really putting together the state delegation support from the Washington office of the MFDP and Eleanor Holmes was working with her, particularly after she finished writing the brief for Joe Rauh. And Eleanor told me last month or whatever, when I interviewed her that Ella said to her, "I really don't want to do this to organize the lobbying operation. Would you do it for me?"

So she was at the Gem Hotel where the delegation stayed and where Sharlene Kranz, young SNCC volunteer secretary from, in Washington, was organizing the transportation to get the delegates out to meet state caucuses and individual members of the credentials committee to get support. Pat and I never went to the Gem Hotel. We never—. I had never even heard of the Gem Hotel when I was there. But we were at the church, we were doing our own thing walking around on our own and we, every time we heard there was a meeting at the church, we went to those open meetings. So that was Tuesday afternoon, after the credentials committee voted the symbolic two seat offer and on Wednesday after the convention adopted the credential committee's decision. And the Johnson administration wanted the delegation to reconsider its refusal of that offer. And I—we couldn't get a seat, there were so many people. Because I can remember standing in an outside aisle, listening to this fascinating discussion where these

prominent, prominent people were saying this is a great deal. Take the deal. This is fabulous. And they called it “the compromise.” [01:45:00] It was no compromise, because there were not two sides, each with a position that came together and each side gave up something and they reached an agreement. There was no agreement.

EC: So what did you—. What was it like to sit there and hear all those people, prominent people, civil rights supporters taking those positions?

LT: I felt like, you know, I was in on history. I don't know that I saw historical significance, but I was seeing these, you know, Senator Morris and Bayard Rustin was of course the elegant speaker, but not persuasive. I knew that the MFDP should be seated.

EC: How did—do you remember how the MFDP delegates responded? Where you there when the—

LT: I recall that very few of them spoke up in the open discussion.

EC: And so it may be they spoke up when it was closed, when, after—

LT: They were the only people—

EC: Because at a certain point it was closed to just the delegation.

LT: They went to a different room.

EC: To caucus.

LT: Everybody says that we were evicted from the big room. They moved—

EC: To a different room.

LT: It was very clear that there were only 68 people there.

EC: And so at that point—

LT: And then so we all waited in the big room and finally someone came out and said they voted no.

EC: So that small meeting, when it's just the delegates, at that point people like Ella Baker and Bob Moses aren't there either?

LT: Correct. Absolutely. There was nobody there. What I've learned is that the credential committee supporters, the last supporters, that came on Tuesday afternoon after the vote and I think Edith Green apparently spoke, and I distinctly remember that Martin Luther King was not allowed to speak, that he was hushed, hushed out. But they met separately and they agreed to keep their discussions confidential.

EC: So tell me—what are we talking about now?

LT: Tuesday afternoon after the credentials committee decision—

EC: So after the decision—

LT: Where everybody's back at the church.

EC: And everybody's back at the church.

LT: The delegates learn the decision from Joe Rauh and he says I recommend you support it.

EC: Alright.

LT: What?

EC: And then at that point you said King wasn't allowed to speak?

LT: Correct on Tuesday afternoon.

EC: On Tuesday afternoon. And then what was the part about Edith Green and the other supporters?

TL: She—yeah then they—they came from their meeting to the church and they got themselves together. They had a little meeting somewhere. And what were they going to do? Were they going to still try to file a minority report?

EC: Okay. And then they agreed to keep those discussions confidential and so, but they ultimately didn't do a minority report.

LT: Correct because they—

EC: Did they not have the numbers?

LT: Because Joe Rauh decided that they, he didn't have the numbers. Aaron Henry said that they had ten. Joe Rauh says they had—I think he said, they had—I think he had eight and he didn't want to look for three more.

EC: What is your sense of Rauh's role in all of it, since you have been—. I guess before I ask that question, I should say you've been doing research so that part of this is your memory and part of this is the research you've been doing for quite awhile now.

LT: Right, right.

EC: That's focused pretty much on the FDP and the challenge, right? Is that a fair characterization? How it's evolved. Why don't you say what the project is.

LT: Okay, what the project is—what happened. When I retired in April 1, 2006, seven years ago, and I retired in order to write something that was more interesting than what, than the writing I had been doing in my work, and I talked to a couple of people who are writers, friends from high school and they asked me questions like whose your audience? What's your purpose? Why are you doing this and they suggested, and this was good advice I think, to write a memoir, to write it as fast as I could from my [01:50:00] memory, and to get my letters transcribed and my diary also transcribed. And I had a former secretary who was able to do that for me. And so by August 1 I had something.

EC: Wow.

LT: Because what I wanted to—the reason I wanted to write was not to write a memoir about my story of what I did during the Mississippi Summer Project, but I wanted to write about the MFDP Convention Challenge to find out why we lost. What happened? What was going on? Because I didn't understand it and I left disillusioned. That's when the questions got hard about, you know, what are you trying to do? And I couldn't explain myself very well so I proceeded along this memoir route, and I only read Taylor Branch's summary of what happened in Atlantic City and I got it. I got an idea. But then I started reading more and got confused with the sequence of events and my first research, I think, was at UNC at Anne Romaine's oral interviews. And that made me want to do more. Then my niece was getting her Ph.D. at the University of Texas and so I went down and stayed with them and went to the LBJ Library and learned about the Johnson tapes of his conversations, that you can listen to very easily on the internet and that was incredibly eye opening. And then I just kept working on the story of Atlantic City. I produced a research paper that—250 pages called “New Perceptions: Atlantic City Revisited”—and Hodding Carter read it and was impressed, but he said it needs, it really needs editing. [Laughs]

EC: Too much detail?

LT: No, I think it was repetitive and all over the lot and I was hurrying. I was—I wanted to get something done, to get something circulated. I wanted to send it to some people to read and I was going to have surgery in March of 2008 and I swear I sent it in the mail the day before I went to New Orleans for surgery. So then I tried to put both stories together. And then I got told I had a hybrid that didn't work either way and then I kept pursuing it. And so—. But I did more and more research and then our friend John Dittmer advised me that the writing that he read

required footnotes. So that's been my last effort to footnote all the material and in the course of doing that, to realize the omissions. The things that I still don't have in the manuscript.

EC: So what are some of the pieces that you still don't have? What are some of the pieces that you still don't have?

LT: A single document. For example, there's a letter about the sit-ins on the convention floor that somewhere in the LBJ documents that I have somewhere on my computer that said why they decided to allow the sit-ins to go forward. They did not want a televised confrontation.

JB: In retrospect, was Johnson the bad guy in this?

LT: Johnson opposed the seating of the Freedom Democrats because—. The traditional answer is that he was afraid of losing Southern electoral votes and afraid of losing the election to Goldwater, who was the most frightening man that could possibly have become president of the United States. And it's more than that though that I've discovered because the riots had begun in Rochester and Harlem that summer [01:55:00] already, the summer of 1964, and the term backlash was in our lexicon and Johnson did not want the election to be about race. That would have been the only way he could have lost, or come close to losing, and it was a fear of losing white votes throughout the country. And he did not want any black delegates on the floor of the convention. And he didn't want that in part on the advice of his friend Governor John Connolly of Texas, and he did not want to lose his Texas votes and he was already in trouble because he had supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

EC: So what is your take on Rauh's role?

LT: The challenge would not have gone forward without Rauh. He was critically important. He claims that he lined up the state delegates support, he and his politically savvy people, not the SNCC workers like Frank Smith and Reggie Robinson and Leslie Macklemore,

who were working out of the Washington office that summer. He did a brilliant job at the credentials committee hearing. The sequence of testimony, of course, the most effective part of the hearing was Fanny Lou Hamer's testimony. But he argued and obtained the large ballroom. The administration intended they were going to be in a small room, with maybe television coverage and he was able to get that out of the administration. He held out through Sunday, when he thought he had the votes, he claimed he had the votes for a minority report, so he was able to cause the delay. He definitely had two roles. He was not 100 percent for the Freedom Democrats. He was—. The other part of him was for himself and his role within the Democratic Party. What I found astounding was that he offered to withdraw in a letter to the White House, but he said, "but I advise that I not withdraw because then it would be run by the commies," meaning Bill Kunstler and Arthur Kinoy would become counsel for the Freedom Democrats at the convention. And he could keep things under control.

EC: So this is a letter before the convention starts.

LT: Yes.

EC: And so at that point he clearly understands that where the challenge could end up going could be at conflict with his alliance with the national Democratic Party.

LT: The national Democratic Party did not want—. The main thing they did not want a floor fight. A floor vote by all the delegates because that would highlight the totally different wings of the Democratic Party. The North for Civil Rights, the South for segregation.

EC: Do you think when he—. Do you think when he became initially involved, that he understood that the challenge could create this difficulty for the national Democratic Party? Do you think it became something bigger than what he initially thought?

LT: Yes. He wanted to change the party. He wanted the reform and when the reform would take place and how it would take place and whether the Freedom Democrats would be seated, they had to have, to make the change in the party, they had to have a vehicle and the Freedom Democratic Party was a vehicle to make the challenge and to force the leadership of the party to do something. Walter Reuther was never enthusiastic about the challenge and he was close to Johnson and he saw a political problem [02:00:00] that Rauh did not see in a sense at the beginning.

EC: Are there other aspects of the challenge that has been particularly interesting for you to learn about through your research?

LT: Courtland Cox has been very open about the request that Charles Diggs, who was a member of the credentials committee, prominent liberal Democratic congressman from Michigan. Diggs requested the list of members of the credentials committee that supported the MFDP and he made that request of Bob Moses and Cortland Cox. And Moses was reluctant and Cox said, "What do you mean? Do you think he is—. Of course, you know, we want to show our support. Diggs can then show the chairman, Lawrence, of the committee our support." And there were, I think they say, 15 people on the list and that list was handed over. I'm not sure if it was Sunday night or Monday night, but overnight, calls were made to all the people on the list and they were threatened with some loss of privilege or something if they didn't change their votes, support the administration instead of the MFDP. The list is not very significant. The most you can say is what Michael Thelwell has said to me is the names kept changing. Two weeks before the convention, Larry O'Donnell, I think I have got that right. Anyway, Johnson aides were researching everybody on that—

EC: Committee.

LT: Credentials committee. They knew exactly who the supporters were. Two from Michigan, Oregon, the two from New York. The man was okay, but they were worried about the woman. The woman from California, they pegged them exactly, and they pegged whether they were, whether they were strong or weak. And what they could do. They had the analysis well in hand and they knew exactly how to reach the last two people. And they did and I found the evidence of how they did it. When they did it.

EC: So what's the evidence? What was the documentation you found?

LT: LBJ called the governor of Iowa. LBJ called a reporter, Hoyt I think his name is, from Colorado about the two Colorado delegates. They couldn't—. The woman from New York was the secretary to Mayor Wagner and John English, the other delegate, was supposed to—. They, last minute trying to reach her, the black woman from Maryland, got—I'm not, this is a secondary source—but got pressure from both in Maryland and from the national people.

EC: So—.

JB: We're going to have to stop. This disc is almost full, I am going to have to switch over.

[Recording stops and then resumes.]

JB: We are rolling.

EC: You said you had thought of a few things this morning.

LT: When you asked about what I learned about the convention challenge from research. What I tried to do was set up my proposed book to tell the story day-by-day because so many writers confuse what happened and that really changes the way the Freedom Democrats look. [02:05:00] The way the delegates look and I'm trying to give them more credit, that they deserve. A lot of the emphasis is on Hubert Humphrey, and that he worked out a compromise and he

did that because he wanted to become Vice President and Johnson put him up to do this even though he was a friend of the Civil Rights Movement. And that's true in many ways, but Hubert Humphrey only acted on Monday. And he didn't succeed. What he did also on Monday was he had his staff people running around to all the state delegations to make sure the state delegations would no longer support getting a role call vote. That they would go with the Johnson administration telling the state delegations: "Look, you're a friend of Humphrey. You want Humphrey to be Vice-President. In order for him to get the nomination, we have to please Johnson and this is what Johnson wants." So Humphrey was not totally unsuccessful on Monday. But it all happened because of Walter Reuther who arrived on Tuesday in the middle of the night. And he worked with the Mondale subcommittee to come up with the finals, what Bob Moses calls the symbolic two seat offer that the delegates would be at large and that they would be individually named people. And it was Reuther's manipulation and plan on Tuesday that made what Johnson wanted work. And it wasn't—. Because Humphrey wasn't getting it done and Reuther had to, the good negotiator, and Humphrey says, "We called him in because we needed him."

EC: So when Humphrey wasn't able to make it work on Monday through actually sitting down and talking with people. Then he calls in Reuther for a whole other level of arm twisting and deception. Manipulation.

LT: Holding two meetings simultaneously so that the credentials committee would vote and decide—

EC: The key people are separate.

LT: The leadership is listening to what the offer is and refusing to accept it. But Humphrey did not have the power to negotiate and Reuther decided not to negotiate. There were no negotiations. It was a—somebody has said it was dictation. It was take it or leave it.

EC: Was it Reuther—and it was a very conscious manipulation Reuther sets up to essentially keep the leadership tied up while the credentials committee is voting. Did anybody besides Rauh at the credentials committee meeting know that the leadership is in this meeting ostensibly discussing what the compromise might look like?

LT: The statements made at the credentials committee meeting were that Aaron Henry and Ed King knew about the offer and accepted it. And Mondale didn't contradict that and Rauh didn't contradict that.

EC: And what have Ed King and Aaron Henry said on record about that?

LT: Nothing. I mean that's a new fact, newly uncovered fact, that hasn't been emphasized much.

EC: So they were—King and Henry were at that meeting with the leadership. Bob Moses is at that meeting. Who else is at that meeting?

LT: Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin was conducting the meeting. Not Hubert Humphrey. Not Walter Reuther.

EC: Were they there?

LT: King and I guess Andrew Young.

EC: So were Reuther and Humphrey there?

LT: Reuther—

EC: They were there but not conducting it.

LT: Yes, yes, they were there, yes.

EC: So John said that you found something that Lyndon Johnson's press conference was already established before Mrs. Hamer's—was already scheduled before Mrs. Hamer's testimony.

LT: Right. The day before their—. Johnson told the press that he would be having a press conference in the middle of the afternoon and it would be full press conference with camera. The press is saying how come? Just because the [02:10:00] governors are here for a meeting are you going to talk about the convention? Are you going to talk about your Vice Presidential nominee? And he, you know, no answer. But it was mysterious. So he was ready when he was watching the credentials committee testimony. He was ready to cut it off.

EC: So basically he anticipated that he might need to do something to distract people?

LT: I believe that's the way we have to characterize it. That he certainly knew that the, you know, that the committee hearing was scheduled. But everyone has written about it because of what Joe Rauh said. Joe Rauh told Anne Romaine that Johnson suddenly called a press conference. So everybody says hastily called, hurriedly called.

EC: So they just take it right from Joe Rauh?

LT: Yeah. Yes.

EC: And it becomes gospel.

LT: Yes. That's my take.

EC: Nothing like a little research. [Laughs]

LT: [Laughs] It's great fun.

EC: It must be interesting to do the research and match it up with your memories and then things like thinking you were at the state convention and finding out you weren't. That must be an interesting experience. A little test of how memory works.

LT: The same thing happened with me with respect to orientation. People ask me what happened at orientation and I've had trouble remembering that so I've read about that too.

EC: So going back, the difference between what you remember and what you know from what people have said about it.

LT: And I try to acknowledge that in my writing.

EC: So you talked a little—actually is there anything else about the convention that you want to say at this point before we read the book?

LT: No. I don't think so. I need to focus in my own mind about what are the newly—new facts and what the main—what my main points are before I really start talking about the book. But what I've done is just try to lay it out in what I fear many people would find is pretty dull writing. But just day-by-day and then I interject what I was doing and John Dittmer says that that adds to the story, that makes it more interesting. But I think by proceeding with my story of what I did organizing the MFDP in Greenville is—and how I got involved in the Mississippi Summer Project just makes you understand—makes the reader understand, I hope, why I care, why this is important to me. And its—and I want to set the record straight.

EC: Sure.

LT: That it's so annoying to read historians making mistakes.

EC: Yes, I understand. I agree, whether they are my own or someone else's.

LT: That's what Charlie Cobb said. We all make mistakes.

EC: Charlie's very generous. You said that when you came home and ran into your mother, or your father, and your mother was upset at the idea that you might stay and that helped you make the decision to go to law school. So what was it like to leave Mississippi or the convention challenge and start law school immediately in a whole other world?

LT: Well it wasn't immediate. I probably I had the three weeks at home to, you know, get packed and get oriented to go. One thing we did during that time, was we had a fundraiser at the Central Presbyterian Church in Summit. And Mr. Schwerner and Chip Sauerwine, who was a neighbor who was a volunteer in Drew, Mississippi, I think, and I spoke to a crowd of 600 people I think who wanted to hear about the Mississippi Summer Project, even though it's a very Republican town, but there was so much press coverage during the summer, they were interested. And the minister there had sent me a contribution earlier in the summer I know of. Because I had a couple of articles in the local newspaper. And we—we raised—I asked and they agreed that that money would go for, to support the Herbert Lee Memorial Freedom Center, which was another project I got involved in in Greenville at the end of the summer. [02:15:00] We relied on all these established leaders that I was calling Uncle Tom's to now support, organize, fund a new community center that would be available to continue the COFO programs after the summer. And I went to a couple of meetings and we got the help of a couple volunteer lawyers and because the Delta ministry was coming in, they were able to make a contribution and Dr. Matthew Page became the president and he was one of the important people for us during the summer. I hoped that he would be one of our new leaders. He was a young doctor, just pretty much starting his practice in Greenville. Local. Local man, grew up in Greenville and he, I found out later, became the president of the Herbert Lee Memorial Community Center, which was established, not in a new building as we planned with a volunteer lawyer but they purchased, no they rented or whatever, they acquired somehow, a church and adapted it, renovated it for a meetings and that became a Head Start center and is no longer in use. But the vice-president of that new Herbert Lee organization was Charles Moore, who had become active with us and he

became a member of the city council for many, many, years. And I did not have a chance to talk to him before he died, but I talked to his widow.

EC: Now you made a comment at the beginning of that talking about the traditional leadership. And, so, I didn't understand. What was their role in this?

LT: They—we organized them to raise the money. To build a community center.

EC: I see. You basically targeted them because they had the means.

LT: Yes.

EC: Where did the idea for the community center come from?

LT: Us. The COFO. Whatever, the Summer Project. We saw a need that they had a one room building that they were using and they wanted a new facility.

EC: And so the money was raised—

LT: That was just an aside because that's what I—. The only thing I did when I got back home was related to that. I drove across the country to Stanford, to law school. I lived on campus in a brand new apartment building for graduate housing with Karen Davis, whose younger sister is Linda Davis who's a volunteer in Ruleville, Freedom School teacher who was at Oberlin College and had decided to stay for a year. So this was a wonderful connection and Karen's younger, second younger sister was a freshman at Stanford and she's now I think—. I think she's now a judge in San Francisco. But that—that was a nice, nice to be able to continue the connection through the Davis's.

EC: I was going to say, was that coincidence or did you—

LT: Coincidence. Coincidence. I believe it was coincidence. Karen was a second year law student. The Law Student Civil Rights Research Council I got involved with that on campus. We had meetings, we had a small group we raised, we tried to raise money. There was a dean that

was supportive. I found in my papers that I went to Berkeley once for some kind of an event and met Arthur Kinoy there. But then I wanted to go back to Mississippi as a law clerk and so I applied and I was selected and assigned to the lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and about exam time I was invited by James Danaher to his office to talk about Mississippi, [02:20:00] because he and one of his partners were going down for a month, I think, or two weeks or three weeks, soon with the Lawyer's Committee. And I didn't know—. I mean this was a Friday afternoon, I was relaxed and I couldn't believe the naiveté of these men as I was trying to describe my experiences in Mississippi. Soon I learned Bill Robinson, with the Law Student Civil Rights Research Council in New York that I would be reassigned. [Laughs]

EC: [Laughs]

LT: They decided—. They were building an office on Ferris Street with a double paned glass window.

EC: Did you suggest that that was a problem?

LT: Spending \$4,000, which I thought was extremely extravagant. So they decided that they didn't want a movement person or they wanted one less law clerk. I learned later that—. I don't know how I learned this, whether Bill told me. Bill must have told me when I saw him later in New York, that they thought I was childish and immature. [Laughs]

EC: [Laughs] Because you didn't defer to them.

LT: Because I was just sounding off, about, you know—. I was sounding rather militant, you know. I disassociated myself from the movement. There is no question about that during law school. I was very afraid of flunking out of law school. My older brother had just flunked out of University of Minnesota law school. And I was not confident. We didn't get any grades, very

competitive environment and I was—. I was getting mailings I think. I was still getting the newsletters, *The Southern Patriot*, SNCC—

EC: *Student Voice*.

LT: *Student Voice* from—that I was getting my senior year in college. And I was reading the *San Francisco Chronicle*. That's all I was reading. I really didn't know what was going on in Mississippi anymore. I was studying, but it all came back in this conversation with these lawyers.

EC: I was going to say, was it hard to be cut off like that? Did you just—was it hard to be cut off or did you just make the transition?

LT: No, it was a natural transition. So, Bill told me to go to Jackson, to go somewhere, I don't know where I was supposed to go, he would find another assignment. So I was assigned to the National Lawyer's Guild and I lived in Tougaloo with Claudia Shropshire, Markham, who was there for one year and we were, she was—. The guild was that summer of 1965 coordinating groups of volunteer lawyers who came to Mississippi to evaluate the need for litigation to open Title III public facilities.

EC: What are Title III—

LT: Libraries, swimming pools, not restaurants, not public accommodations, but public facilities. County by county. So I was the law clerk to help these volunteer lawyers. Traveled out to the counties that were selected to do that.

EC: Do you remember which counties?

LT: Madison County.

EC: Madison is near Jackson.

LT: We went to Greenwood. Went to Greenville. That's where I saw Mrs. Britton.

EC: When you were dressed nicely.

LT: Jackson was one, but I lost my fury. There I was doing legal work, I mean I was really becoming a lawyer, transitioning to law.

EC: Did you have any concerns about working with the National Lawyer's Guild?

LT: That was, I think, why I mentioned that about my father. Yes, although, you know, we certainly heard the lecture at orientation from Bob Moses that red baiting was a thing of the past. He was—. Regardless of what the National Council of Churches said, he was accepting legal services from anyone. He was accepting help [02:25:00] from anyone and he wasn't going to be influenced that the movement was going to be tarred with the label of communist. And I remembered that during the summer, that when we were called communist that that was just red baiting, that was to be dismissed. We were—. We weren't communist. We weren't socialist. We were the Civil Rights Movement and it was straightforward and honest and real. When I was assigned to the guild, whatever reservation I might have had, later becoming a lawyer and all that, I was an employee directly of the Law Student Civil Rights Research Council. I never joined the guild as an attorney. I joined in retirement. [Laughter]

And at the beginning of May I was in Detroit and I saw Claudia Markham and we had a wonderful, wonderful reunion with John Hardy, who she knows in her building. We had a long luncheon, but she told the story, which I had no recollection of, that one day, I came out of the bathroom, I said I think there's a peeping Tom out there. And she yelled Lisa get the gun! [Laughter.] Of course, we had no gun.

EC: Right.

LT: And she heard someone scampering off.

EC: That's funny.

LT: But that—it was a good learning experience. I had a good summer, but going back to Greenville, I didn't look anybody up. I didn't enquire about the Herbert Lee Center. I didn't—I wasn't curious about the Delta Ministry.

EC: So it was like you were a different person?

LT: You know, I mean, I had, I've—. There are people who have read my drafts and say what is this? How did you not know that there was a Herbert Lee Community Center until you read a book after you retired? That's how far I think I disassociated myself from the movement. After law school, well after my second year, I clerked at the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington in the General Council's office. I think my close friend Vicky Popkin was, I think she was working in New York that summer. But she wanted—she had worked for two years before law school, in between college and law school, so she was going to be working in Washington after we finished law school. I wanted to—I didn't want to work in New York. Didn't have any connection with Boston. New York would have been too close to home. Washington was a natural place for me to work. That was a good summer. Then third year, looking for a position, I applied for all the civil rights positions, which were highly competitive. Very few of them at the Justice Department or whatever. And the Anti-Poverty Program was just beginning, and so I applied to be a legal services attorney in California. I took the California bar and they wanted a bar admission. They wanted to put you in the courtroom immediately, and I wouldn't have the bar admission until January so I continued looking in Washington. But my first job was with the United Planning Organization, which was the community action agency receiving federal funds, anti-poverty money. And we wrote delegate agency contracts, funneling that federal money out to community groups and D.C. government, it was a regional—. So even including the neighboring county governments, and within two years, I felt the effects of Black

Power. The atmosphere in the agency changed. I felt less welcome as a white trying to do my work, and I also felt that I could contribute more elsewhere or that I was not doing as much as I might. So I resigned. Interesting also that I was at the United Planning Organization the exact two years that Wiley Branton was there.

EC: Oh really?

LT: As the executive director. So I was preparing correspondence for his signature and he was—. I thought the world of him. [02:30:00] He's a wonderful, wonderful man. I took the D.C. bar and applied for private practice in D.C. and Trovon Bower recognized that I knew something about contracts and hired me and I got into the field of government contracts and practiced in that field there and with Morgan, Lewis, and Bockius for almost ten years, I guess. And that qualified me to be an administrative judge on a Board of Contract Appeals. And after a three hour interview, I was rated and I mean I was initially qualified under the statute, the Contract Disputes Act of 1978. I was then qualified, rated highly qualified. Eligible for one of the few positions that there are as a Board of Contract Appeals judge and found an opportunity at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

EC: So what does that work entail?

LT: We handled disputes that were presented by contractors. Once a contracting officer for a federal agency issues a final decision, whether that is terminating a contract for default, or denying a claim for additional funds, defective specifications, change orders, changes. The contractor can appeal to either, to the U.S. Court of Federal Claims or to an administrative board. We were intended to provide fast, inexpensive, informal relief, but it tended to be quite litigious once the attorneys were representing the contractors. We issued—. We conducted full trial type proceedings, discovery, sworn witness testimony, transcripts, and briefs, and then wrote detailed

decisions of findings of fact and conclusions of law that were issued by a panel of three judges and subject to review and appeal only to the U.S. Court of Claims, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. And I was there ten years. We did not have a large caseload that would sustain the required, statutorily required board of three full time judges so we initiated the idea of a merger of the NASA board with the Department of Defense board. And I became a judge on the armed services Board of Contract Appeals.

EC: So did that just change which contractors, but not really—

LT: The work was the same. Yeah, it was the same format. Absolutely. But the caseload was huge. The variety of appeals was huge. And the jurisdiction was worldwide.

EC: Wow.

LT: So we traveled for our hearings, for the convenience of the parties. So I had some interesting and some uninteresting trips. [Laughter].

EC: Did—

JB: I need you to stop for a—

[Recording resumes after pause.]

JB: Okay.

EC: Did your experiences with the Civil Rights Movement influence you in any of the subsequent legal work or your life?

LT: Somebody else asked me that recently and I think its interesting that we talked about nonviolence and civil disobedience so much in the Civil Rights Movement, and yet in my work, I was confined by federal law. That was my obligation was to apply the rule of law in the decision of cases. What I tried to do was offer the contractor a full and fair hearing. And to listen and to be fair and then to, of course, write a decision that would be understandable.

EC: Did you ever feel like you were constrained by what federal law was in terms of what you thought might be just [02:35:00] or right?

LT: Yes, yes. There were situations where you're, where the situation cried out that this poor contractor had really been victimized by the way the thing went and this was da da da da da. In the end, you needed to say no I'm sorry.

EC: Was that hard?

LT: It was something you had to do.

EC: So what made you want to write, retire and write something more interesting?

LT: I enjoyed the job very much and I enjoyed the independence of the job and the way, everything about it. But I learned how to do it. Every case was different and it was always interesting in that respect, but there was something of a formula to be applied to getting to a result. And I, well I got the idea for the book from a friend knowing—I have very large library of books that I acquired as they were published about the Civil Rights Movement and you know—when I mentioned the library, she said, she suggested that I write a book and then I, you know, the idea took. So I really started before I retired, I tried. I remember I talked to a literary agent and she asked for the first chapter and I was [laughter]—. I wasn't prepared to stay up nights when I was working to write the first chapter. So—

EC: So that pushed you towards retirement because you had something—

LT: But I was writing behind closed doors all those years and it wasn't—. It would not be as interesting as rethinking and revisiting Mississippi Freedom, the Mississippi Summer Project and the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and it's just opened up so much for me because I've gone to the conferences of the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement in Jackson and just met so many, so many new people, you know, it's a whole new world for me.

EC: So then in some ways the Civil Rights Movement is still, then, an influence?

LT: Yes, yes. I think it really did have a huge impact on me, even now, even though I went dormant for, I don't know, for the years after leaving law school. I did not get involved in the women's movement or the peace movement. I—

EC: You were focused.

LT: I was focused on my career. Just private practice.

EC: But you've enjoyed the writing and revisiting.

LT: Very much. I found the writing much more difficult than I expected. The project, you know, the amount of time it takes, and you know, I have been warned about it. Mary King has been very, very helpful to me. Mentoring me and she has extremely high standards. She's very meticulous in her writing and she read a couple of pages that I had written at some point, and I couldn't believe what she turned them into and the questions she asked, which I hadn't expected at all when I went over to her house for tea.

EC: [Laughs]. You didn't know you were going to have a critique session.

LT: Right, right.

EC: Peer review right here.

LT: Right, right.

EC: One of those ones where she has more to say about your writing, you know, two pages come back for every one you send in. Did your perspective on your experience and what you did, has that changed as you look back on it?

LT: Well, I'm interested in what other people say to me. You know, they kind of can't believe that I did that or that I took such courage. I never felt that way, but now you—. You know, I'm trying to follow what other people are doing and writing about and saying [02:40:00]

and as students we changed history, is one of the things that I recently heard. And we certainly did, because we did not influence the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that's a mistake that some people make, that Freedom Summer did not have anything to do with that. It was done before we got there. But the Voting Rights Act, certainly, and the reform in the Democratic Party is just absolutely incredible. And the possibility of the election of Obama in 2008 is directly traced to the work that we did. And the work was not done by a few leaders. The work was done by many, many, many people. Maybe the SNCC activist, the students, who really were in there in very, at a very dangerous time for themselves personally and maybe the volunteers going in there—. By the way, there were only 500 of us. There were not 1,000 college-aged volunteers. There were just a lot of professionals that dipped in for a couple of weeks that make up the thousand.

We made a difference, and if we made a difference maybe it took a long time, but we made a difference and we made a contribution and things are better, then I want young people today to believe that and not to be cynical and pessimistic about our current dysfunctional government with a Congress that can't seem to pass any legislation. But there is a way—. One of the things I learned to do, I think, in North Carolina, was to write a letter to state a position and I did that during the summer. I have done that since, but I think I have done it more complaining about a product than on a political issue. Living in D.C. we don't have our Congress—. A congressman, congressperson and senators. But someday we may, but I think that's always a deterrent. But I've always voted. That was the registrar in North Carolina said, "Make sure you always vote." You know, we've got to participate and it's up to every individual to do that. And once a single person finds a passion, finds something that's important, something that they want to change, then it's time to find somebody else who feels the same way and to reach out and once you have a larger group, maybe that's what we call community organizing. But getting together

into a larger mass, it will make a difference and I feel it's important to encourage that among young people. I don't—. I have not done public speaking. I have not spoken to student groups, but when I do have a chance to talk to a student, that's what I want to say.

EC: I wondered when you were talking about that, because my experience is that sometimes—that a lot of students do take that away from actually studying the Civil Rights Movement. It's one of the things they can get, if they're taught it in a certain way and that they often find it really empowering, to use that word. But to talk to people who were their age and did do things like this and it makes them ask themselves questions, what is my—. So I wondered if you had actually spent time speaking to students, if you've had that opportunity.

LT: I did speak to one history class at my class at my high school and that was, oh, that was over ten years ago I think. And somebody said, "Oh, they really lit up when you read from your diary." [Laughs].

EC: I can imagine. I can imagine. Well, can you think of anything else, anything we haven't covered and should?

LT: I don't think if you asked me if I was scared.

EC: Were you scared?

LT: [Laughs] I was scared at the beginning. But I wasn't scared when I left Oxford, which so many summer volunteers were. [02:45:00] Particularly, of course, the second group. But sitting in the Freedom House, and hearing the cars, hearing the cars going around and not knowing. It was the uncertainty. And then we learned, oh, that was the police. They were making sure that nothing was going to happen to us. And you wonder if that's true, but I think it was. Because that was the nature of Greenville. That they wanted to make sure that nothing, that

nothing was happened. There was no Klan there, no Citizen's Council was allowed to organize in Greenville.

EC: Yeah, Greenville was a little bit unusual.

LT: Right.

EC: I mean it was probably considered the safest, or one of the safest places, in the state. Right? Do you think that had something to do with your not being afraid because you knew where you were going? Or was it just that you became confident through the orientation?

LT: No, I was reassured by Greenville, that being assigned there. And the only time that I was concerned, as so many people always have written about, when you are in a car and you're on a highway, particularly at night, you notice the pick up trucks and you notice the rifle racks in the back of the pick up trucks and they're following you. You just worry, you know.

EC: Yeah.

LT: That was a standard concern. The only—. The closest thing I came to violence was being at a VFW dance at the beginning of the summer. You know, in this huge open hall, and of course I was one of—. I might have been the only white woman there. I don't know whether any, a group of volunteers went to this dance because it was a fundraiser sponsored by Charles Moore, who was very active in that VFW, to raise money for the project. I said well if they're raising money for our project, we should go. And I wanted to talk about voter registration with all these black dudes there, right, at the dance. So I was dancing. I don't know whether—. I probably had a cup of beer and danced with one guy. Danced with a second guy. The second guy asked me to go out on the porch, which was a great relief because it was so hot and crowded on the dance floor. The first guy comes out and pulls a knife.

EC: [Laughs] Danger at the VFW.

LT: That also ended my interest in black men for the summer. You know, I wasn't going to get involved. I didn't need to date the summer of 1964. So I went across the street and sat at a picnic table at some kind of barbeque joint and waited for my colleagues to take me back, back to the safe black community.

EC: So there were other colleagues at the dance?

LT: Right, right. We just had one carload I think.

EC: Well, that's good.

LT: So if you want to ask about sex and violence, that's all I can offer.

EC: That's good. That's not a bad, you know? Anything else I should ask you?

LT: No, no. I don't think so.

EC: Well thank you very much for the interview.

LT: Well it was—. I enjoyed talking about it, about these memories. Important memories.

EC: I'm looking forward to reading your book.

LT: I think you'll be interested in it having learned as much as I tried to remember in talking to you. It's complementary.

EC: Good.

LT: Because many things got taken out of the book. [Laughing]. By editors. By people who have looked at it.

[Recording ends at 02:49:03]

[END OF INTERVIEW]