

Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2015

Interviewees: Dorothy Zellner

Interview Date: December 8, 2016

Location: Baltimore, MD

Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: 1 file; approximately 3 hours, 5 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

EC: This is Emilye Crosby on December 8th, 2015. We're in Baltimore at Betty Garman Robinson's home. We're interviewing Dorothy Zellner, Dottie Zellner, as part of the Civil Rights History Project cosponsored by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Also with us is John Bishop and Guha Shankar is here as well. Dottie, could you start by telling us when and where you were born and about your family?

DZ: Yes. I was born in New York City January 14th, 1938, the oldest of three children. My parents are both immigrants. My father's people came from Lithuania to England. He was born in England. He emigrated at age eleven in 1910 to Toronto, Canada. My mother was born in Kiev, which is now the Ukraine, but she always

considered it to be Russia. A babe in arms at six months, to Toronto, Canada. Both of them emigrated to the United States. They were married here. They were both naturalized. I'm the oldest of three children. My sister is Eleanor, a year and a half younger than I, and my brother Jonathan is five years younger.

EC: Can you describe your growing up years in New York?

DZ: My father was a dentist. He became a dentist because as a Jewish person in Canada he couldn't be a teacher. There was one teacher in the entire country in Canada in the '30s, one Jewish teacher, so he became a dentist, second best, and he migrated to the United States in 1929, a very key year. Didn't have a job for three years. Actually was hospitalized at one point for malnutrition.

I'd say the big factor of my growing up as a young child was World War II. I have very distinct memories of air raid drills and pulling down black curtains on the windows. My father was eccentric, to say the least, and he and my mother, who was his quote, unquote nurse, his assistant, they worked in the front of our apartment, and we lived in the back three rooms. It was a typical immigrant mom-and-pop operation, differing only in location from many many other hundreds of thousands of families who also lived and worked in the same place. My father was totally worked up about the war. In between patients he would run back into our living space, which was three rooms in the back, and he would turn on the radio to get the war news.

My father was left-wing, my mother was left-wing, they were both highly involved in the issues of the day. And both of them had come from Orthodox Jewish

families. They were not Orthodox, they were secular. But quite Jewish. I remember the war was living in our house. The war was another member of the family.

Another early memory I had was that my father was a great movie fan. He took us to the movies. Now who us was, I must have been about seven or eight. Seven. I think the war was still going on. There was a newsreel that accompanied the film. It must have been a cartoon movie that he took us to. There was a newsreel film of the war, which he was not anticipating. I actually remember seeing a child hobbling along with crutches and one missing leg, and I became so frightened and upset that I crawled under the seat in the movie theater and they had to pull me out.

So the war was this ever present specter in our house. After the war I came across a book called *The Black Book* which was in my parents' [5:00] library. And it was a picture book of the concentration camps. I remember reading it and I guess I was about eight then. And being the oldest child, I was very protective of my younger sibs. I took the book and I threw it in the garbage. The garbage cans were in the hall outside our apartment. [Laughter] When my mother saw the book in the garbage, she had a fit. My father had a fit too. Their attitude was not that I as a young child had been petrified by these photos but that I had had the temerity to throw away a book. You never throw away a book. That was what was the message that was sent to me.

So the question about the war was, now looking back on it, a lot of fear. Were we, I mean as Jews, going to survive? Now if you had asked me that at age seven, I would not have been able to articulate that at all. But that was what was simmering around us. When I give talks now, which I have been doing for thirty years, I tell people that it was not just a theoretical question. It was an actual question. Were we going to

make it was a real question. Actually if things had happened differently, we wouldn't have. We actually wouldn't have made it.

When my father was cheering on the Red Army he was very correct to do that, because if it hadn't been for the Red Army, the German army would possibly have triumphed. So it was a very vivid thing. Hitler was a real person. These were all real. Real people.

EC: You mentioned that your father couldn't be a teacher in Toronto. So did Canada have some kind of prohibition on Jewish teachers?

DZ: I don't know if it was statutory or whether it was custom. But it was a very anti-Semitic country. He always felt that it was very provincial. Very boring, very Waspy, very provincial.

EC: Is that why they migrated? Or is that why he? Did your mother have a similar feeling?

DZ: Yes. Oh yes. Yes, yes. I think it was because both of them were exposed to the broader world. They were both on the left. And Toronto was like being in Ish Kabibble, Idaho, something like that. So that's why they came.

EC: And you talked about the war a lot and about it being almost like another part of your house and Hitler is a real person. So from that I get the impression that your parents talked to you about how Jews fit into that war.

DZ: I don't remember their actual words. But they talked about it. They talked about what was happening to the extent that they knew. And by extension their concern about Jews was extended outward to other people. Other people who were marginalized and in difficulty. I remember asking him when I was about eight or nine. I

said, "Daddy, I don't understand." I said, "How did they know who we were?" So I must have been quite preoccupied with it.

He said that they didn't know. As it turns out, that's why they had to register everybody. Because they didn't know. I remember thinking, "Well, a lot of times they didn't know who we were. But they would have known who a black person was." So from an early age I think there was a sort of an awareness. An awareness.

I do remember when I was about five, one of my younger moments actually. I remember getting on a bus with my mother in the city. There were some black people on the bus. I remember saying to her in a very loud voice, "Why aren't they speaking to each other? Are they angry with each other?" She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, they're all in the same family. Why aren't they talking?" And of course she became mortified that I had asked such a question out loud. So it made a big impression on me, that's why I remember that I had made some horrible faux pas. But I was obviously very--I was conscious. I was conscious. I don't remember that they had very many [10:00] black friends. But they did have a few. My father had a few black patients.

My father also was very very very devoted to the veterans of the Spanish Civil War. He had not gone to the Spanish Civil War to volunteer. I don't know exactly why. Later on when World War Two started he then had two children and he was in his forties. He tried to enlist, but they wouldn't take him. He was too old. But about the Spanish Civil War, he always treated all of the vets that were in his practice for free for the rest of their lives, the rest of his life. He repeated that with some of the people from SNCC. He

treated them, and he was only one part of really I think considerable number of medical people who took care of civil rights vets.

And let me hop to one story about that. When Bill Hansen was in jail--don't know where, it must have been Arkansas--and he got his jaw--.

EC: Albany.

DZ: Albany, and his jaw was broken. In Albany they wired up his jaw together, and they told him that he could get it unwired in a month. He had to walk around with his jaw wired together for a month. He was able to drink through a straw. And on the day when the wires could be taken off, I guess I arranged that, that my father would take out the wires. So he came to the office. I remember my father took all the wires out. Then Bill was totally crestfallen to find out that this had fallen on a Friday. As a Catholic he couldn't eat meat. He had been longing to have a huge steak like this big. [Laughter] He said, "Oh, no, it's Friday, I have to have fish." Of course thinking back, oh, can you imagine? I mean such a thing happening today, that would never happen today. So I don't know how many other people he treated. But I remember Bill was.

So then my father had a whole bunch of friends who came over. My mother had friends. They were all lefties. They were very concerned about everything, everything. I remember in high school I came home one day. And one of my father's friends was in the house. My father loved his friends. I said, "Well, today we were told," this was in 1954 now when I was in high school, I said, "I said in class that the United States was starting to send aid to the French to fight in Vietnam. The teacher said it was absolutely false." My father's friend Sal, two days later he came in. He said, "Take this to your

teacher.” [Laughter] And it was an article in the *New York Times*. I did. I raised my hand and I said, “I wanted you to know,” I read him the article, and he was very embarrassed, I’m happy to say. So I sort of felt like there were some adults sort of cheering us on. Because then when we were in high school we were in the depths of the McCarthy days. There were a lot of people who were sort of, I don’t know, keeping an eye on us, that we would be OK in McCarthy days.

Now during the war there was a feeling actually of camaraderie and that dissipated soon enough. I’d say by 1949 there were problems. Now in our apartment building, which consisted of six floors with the fire escape out front, which I made a mistake of describing as a tenement in an article I wrote later on in life, and my mother took high exception to this, “We never lived in a tenement,” but actually it was a tenement--a tenement is not a pejorative word actually--living in our house was a leading member of the Communist Party and his family. We were quite friendly with them and his--.

EC: I’m sorry.

DZ: In New York.

EC: You said in your house. Do you mean the apartment building? In the building?

DZ: In the building. In the apartment building. In the apartment building where I lived till I was thirteen. [15:00] We became very friendly with that family and the father, the male parent of this family, was arrested in 1951 under the Smith Act. The Smith Act charge--people don’t remember this at all when I tell these young people--the Smith Act made it a crime to advocate and conspire--no. Conspire and advocate the

overthrow of the US government by force and violence. So first you had to advocate and then you had to conspire. It was two steps removed at least from actual violence. And not one of these people was ever convicted of ever even having a peashooter, much less a gun. It was extreme McCarthyism. And it was singling out this party as the source of all devils and evils.

So of course I imagine we had FBI watching. Certainly they had FBI watching. When he was arrested, the father was arrested, it was seven o'clock in the morning, they came tramping up the stairs in the six-story building. Everybody, all of us, knew, who were in the house, that this had happened. This was very traumatic. Very traumatic.

So I always felt growing up that I was definitely marginalized. Definitely. I knew I was in a group of very unpopular people. And by then of course the McCarthyism was extreme. I mean it's even hard to describe this to younger people. Here's an example.

When I was in high school, I was a junior in high school--so I graduated in 1955. In 1954, our class decided that as a graduation speaker we wanted to invite J. Robert Oppenheimer, who was one of the atomic scientists. This was so outlandish and extreme, viewed by the principal of our high school, that he refused. Now Oppenheimer was one of the semi-semi-suspect scientists working on the Manhattan Project. Certainly not a raving red by any means but nevertheless somebody who had criticized the building of the atomic bomb, that was his great sin, and who was reluctantly participating in rearming with atomic weapons. This was such an extreme thing that they almost closed down the school. It was an unbelievable thing. Hard to even identify with.

So I don't know how deep you want to go. The signal event of my teenage life was when the Rosenbergs were executed. My friend Freddie, the son of the family I was just talking about, he and I and his mother and my mother, the four of us, went to Washington. I was fifteen, he was fourteen. While we were in Washington the Supreme Court issued a stay of execution. And instead of everybody coming back, a lot of people stayed over in Washington. And Freddie's mother said he could stay, and my mother very reluctantly said I could stay. So there we were in front of the White House all night, picketing in front of the White House. And one of my memories is that along with us was picketing this young woman in high heels. And it was Mary Travers, soon to be in Peter, Paul and Mary, who was then a couple of years older than I was. She was there.

So you can see coming into the movement I was not your typical average American teenager. OK? Also I was quite romantic, I think. I mean I was living on books and stories about the war, and I actually probably was a teenage expert on what had happened to the Jews. And particularly the stories about the Warsaw Ghetto, which is where the Jews were captured, [20:00] from which they were brought to the extermination camps. And in April 1943 they had a revolt. Six weeks they held off the German army, for six weeks. This was the only civilian armed uprising, including--and I've just been to Paris a month ago--including the great French Resistance, which fought for six days in Paris. This was six weeks, fighting by desperate people who knew they were going to be killed, and who just decided if they were going to go they would bring as many of them with them as they could.

This made an indelible impression on me, to this very day. To this very day I consider it not only an obligation but an honor that if you are up against the fascists and

you have no other recourse that you have to, you must, bring as many of them with you as you can.

So by the time the civil rights movement came along, was there really a question? Now there might have been a question. I think Freddie urged me to go. Other people urged me to go. I don't think I was just sitting there thinking about this myself. But I do remember, and I've talked about it many times, I remember where I was even sitting when I read the paper and I read the story about the sit-ins. I remember every single thing about that.

EC: You alluded to the fact that you have vivid memories of reading about the sit-in movement. Do you have memories of other aspects of the civil rights movement from before that?

DZ: Oh yes. Oh yes. Well, somewhere along the line in high school I joined the NAACP. And it was just with the friends that I had, especially being on the left, it was a given you were going to support black people. Actually I have to say that I have a totally thrilling memory that I will share with you. I don't know how old I was, maybe fourteen or--thirteen or fourteen. Freddie's father was friends with Paul Robeson, who of course was a great tremendous hero of my youth. And Paul Robeson must have been coming to visit him. My father must have been coming out of the office or something, it was the daytime, and it was Second Avenue and Eighteenth Street. Across the street comes Freddie's father Jerry who was about five-foot-seven, my father who was five-foot-two--no, maybe he was five-foot-four--and Paul Robeson who was about seven feet tall. [Laughter] They're walking across Second Avenue. Paul Robeson, oh my God.

So anyway I don't remember going to Harlem, I remember having some black friends. Not really close black friends. But it was an article of faith that this is something that you would be involved in. So when the bus boycott--the bus boycott, I remember actually the day of *Brown versus Board*. And everyone really getting excited. I remember those banner headlines. So *Brown versus Board* was [19]54. So I was sixteen. I remember going on demonstrations. I guess it was about the bus boycott. I mean the bus boycott was totally thrilling. Completely thrilling. I don't remember ever seeing Dr. King at all in New York, I don't remember any of that. So what was your initial question?

EC: It was just memories of the civil rights movement before that.

DZ: Oh. The civil rights movement was very very very present. I think in simpleminded psychological terms the civil rights movement replaced what I had vicariously experienced as revolt by Jewish young people during the war. This was like our time. This was our moment. That's why I got so electrified. I wish I knew the name of the place. I just know I know where I was. I was on Forty-second Street. The main library, I had been at the library doing something. I don't remember what. I went across the street. There was a coffee shop there. I sat down at the counter. Isn't that ironic? At the counter. [25:00] And of course as I've told all these kids, we all smoked. Oh my God, did we smoke like chimneys. Coffee. I remember sitting there, I opened up the paper. What? [Laughter] What? And it wasn't so much that they couldn't be served, it was that they didn't get up. They didn't get up.

And it was just thrilling. And now I keep saying to myself I should go to the microfilm at the Forty-second Street library and see what page it was on. I always say

it's page sixteen, page thirty-seven. I don't actually remember. But it was not page one, I'll tell you that.

EC: So this is the coverage of the Greensboro sit-in.

DZ: Yes, right.

EC: Was there a picture?

DZ: No.

EC: It was just that little short little first article.

DZ: And you remember in those days they called the *Times* the Gray Lady because it was gray, gray, gray, they had hardly any photos, tiny tiny type, and ads. I don't remember what page. I have to find out someday. Someday. Somebody must know, it's in some history book somewhere, the page.

EC: So at this point it's February.

DZ: February 2nd.

EC: Right. So the first Greensboro sit-in is February 1st, so you're reading about it on February 2nd.

DZ: Right. Oh my God. Electrified.

EC: And you're a college graduate? Living at home?

DZ: Yes, college graduate. College graduate. What?

EC: And living at home?

DZ: College graduate, living at home, had just graduated. Looking around for a job, which I did, I got a short-term job at the *National Guardian*, which was a left-wing newspaper. Being very unsettled, not knowing what I was going to do. A lot of the girls that I knew were already married. [Laughter] Some of them had become pinned. I don't

know if you know what that even is. Do you know what that is? To be wearing a fraternity pin. They would wear it as close to the nipple as possible. These bras were like this then, like arrows, like the prow of boats. They would wear this thing right here, oh my God. It was ridiculous. So those people were already married. Then half of the other people had to be engaged. My sister got married when she was twenty. I was a year and a half older. And people came to me at the wedding and said, "Don't worry, dear, your time will come." I was twenty-one.

EC: Were you worried?

DZ: [Laughter] I think I was worried. I mean I think yeah, sure, I was worried. I mean if they were worried how come I wasn't worried? I mean of course I was worried, a little worried. So I was at a good place. I mean had I had family responsibilities I probably never would have gone, knowing me I would not have gone.

So finally I found through Freddie's girlfriend Jocelyn--and she was working at the CORE office. She said, "There's going to be this workshop." So I was not brave like other people. I mean I saw people for years coming south. They would walk in the office on Raymond Street with a suitcase. "OK, here I am, I've just come from blah blah blah." I remember being very ugh with them, like "Why didn't you tell us you were coming? What is this just popping up?" I would never have done that, never, no, never. So I enrolled in this workshop. We went to Miami, Florida, this was CORE, there were a lot of people there from Louisiana. I ended up living in Louisiana for seventeen years, but had absolutely no idea that was going to happen. Some people who turned out to be kind of famous. There was--oh, just died.

EC: Rudy Lombard.

DZ: Rudy Lombard. Rudy Lombard. There was a white guy named Hugh Murray. There was one of the twins, Pam and--hmm. Well, her married name was Due, D-U-E.

EC: Priscilla and Patricia.

DZ: Pat, that's right, Patricia and Priscilla. Can't think of their last name.

EC: Stephens.

DZ: Stephens, exactly. And Angie Butler. Angie Butler was in that group.

EC: From Nashville.

DZ: From Nashville, that's right. We all gathered in Miami and actually some of the people were pro--I mean Angie was a pro by then. She had been arrested several times. And it was four months after the sit-ins. So the sit-ins were February. This was March, April, May, June. June. It was June, four months after the sit-ins.

EC: So how long was the workshop? What were you doing at the workshop?

DZ: Well, the workshop as I recall, [30:00] here my memory gets a little fuzzy, it was about two weeks, and the idea was from the CORE point of view that everybody would be trained as nonviolent organizers and go back. But going back for CORE was--I mean they were not in the rural areas at all. The only place in the South where they actually were was New Orleans. So they were heavy-duty Northern people. Jim Laue was one of the people. He was there. So there were people who were never going to be working south, they were going back north. I don't remember what their organizational overview was. I was just one of the people. Looking back, now that I'm thinking about it, which I don't often, they must have also been looking for another generation of

members, supporters, fundraisers. They probably wanted as big a geographical spread as they possibly could get.

EC: Of course, you just alluded to that, but CORE is basically an urban--.

DZ: Urban Northern. Urban Northern. Yeah. But they had this kind of branch in Louisiana. They were strong in Louisiana.

EC: Do you have a sense at all from that that they're trying to make inroads into the South? Especially if they're bringing these sit-in veterans?

DZ: Yes, yes. I don't think they succeeded. Because their roots, their administration, everything was in the North. We had some national leaders there. Marvin whatever his last name was.

EC: Rich.

DZ: Rich. Was there. I have a picture somewhere of all of these people. So that was amazing experience. And do you want the story of the arrests and all of that? OK. So we were sitting at this restaurant the name of which I can't remember. But Angie Butler remembered. They wouldn't serve us. "You will not be served." I don't remember how many people, seventeen maybe. And on the way out we started to sing. I think I was one of the first people, I'm happy to say, that we started singing. Then I realized, it dawned on me, that I was the only white woman in the group. We were on our way to jail. [Laughter] This is what I tell these young people now. I say, "Look, you think it's only the lunch counters and only the buses." So I say, "From the time you got up in the morning till the time you went to bed your entire life was formulated on the basis of your color." I go into a list which they're very shocked to hear.

Of course the jails. Do they care about the jails? But it didn't dawn on them that the jails were segregated. I talk about how when I went to Atlanta middle-class black women would spend four hundred dollars for a dress, couldn't try on the dress, no dressing rooms. Had to take it home, too bad. Didn't fit? Too bad. Then I notice all these young women are nodding at me like oh, oh. Talk about the dentist's office, the doctor's office.

So here I was on the way to jail. OK, so it was very frightening. They brought me into this cell, and it was at night, so the bed was not made, so there was some sort of covering, and I lay on the mattress. Oh, the next morning, the women said, "You slept on that." Oh God, they must have--this poor little thing had no idea. [Laughter] I don't know what I was supposed to do. Sit up all night? I wasn't about--and it was on the upper bunk. A detail I had forgotten about till this moment. I wasn't about to be making a bed in the middle of the night.

So the matron came in and we all had to line up. She did not call me a nigger lover or anything like that. But they all knew there was something peculiar about me. She handed me this mop. The mop weighed about thirty pounds. And "Mop the floor." Now believe me that housework was not my strong suit at the best of times. So I did something, pushed the mop around, and they were all--they made ruthless fun of me, these women, "Oh my God, what." But I don't remember them being vicious. I really--I mean aside from being petrified that I was in jail I didn't really feel any terrible menacing come.

I think they must have asked me why I was there, and I must have said, "Arrested at a lunch counter." I didn't know how to lie. I probably said that.[35:00] Who were

they? They were check forgers. They were white-collar women. It was obvious. No money to feed the kids, so petty thieves, that kind of thing. They shouldn't have even been there to begin with.

So after the whole day went on like this, then they called me into a meeting with a lawyer. They said, "People are coming out, if you want to come out, you can come out." I guess they had gotten the bond. They didn't want to keep us there for days and days. I said, "Yeah, I want to come out."

So I have a picture, by the way, of me through the bars.

EC: Do you?

DZ: Yeah.

EC: When are you going to share that picture with me?

DZ: [Laughter] OK, well, I have to lay my hands on it now. But it's from the newspaper. There was a newspaper article about me. And it's me behind the screen.

EC: You said that people were coming out. I know that like Patricia Stephens had--.

DZ: Stephens, she stayed in, Angie stayed in.

EC: Because some of them had already--I think the Stephens sisters had already done jail, no bail--.

DZ: That's right.

EC: --with their sit-in, and so I wondered if there's any discussion about staying in. Of course you have nobody to discuss it with.

DZ: No, I had nobody to discuss it with. I don't remember any discussion ahead of time. Now that would have been nice as an organizing thing to say if you're

arrested what are we going to do, are we staying in. Nothing. Nothing. And now looking back, there was no--I didn't expect any special treatment, but it seemed to me as an organizer that many years later I would have noticed that oh, there is one white woman here, do we need to do something special here, because obviously I was in minimal danger. I don't think I was--I wasn't endangered, but it would have occurred to me if I had been an administrator, "Uh-oh, maybe this is our weak link here." Maybe that's one of the reasons they wanted to get me out also. But they didn't communicate that with me. It was left entirely up to me.

I think Angie stayed in, other people stayed in. But they had an administrative problem because they had this project. Were they going to keep people in jail forever? Looking back, now that I'm talking about it, it wasn't very well thought out. [Laughter]

EC: Were you expecting to get arrested? I had the impression that you maybe weren't expecting to be arrested and then ended up being arrested. I'm not sure why I think that. But it's sort of like a little glimmer.

DZ: Well, it's possible. It's possible. I mean they chose the restaurant. They must have cased out the place first. They must have.

EC: So this was basically your practicum, right? You've been studying the theory of nonviolence and now you go out on your sit-in.

DZ: Yeah. They did the usual thing beforehand. We lay down on the floor, "Hold your head," people would come and scream at you. I do remember that they had us change roles. Either you were the victim or you were the perp. And in these little practical things. But they made us the perps, the people who were the perps had to scream every vile thing they could possibly scream, and I remember screaming, getting

unbelievably upset that I was standing there screaming and how easy it was, to tell you the truth. Oh, you can stand there, you can turn into a fascist. Unless you're careful. Unless you're careful.

EC: Do you remember in that workshop having any sense of males and females having different roles? There being any concern about women being hurt and men being protective?

DZ: No, I don't remember anything like that. But I think I was very poor, I was definitely a poor subject when it came to women, I had no consciousness of myself as a woman at all. I mean I think up until that point, several years afterwards, I was following along. True, an unorthodox, path. Nevertheless, it was expected I was going to get married. I was going to have children, it was all programmed. This was a rather unorthodox way of going about it. But it was nothing. [Laughter]

EC: Looking for a spouse in a Miami jail?

DZ: So then I didn't want to leave them. When it all came over, I didn't want to leave. So I begged them to take me with them to New Orleans.

EC: You say them. Because there was a large contingent.

DZ: It was a large contingent. That's what I mean that they were strong in Louisiana. Stronger, I should say, in Louisiana. [40:00] A whole bunch of them were going back. I stayed with somebody whose name I can't remember, a black woman who lived on Claiborne or near Claiborne Avenue. I stayed at least a week, if not two weeks. They were getting ready for the first sit-in, which they had not had yet. Now that was kind of interesting. Somebody'll write an article about that, because what was the name of the black college there? There were two.

EC: Dillard?

DZ: Dillard and Loyola. Not Loyola. Loyola.

EC: Xavier.

DZ: Xavier. Dillard and Xavier. So that was kind of unusual that they had not had any sit-ins there. I don't exactly know why. Somebody knows why but I don't know why. Maybe there was infighting in the community. I don't know exactly why. So when we got there they were definitely ready to do it, but now that I'm thinking about it, it was coming from outside, it was coming from the CORE people. It was not coming from the local students. I mean it was coming from Hugh. It was coming from this woman who I stayed with. It was people who lived there who were resident there, but it was not coming from student groups as I recall.

So we met in the Y, the black Y, and so I was making signs. I had gone to music and art high school, this is where my art career came in handy. [Laughter] So I was making signs. Then there was this--as one of the white people I was to case the Woolworth's on Canal Street. We did that, there were several of us, and we cased the place, and what was going to happen, and where was the lunch counter, and so forth and so on. Then my role was they asked me would I do outreach into the white community.

I went to see this rather famous priest named Father Fichter, who was at the white Loyola. Loyola was white. He had been very well known as very good on racial issues. The Catholic Church actually was definitely more advanced than almost any institution there. They had already integrated their schools. I met him. I told him that there were going to be sit-ins there. The first sit-in. And could they do anything? He said, "Yes, we

will help, we will talk about it in our parishes, I'll spread out the word." Very very cooperative.

Then they sent me, they told me to go to him, and to go to the rabbi, one of the big rabbis. That's where I went to see this rabbi who kicked me out of his office. Which I must say now in retrospect he didn't realize what a big favor he was doing. Because I have used that story fifty-five years. Thank you very much, Rabbi Jules Feibelman, F-E-I-B-E-L-M-A-N.

EC: You don't remember him, do you?

DZ: No, don't remember him at all. I was extremely upset when he threw me out of his office. Really upset. As I said that has stayed me in good stead as a Jewish activist now that this rabbi threw me out. When the Catholic had invited me in, OK? I just should say parenthetically that as the years went on and I traveled around the South, I learned what had happened to the Jews there.

I remember one time Bob and I drove through, it must have been Hayneville. Am I saying it right?

EC: Is this Bob Zellner?

DZ: Bob Zellner, my former husband. Is it Hayneville? Am I right?

EC: Haynesville? Where?

DZ: Well, we pronounced it--it's in Alabama. In Lowndes County.

EC: You mean the one in Lowndes County. I think it's Hayneville, but I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Haynesville I guess.

DZ: Well, if it's Hayneville, then I think some of the local people, I don't know, I have to look. I remember it as Hayneville, but it's probably wrong.

EC: I may not know how--.

DZ: I remember going through that town. I will never forget that town. I don't know what it looks like now. Then it looked like a movie set. It looked just like *Intruder in the Dust* or the one with Atticus Finch.

EC: Finch, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

DZ: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There was the town square like this, and there were men on their chairs tilted back, there were the trees with the vines.

EC: Spanish moss, kudzu, Spanish moss.

DZ: Spanish moss. Yes, hanging down. There was [45:00] Goldberg's store. Or if it wasn't Goldberg it was Feinberg, it was somebody's store. And in the middle of blankety-blank nowhere. Actually am I allowed to use bad language on this? Probably not. Not. OK.

EC: Well, Guha would prefer you didn't.

DZ: OK. So then--.

EC: You're certainly welcome to quote people.

DZ: All right. So as the years went on I understood how they had gotten there. Their role was not enviable. They were not accepted by anybody. They were always trying desperately to be white. They were never secure. They were like the Chinese storeowner in Greenwood who was the same way. Trying so hard to be white, and he would never be white, no matter what he did.

I don't know. Someday maybe somebody will write some books about them. Maybe they have.

EC: You want to save it? In another conversation when you were in Miami on the workshop a lot of people were telling you about SNCC.

DZ: Oh yes. Oh, no, no, absolutely, absolutely, I realized while I was there, and then in desperation I had to go to New Orleans, that I had found something that I wanted to come back. I knew I wanted to come back. I started asking people. I said, "Well, what do you advise?" And Bernard Lafayette was in this group. And it was Bernard who said to me, "SNCC. Go to SNCC." I sort of stored that away in my mind that SNCC was--I didn't know a thing about SNCC.

So I was in New Orleans I guess for a couple of weeks. Then we had the famous sit-ins. The sit-ins were spectacular. I must say. They really were. And one of my assignments was to drive the car. [Laughter] So keep track of what I'm saying, Emily, because I want to skip ahead and say something about cars.

EC: OK.

DZ: It's only after we did the book, the *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, that I realized that SNCC had no resources except for one, cars. OK? That it became a big issue who controlled the cars and who drove the cars. OK? So young women are very surprised to hear that if you were in an intergender group, a woman never drove a car if a man was in the group and could drive a car. Never. Like never.

And our book has many wonderful stories in it about cars and who controlled the cars. The best one is Zoharah Simmons who was a project director and controlled--the car was controlled by the previous project director who then left, and she felt it came within her purview as everybody else did, except this guy wanted to take the car with him. So then I realized cars. Cars loomed very big. And you talk about our great

characters like Stokely. Stokely in my mind is inseparable from a car. We had these legendary drivers. People would talk about so-and-so drove. I mean they drove like bats out of hell. But they must have been fantastic drivers. Maria Varela has a story in *Hands on*, where she's driving trying to escape the Klan at 110 miles an hour. Cars loomed very heavily under the story. Anyway I was--.

EC: You said something not very long ago about how Stokely would come into town.

DZ: Oh yes. Oh. Well, Stokely, he was head of the second district. Mississippi was divided into districts and his district was one of the really hopping popping districts because it was not only Greenwood, it was Tallahatchie County. It was these truly unbelievably terrible places, Ruleville was in the second district. I don't know if Greenville was in the second district. Oh, Greenville. So he would be making the rounds all the time. He was an unbelievable character. He was about six-foot-three, [50:00] skinny like this, very very handsome, very charismatic. He would drive in, we always knew it was him. [Laughter] He would drive in. Oh. Put his feet on the brakes. The gravel would be flying. Get out of the car. Smooth his clothes down. He was an unbelievable character, unbelievable.

So that's the way he drove. So driving was very important. Actually driving was, because your life could depend on how well people drove. So women seldom if ever drove. And back to this story. I was supposed to drive.

EC: In New Orleans, we're back to New Orleans and the sit-ins.

DZ: In New Orleans. Now we're back in the sit-ins, 1960. I was supposed to drive and I was a terrible driver, I had learned to drive late in life in New York City

where none of us had a car. But I did have a license. And evidently, I don't remember why nobody else could drive, I have no idea. So after the event they had me driving, and we almost got killed I'm sure. We were going around a traffic circle which later on, living there seventeen years, I went around all the time. I had no idea what I was doing. And everybody was screaming in the car, "Oh, what are you doing?" [Laughter] Screaming, "We never should have let you drive." Oh my God.

So it was very dramatic because Hugh Murray's father had been driving along in Harahan. I think they were from Harahan. He heard on the radio that a sit-in was going on and that there was a white man in the group. I think they must have said his name or he knew it was his son. So he came storming into the Woolworth's through the cops, through--they roped it off. And literally grabbed Hugh and dragged him off the seat and dragged him away. And Hugh--actually I don't know if it was ever the same again. I met him a few times over the years. He was kind of an eccentric character. The white people who lived there, the Southern white people, they had very little support. This was a big thing. It was covered in the *Times-Picayune*. I don't really know, I think he's written something, I'm not sure. Might have written something, Hugh Murray.

So then I went home, and I said, "Oh, well, SNCC is the place to go, Bernard said SNCC," other people had said SNCC. CORE was not an attractive thing to me.

EC: Do you know why?

DZ: Well, I suppose first of all there were very few what I would call--later came to call--local people. Even though the Stephensens I think were from South Carolina or North Carolina.

EC: Florida.

DZ: From Florida, oh, that's right, from Florida. There were several people from New Orleans there, but a lot of people from New York. I don't know, I just didn't want to be New York, I just felt it was a Southern thing, I don't even know how much I thought about. But it wasn't attractive to me. Definitely was not. So all through that year I was writing letters to SNCC. And little did I know, they were throwing them in the garbage, there was nobody there to even open them.

I just thought, "Well, they're not interested." What did I know? I finally got a job. For my first job after I came back was this horrible job doing proofreading for a scientific magazine, proofreading equations, can you imagine anything more terrible than that? I lasted about six months on that. Then I had to leave. Then I finally got a job in the Welfare Department. The Welfare Department was like the home for everybody there, didn't matter who you were, you graduated, you had nowhere to go, you went into the Welfare Department. I was a welfare investigator, which was another story we'll get to some other year. Then by a peculiar fluke, because life is made of all these flukes, it turns out that a black guy had been hired at the Southern Regional Council and his name was James A. Moss, M-O-S-S. He had been a professor at Queens College when I was the editor of the student newspaper. He was the only black professor in the entire school. [55:00] His contract was not renewed. He came to me and told me his story. I was totally outraged and I wanted to do a story about it. But he wouldn't let me, he was afraid, and he felt he would never be hired anywhere else, and he left.

EC: Do you know why he would come to you about the story even if he didn't want it to be published?

DZ: Yes. I think he wanted some emotional support. I think I was the editor of the paper, I was known as a lefty, and I think that's why he came to me, otherwise I would never have known.

So one of the many many places that I wrote to to get a job was the Southern Regional Council, and here James Moss had just been hired as the research director, and he saw my letter. See how life is so--and he said, "Oh, I know her, hire her." So in three weeks I was down there. From the time that he got the letter. I was down there.

I said, "OK, everybody, I'm going." I said to my parents, who were probably very happy to get rid of me. My mother, I remember my mother didn't want me to go, but she helped me pack a trunk. A trunk. I took a trunk down there. I took sheets, I took silverware. I don't know.

EC: You were going to go marry the Southern Regional Council.

DZ: I was going to marry the Southern movement is what I was going to do. So yes, so I went down there, and I became a research associate, what they called then, and they actually put me to very good use. Because I am the one who did the research for that Southern Regional Council report which was about the first eighteen months of the civil rights movement--of the sit-in movement. Heavily edited by Les Dunbar of course. I think appropriately so. But I am the one who went through all the newspaper clippings and everything, added things and tallied them and blah blah blah. Made up all the categories, figured out. And it was really an impressive thing.

When they issued it I remember very well it ended up on the front page of the *New York Times*, this report, not my name of course, I didn't exist, my name was not on

this thing at all, as the style of those days. Research people, they did the work, they wrote it, and they were gone to history--from history. So that was very useful.

I lived on the white side of town. I lived on Peachtree Street, one of the many Peachtree Streets. And SRC was an interracial organization so we went many places together when we could. I lived a double life. I went on the white side and I went on the black side as well.

EC: So what was it like to work? You said you were sort of on the white side and the black side of town while you worked for the SRC.

DZ: Well, I must say I had some guilty moments but it didn't stop me from living on the white side. I didn't really have a way of getting to the black side. And often the black people came to my house on the white side after dark. And looking back, I mean weren't they ashamed, wasn't I ashamed? I mean really it was overt. Oh, it was nighttime? You can go to her house. Nighttime. What is that?

EC: Did you talk about it?

DZ: No. I remember black people, friends of mine who worked there, this was an interracial organization. And it was just taken as a matter of course. Well, of course, she lives on the white side, so we have to go make sure that her neighbors can't see.

I remember going to places that I knew my black colleagues couldn't go to. I wasn't easy about that. I only had one white friend that I had met other than SRC and of course she had nothing to do with the civil rights movement so she was the one, "Oh, let's go here, let's go there," so I went.

EC: What would happen when you'd go places on the black side?

DZ: Oh, on the black side it was always “Are we going to be arrested?”

[Laughter] Except when we went to a black place. It’s very hard to--this is what I tell these kids. I say, “Try to put your mind in a place where you’re going to a dangerous neighborhood.” I say, “What does that mean when people say you’re going to a dangerous neighborhood now?” Well, of course it means a black neighborhood, Latino. I said, “With us it was the white neighborhood that was the dangerous neighborhood. [1:00:00] So when we were in the black community we felt completely safe, completely safe. White people. White people. I don’t know what that means to a psychologist. Would have some interesting insights. What do you look at when you look in the mirror? You’re saying to yourself, “Well, I’m one of them. But no, I’m not one of them.”

Then Jane came to work.

EC: Jane?

DZ: Jane Bond came to work. We liked each other a lot right away. ~~She~~ was dying to move out of her house. She had been a graduate student in Indiana or somewhere, coming back, she didn’t want to live at home. I was able to find a reason to be on the black side. In those days to live alone as a woman, getting an apartment, was not easy, and very few people did it. And for me to have gone into the black side, I don’t even know if anybody would have rented to me. I don’t know. But I didn’t even try. So then Jane and I set up household at 2222 Telhurst Street, which by the way the last time I was in California Jane and I went to see. I mean not when I was in California, when I was in Atlanta Mary King took me to Telhurst Street and I told Jane about it when I saw her in California. We lived there for a year and a half. I think I might have met Jane before I met Julian. All this time I was in SRC and people would come in regularly,

visitors, other countries, and they'd say, "Oh, and here we're having a meeting here, and now we're going to SNCC." I knew perfectly well where SNCC was. I had tried to work for them, but they had not responded, and they were literally twenty minutes away by foot, and I couldn't get there.

I was reading about all of these people in the newspaper. Now they were part of the people that I was making my report about. Among others I kept seeing this name, this name, Robert Zellner. I thought to myself, "What is this Jewish boy doing running around?" His father was a minister. So I had no idea who he was. And finally, finally there was this Swedish journalist named Per Larsen and he came, it was in October, and he said, "I'm going to SNCC now. How do I get there?" I said, "I'm going with you." I finally worked up courage. Five months it took me.

EC: So did you start working for SRC like summer of [19]61 or spring of [19]61?

DZ: June of [19]61.

EC: June [19]61.

DZ: Yeah. I went over to SNCC the first time in October of [19]61.

EC: Good timing.

DZ: Good timing, because Forman had been there a month. If I had gone there two months earlier there would have been nothing, I would never, who knows when I would have gone back? So I don't remember what happened to Per Larsen, I don't know what happened. Then my next memory is meeting Forman. That became this momentous thing that he said to me. So I remember he shook my hand, and he said, "Can you type?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Good, we need you." OK.

Now later that became deconstructed by feminists as the most terrible thing a man could say. I've said many times I was beyond thrilled that he asked me if I could type, I was so happy I could type. By then I knew that my ability to function in the South was limited. OK? Putting it mildly. First of all I was a woman. Second of all I was a white woman. White woman equals death to black men. [Laughter] Third, I was from the North. What else was I going to do? This is why I later had very little sympathy with the poor white women who felt that their skills were not being developed enough. So I said, "Yes, I can type." He right away put me to work typing.

Then it wasn't initially the same day, it was [1:05:00] probably a couple weeks later, I went up to him and I said, "You know, Forman, I can write also." Maybe I said to him I was the editor of my paper, I don't remember if I even said. He said, "Good." [Laughter] "I'm going to put you to work with Julian." So I think probably by December, November, December, I was already--had met Julian and maybe Jane and I started living together a little bit later. I'm not sure exactly.

EC: And Julian is Julian--.

DZ: Julian Bond.

EC: And Jane's brother.

DZ: Jane's brother. We started right away working on the *Student Voice*. Right away. This is where Forman's great genius was, that he was walking around with this switchboard in his head. And of course I say switchboard here but young people don't even know what that is. It's a board with holes in it and you put the screws into the right place, the plugs into the right place. He knew everything. He was walking around, he knew, the whole organization was laid out in his mind in a three-D version. He knew,

“Oh, we need people here, oh, we need people to do that, we need people to do this.”

When I said what I could do he just instantly knew. I mean literally. He didn’t sit down, “Hmm.” Think. I mean he knew right away. “Yes, you can type, good, because we have people coming from the field, they need to write affidavits, they need to do this, we need you to type.”

That’s mostly what I remember typing. But it got so in the later years that he would hand me his mail and he’d hand me a whole letter, he’d say, “No.” I wrote the whole letter. Said no. Then he’d sign it. Or he’d say, “Tell them next week.” I mean he would say the briefest possible thing. I would write his mail, write his letter.

EC: So he would just leave it up to you to figure out what to say to people and how to handle it?

DZ: Yeah. He told me what to say.

EC: Well, he told you.

DZ: He told me the essence. The request is denied, the request is accepted, I mean whatever. I wrote four paragraphs. I talked about SNCC and I wrote about SNCC and everything.

EC: Are we rolling? Can you explain for people who may not know what you meant about white women and black men?

DZ: Oh yeah. Well, especially in the rural areas but in the cities also, the deadly combination for reasons of psychotic behavior in the white community was the combination of a white woman and a black man. And by then black men had been charged at least for more than a hundred years with raping white women. I had experienced in my youth some very famous cases like Willie McGee. Cases of people

who were lynched from jail. And usually because they were accused of having raped a white woman. And it's possible that maybe some rapes did occur somewhere along the line. But the famous cases were in fact white women and black men who had had relationships. Then for some reason the white woman betrayed the black man either out of fear herself or being forced by her family or her whatever. And Willie McGee was one of those cases where he'd had a long term relationship with this white woman and then they charged rape and he ended up being lynched.

EC: I think he was actually put to death.

DZ: Wasn't he taken out of the jail?

EC: I think that was--.

DZ: But maybe that was somebody else.

EC: I think you're combining it with Mack Parker.

DZ: Maybe with Mack Parker. OK. They're both in Mississippi.

EC: They both ended up dead because of their relationships. But I think one was lynched and one was convicted with the death penalty.

DZ: Maybe Willie McGee, yeah, yeah. OK, thank you. So anyway in the rural areas we were anathema, white women were anathema. And our book is full of examples of how just walking along the road with a black man could mean that he would die. He would die. So you had in your mind. I mean I think for white women who didn't deal with this, they were in super denial. Super denial. And especially--I never went to Southwest Georgia by the way. But according to the stories and the book, I mean Sherrod was a maniac about this. Sherrod [1:10:00] I mean viewed white women as sort of charges that were about to be detonated. And very strict rules. You can't go past this

street for a week, you can't do this, you can't do that. To make sure they didn't wander off somewhere and end up getting somebody in severe trouble.

EC: So Charles Sherrod was SNCC's project director in Southwest Georgia. And Southwest Georgia was unusual in some of SNCC's projects because it was explicitly interracial, he recruited whites and blacks to work.

DZ: Right.

EC: Can you describe Jim Forman and Julian Bond and what they were like?

DZ: Well, I'm going to get weepy here because they were my special ones and they're both gone now. Jim was an amazing, amazing person. I really think that historians who write about him who didn't know him and who didn't interview people who knew him have misconstrued his character. First of all, he didn't suffer fools gladly, number one. He was highly intelligent. I mean extremely intelligent. He was very cultured. He was a French speaker, he spoke French. He read books from Africa before anybody ever heard of Africa. But he had very few what they call common social skills. He didn't chat. He was not a chatter. He was not an ass-kisser. He was not somebody, he was not going to sit there and pass the time of day, he got to the heart of things, got to the meat of things.

He invented the concept of friends of. And now this is a concept that has been replicated all over the world. Forget all over the United States. All over the world. He knew in his mind, I described the switchboard in his mind, but he also--here was Atlanta and everything else was this wheel. Atlanta was the hub. It was the wheel. He invented the concept of support groups which did not do policy, they did not make policy, it was

the center that made the policy. The support groups had the option of supporting or not supporting. But they did not have any other option. They did not.

And now Miss Baker was really responsible for keeping SNCC autonomous. But she did it, she was protected--not protected, her work was extended by Forman. And Forman insisted on that. Can we stop for a second?

M: We're rolling.

DZ: OK. So Forman, I'm sure it was his idea that all of these field secretaries would come off the field, the field being everything but the main office, writing these affidavits. What he called affidavits. Now they weren't legal affidavits in any sense. They were statements basically. That's what I did as a volunteer. People would come off the field, they would sit next to me, and I would type and they would speak.

At the time I was a very fast typist, very inaccurate typist, and--.

EC: You said inaccurate?

DZ: Inaccurate. And if I made a mistake I didn't stop, I didn't correct, I just put an X on it and just kept going. So I am able to tell what I typed now, fifty years later, because nobody else was sloppy like that. But I was really fast, so I could type as fast as somebody could speak. Then he sent them off. He sent them off to Robert Kennedy. "This is what's going on now." The idea was that there was enough on the books already in the 1957 Civil Rights Act where all these registrars could have been sitting in jail all of this time.

EC: The registrars, these are like voter registration?

DZ: Voter registration, people in charge. We kept sending them off. “We want you to be aware that.” I don’t even remember where the letters are. The letters are all in the SNCC papers I’m sure. That was one of the things I did.

Let’s see. He didn’t have small talk. But when he made a human contact with you, it was like a laser beam. I found him very very attractive. In a very atypical way. [1:15:00] He had a wonderful smile. As a dentist’s daughter I notice everybody’s teeth without fail. He had wonderful teeth. He smiled. He had a good sense of humor. But he rarely if ever--he didn’t initiate the humor. I think he appreciated people’s humor. He was constantly exasperated. He never hid that at all. His famous gesture. When people would talk he would go like this. Wind it up. Wind it up. [Laughter]

So I had a couple of narrow escapes when he was present, which is of course one of the many reasons I loved him so much. Once we were in Greenwood, Mississippi. Not the summer of [19]64, the summer before that. And it was the occasion of Bob Dylan and the folk festival. And on the way out there were two or three cars, interracial cars. We were all stopped by the cops. It was at night. And it was on or near a railroad track, that’s all I remember. The cops made everybody get out. We had to put our hands up on the hood of the car. He handled it. I don’t remember what he said. He was very calm. Very very calm. I don’t know what they said to him. He dealt with it. That’s the way I felt about him. I had total confidence in him. That’s why I bitterly reject some of these historians saying that he was unstrung in some way. When I dealt with him, when we were in extremis, he was deathly calm. His instinct was absolutely right. He was never--he wasn’t provocative. But he was very dignified. He was very contained. Self-

contained. He didn't pop off. He didn't scream. He didn't do anything like that as has been portrayed.

I had truly total confidence. If he said to me, "It's OK to do this, go walk out here and go across that street. There's a car coming but I know you're all right," I probably would have done it. I just had total confidence in him. So that was one time.

Then in Danville when we were almost all killed again at a demonstration when they were getting ready to hose us down and beat us up, he saved us. He realized that we were--he realized it was going to be a disaster. He got up, and he went to the police chief, and he said, "Do you realize what's going to happen here?" I think those were his actual words. And behind his back he sort of motioned us all to leave.

EC: Can you describe the situation?

DZ: Yeah. So here we were in this wretched little town which lived and died by the mill, by the Dan River Mills Company. And black community had been struggling and struggling there to desegregate. The community was taking a big hit. And SNCC went in there, and he sent me up there to write a pamphlet. See, that was his idea. Who would think about that? Writing pamphlets. You see?

Now when he wrote a pamphlet, the pamphlet wasn't only "Oh, well, we'll just do it for history's sake." Even though he believed in that. But he knew exactly what he was going to do with it, he was going to print it, he was going to distribute it, he was going to send it here to the North. I mean he had plans. He had plans. Big plans.

So we were out there on these steps. OK. Can we stop for a second? There were about forty people out there on the steps of this horrible town hall--city hall. Right across

the street were all these deputized drunks and God knows who else. They had the fire hoses across. I'd already been knocked down by the fire hoses. And--.

EC: Had people been hospitalized?

DZ: Yes. People had been hospitalized. It was in the previous demonstration. There were two demonstrations. One was when we were praying by the jail and they came out and they turned the fire hoses on us and then later on that's when I was hit over the head by this cop. That's the picture that Danny Lyon took where Forman is sitting next to me. He's taking an affidavit. [Laughter] I am talking about being hit over the head. And unfortunately I'm sitting in this position. People think I'm posing as a model. But it was actually I was holding my head.

That was number one. Number--.

EC: So how did you get hit?

DZ: By this cop who hit me. I was on my hands and knees. I weighed 106 pounds. I had no purse, it was--disappeared. I didn't have any shoes. Washed away. This guy came just out of total unnecessary sadism, hit me over the head with his stick. OK? That's when I said that they say that seeing stars is an expression, it's not an expression, because I actually saw lights going off in my brain, I'm sure that he damaged some blood vessels in my brain and that's what I was seeing.

So not to be outdone, we went back. That was the other thing about SNCC. Always go back. Wherever people are in the most danger, you go to them. We're like the fire department. It was like the fire department. Then if something bad happens you go back. You do something that shows that you're not afraid, that you're going to continue. That was the whole SNCC methodology.

That's probably why we had such a reputation, for good and ill, that we were not--that SNCC was intemperate and hotheaded and so forth. So the going back was the community went back to city hall. They vowed that they would stay there for--day and night if necessary. We lasted about eight hours. My favorite memory of lasting is that Forman--here we were all sitting on steps. [Laughter] He must have thought to himself, "These people are going to go stir-crazy just sitting here all day. I have to do something." Said, "Now we're going to have a workshop about black history!" He went up and down the steps. "Now who was Harriet Tubman? Tell me who was Harriet Tubman." And people would answer. He actually got them involved. He had been a teacher in Chicago.

So then they arrayed all of this hardware in front of us and I was really scared. Really, really scared. I was sitting on the steps holding on to this rail with both my hands like this. I remember thinking to myself, "This is probably it."

Because the idea was they were going to wash us down the steps with the hoses and then come and kill us with the sticks. I would have sat there. I would have sat there. I mean people have asked me. I mean it was inconceivable to get up. How could I get up? How could I possibly? Aside from the fact that I was the only white person in the group, how could I possibly get up? I mean who had the option to get up? You don't have an option. You got there on your own two feet, you're going to stay there with everybody.

So that's when Forman came up. He distracted the police chief. And behind his back he went like this. This meant "Get up and get the hell out of there." We did, we got up. Very dignified. We left. So I consider that twice he saved my life.

If he had been in any way intemperate or off the wall in Mississippi when we were stopped that night, who knows what would have happened? Then in Danville we knew what was going to happen. But you see, he had the stature to know when it was time to retreat. He was not a crazy hothead. Because if he had been he would have just said, "Oh, OK, so we'll have four, five people killed out here today." He didn't, he wouldn't. He wouldn't do that. I was incredibly fond of him. I really just loved him. He was also brave in other ways. Like who is brave enough to buy twenty cars at once? And just the idea of having the money. That was two thousand dollars a car by the way in those days. So he said to himself, "I can do this." Who knows if we only had forty thousand dollars in the bank? We might have. He said, "Now is the time." He was brave. He was brave in that way.

Then he put up with all sorts of unbelievable people as we well know. I mean really the SNCC people as a group were definitely--what should I say? Exceptional. [Laughter] In all respects. [1:25:00] He put up with a lot of divas. A lot of divas.

So I had nothing but respect for him. Nothing. He's never been treated properly. To think that he was reduced to that person in the movie in *Selma*. It was totally bizarre, a totally bizarre portrayal of him. Makes me feel bad. It makes me feel bad to read a book just recently that he was petulant, that he was jealous, he was--no, no, no, no, no, no. Wrong guy. Wrong guy. Again he certainly was not flawless by any means. He could be definitely very brusque, very brusque. But he would look at you, he'd tell you the truth. He would tell you the truth. "No, you didn't do that right. No, you didn't do that right." I don't remember that he spared himself either.

Then of course what happened to him was very sad. Now all the time that I knew him, I knew him really well up until 1967. So I knew him well from 1961, the fall of 1961, to the spring of 1967. All that time I did not know that he had had a psychiatric history. I didn't know that he had had a breakdown as a young man. There was absolutely nothing to indicate in any one of his dealings that he had ever had any problem. I don't think I was--I certainly was not a nurse then or anything. But I think I was pretty sensitive to weird people. Like within five minutes. He wasn't like that. He was not like that. He showed no sign of psychiatric problems whatsoever. Then he crashed. Then he had a breakdown.

Now whether--it's hard to believe that it was not a result of accumulated stress and accumulated trauma. Because he was in a very responsible period for many years. And considering that he had had a previous breakdown, I suppose it's not surprising.

Now Dinky managed to get him back. She took him to Puerto Rico. And in that period Liz Sutherland worked with him on his book. He came back. I think he had altogether three breakdowns. His final breakdown, I remember somebody telling me who was a medical professional that with the final breakdown he had two options then. He was going to deconstruct completely. Then he would be able to be rehabilitated through therapy and medication and restore his personality. Or, without intervention he was going to level off at some chronic state. He at that point refused treatment, and that's exactly what happened is he leveled off at a chronic state, and became a totally different person. This is the person who was talking about class warfare, who became this lapdog of the Democratic Party. I remember having a knock-down, drag-out fight with him about Ed Koch, the mayor, whom I loathe and despise. He was giving some sort of a

reason why it was important to support Ed Koch. Oh my God. Then we became very-- we became distant. I mean I cared about him. He would come and visit me. He even stayed at my house once. By that time, when he was in his very sick period. He was convinced that he was being poisoned. He refused to eat anything with me; we'd go to a restaurant, he wouldn't eat. I just said to him, "If you're afraid you're being poisoned, give me the food and I'll eat it first, and if nothing happens to me, you can eat it." I just treated it like, "OK, if this is what you think, let's try that." He ended up-- Well, everybody knows how he ended up.

[1:30:00] He ended up in Washington. He was extremely bizarre. He was a great man. He has not been treated like a great man in all these years of historiography. I am totally convinced we would have had a collection of extremely brilliant people who would have been all over the place, if it hadn't been for him. I mean, he really--he invented the hub, the wheel and the hub, and he was standing right there, right in the center of the hub. He invented the campus travelers. He invented, I said, the friends groups. It was all to serve the rural areas. That was all-- We didn't put it in those terms, but now looking back, that's what it was.

We were all serving the work, and that's what his motto was because that's what he did in his life. I don't believe-- I think he took vacations. He certainly--he didn't care about clothes. There was nothing that he did. He didn't care about food. He didn't care about any of that. He was very ruthless about publicity. He wanted publicity for the work. I don't remember anything where he wanted publicity for himself. He wasn't like that.

EC: You mentioned Dinky was able to get him through the first--.

DZ: Yes. She got him through twice.

EC: And can you say who she was in this context?

DZ: Oh yes. Well, she was his virtual wife, the mother of his two children, both of whom are accomplished. James Forman, Jr. is a professor at Yale, and the younger son, Chaka, is an actor and a teacher in California. So, it was a long series of--a heart rending thing to watch. I remember Betty and I went to see him a couple of months before he died, and he was living in this sort of rehab home after surgery. Then he had an obsession that Aretha Franklin was a Native American. That's all he would talk about, was Aretha Franklin and being a Native American. I looked at him, and he said, "I'm a Native American, too." I remember looking at him, and I said, "Really?" He showed a little flash of his old self. He said, "Yes, I'm telling you. Yes, yes." [Laughter] But that disappeared.

Then we had a big party for him, you know, when he was seventy-five, but that was before. He had stabilized at that point. He was like your chronic, eccentric person; he didn't have big ups, he didn't have big downs, but he stabilized at a level that was a different person. I don't know the technical name for that, but his politics were different, his--. He didn't have any great passion left. He had spent it all. He gave himself to us. Unfortunately there are a lot of people who don't realize what a gift that was.

EC: And for people who don't know SNCC's history, he really is the person who's the executive secretary when SNCC was building the infrastructure to support people working in the field, and held that position until sometimes in [19]65 when he was moved on to a different position as international--.

DZ: Yes, but he was still very much in the leadership.

EC: He wanted a different person to be in that position.

DZ: Yes, and then Ruby Doris came in there.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on]

DZ: Well, all I remember--I remember Pete Seeger was there.

EC: This is the festival in Greenwood in 1963?

DZ: In Greenwood in [19]63. I remember Bob and I were supposed to take Pete Seeger around, OK? And Bob Dylan was at the festival. Danny Lyon did several photographs of him singing there, and it was out [1:35:00] in a big field, and he sang songs that were fabulous and totally incomprehensible it seemed to me, to the audience. [Laughs] He was singing, I remember he sang a song that I totally loved and agreed every word of, which was, "With God on Our Side," to a group of people whose religious faith meant everything to them and that had held them together for 300 years, and here he was singing "With God on Your Side." I don't know what people thought of him. I don't know what they made of him.

I think that's might have been where I met the Green family first. I don't remember how long we stayed there. I mean, we were only there a few days. Only a few days. But enough, of course, to get into trouble () with the cops.

EC: What was it like for you? Was this your first sort of foray into the more rural South, away from the quote safety of Atlanta?

DZ: I'm trying to think. I had only been in the rural South in the white side in Alabama through Bob's family. I had not been on the black side.

EC: Was this before or after Danville?

DZ: Well that's what I'm thing to remember. It seems to me it was after Danville. I think Danville was June. We got married in August. So it must have been somewhere around July. What a time to have a festival? In July in Mississippi? In Greenwood. Or was it the summer of [19]63? Am I right?

EC: It was [19]63 but I'm not sure when in [19]63. I just don't remember the exact time.

DZ: Yes, we can find out. Well, I don't remember making a distinction between rural Mississippi and urban Mississippi. I remember the *Welcome to the Magnolia State* sign, and when you saw that sign your heart went to your feet and it didn't matter where you were going. I think I only ended up being in Jackson maybe twice. So that was the only urban area. I didn't consider where we were in Greenwood to be urban, quite. To me the whole place was like a nightmare. A living nightmare. That whole summer was a nightmare, definitely, a nightmare.

EC: I'm going to back--. You're talking about summer of [19]64 was a whole nightmare.

DZ: Yes.

EC: I'm going to backtrack a little, and you were--. The last time you were talking about your chronology. You were working for the Southern Regional Council and volunteering with SNCC.

DZ: That's right.

EC: At a certain point, you moved from the SRC to SNCC.

DZ: Right.

EC: What was it like to work at the one versus the other?

DZ: Oh, well the SRC was just a regular office situation. Jane and I both were well-paid clerical workers. She already at least had a part of a Master's. I was a college graduate. I think we were doing, I don't know, paper-pushing. I don't know exactly what we were doing. I was still ostensibly keeping track of the sit-in movement and statistics and all of that.

Now we're back to the winter of [19]61, [19]62. And, at some point the FBI came and questioned Les Dunbar, who was the head of SRC then, questioned him about me. He told me. This is what he told me. They apparently came with a photo of me somewhere. I never saw the photo. I don't know if I ever asked Les Dunbar about it, but I was always--I always had some hopes for what that photo could have been, and I hoped, I hoped, I hoped, that it was of me at a Paul Robeson concert. That's what I hoped; that they had a photo of me. Anyway. He fired me.

Now, I had been talking to Forman about--. Forman had asked me to come on the staff, but there was no money at the time, and I said well, I might as well stay here and get my salary paid and I'll come and work at night. So, that's what I did. And, of course my life ended up being in the evenings at SNCC, but I still had friends and Jane was still at SRC. We lived together. So it was all a kind of tidy, a tidy thing. Then the FBI [1:40:00] came and then he claimed--now this is all from him-- he claimed that they had come and that two or three months later he had decided that I was now redundant, and that there was no point in paying me a salary to clip articles. They could get anyone to clip articles or they could get a service, a clipping service. That's what they had in those days was a clipping service.

He called me in and he fired me. I went to Forman and I said, "OK, now's your chance. You can put me on the staff." [Laughs] He said, "OK." I think he had started asking me around the winter, and if I had been him, as administrator, I definitely would have hired me because, first of all, I did anything. Put me at the mimeograph machine for four hours, I'd do it. I was just so thrilled to be there, whatever I could do. I was, by then, I was skilled and I could put out a newsletter and I could write letters and I could write affidavits, and I could do all of this stuff.

Many years later--in fact I think it might have been at his memorial. I'm not positive--but, Les Dunbar showed up and I took a lot of--this you might want to--well-- I'll tell the story. I'll tell the story. I did take some immoderate pleasure in introducing my daughter, Margaret, to Les Dunbar, and saying, "This is the man who fired me when the FBI came." Now, he claimed that I was redundant and that the FBI had nothing to do with that, and you could possibly give him some credence in that because he didn't fire me the next day; he fired me two or three months later. He didn't tell me that they had been there until he fired me. So you could possibly say that. On the other hand, on the other hand--.

EC: It wasn't--.

DZ: On the other hand. I'll just say that. I did--. This was many years later.

EC: Yes. He also fired Jack Minas.

DZ: Did he?

EC: Who also then came over to SNCC after being fired by the SRC. So, SNCC got some really good people fired by the SRC.

DZ: Yes. Oh my God, we don't have time to even go into some of these characters like Jack and people like that.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on]

DZ: Oh. Well, you said that Jane Bond said that I was fired because I participated in a demonstration about the Cuban Missile Crisis that was organized by Howard Zinn. I said maybe that's the photo that the FBI had. Now, they did have my name. I know that because I think Howard told me that they--I think there were twenty-three of us. They knew every single person's name.

EC: Howard Zinn?

DZ: Howard Zinn told me. So, that's possible. I don't know what the photo was. And, I said, to give him credit, maybe--. On the other hand, if I had an employee that the FBI came about, I wouldn't wait three months. I would discuss it with them right away. So, there's something off there.

EC: Yes. So, when you started working with SNCC full time, there were a couple of things I know you were working on; one was the Civil Liberties conference, or workshop. And, you were also working with Julian Bond on the communications?

DZ: Yes.

EC: Can you talk about those--that work?

DZ: This is going to be hard because I have to talk about Julian now. Well let's see, I started working with Julian the winter of [19]61, [19]62. And, right away we meshed. And, probably you couldn't get two more different people because I was--. I'm sure I was hard to deal with. I think I was hard to deal with by some of the people there because when I said I'm going to be somewhere at nine o'clock, I was there at nine

o'clock. I mean, that was the hardest thing for me to adjust to; was, we'd say, "Oh, we're going to meet at nine o'clock on Thursday," and it might be nine p.m. on Tuesday. I found that very hard to deal with. I don't know if I interpreted it as a Southern way of life, but it might have been anything but a frenzied New York way of life. [1:45:00] I'm willing to grant that.

So, we had different ways. I was really hard driven and he was much more relaxed; relaxed meaning coming in later, leaving earlier, then coming back. But, we really got along well, extremely well. He was well-known to love gossip. He loved gossip. He loved funny stories about people. The interesting thing is that, when I needed a confidante about personal matters which I will not go into, who did I pick but Julian to talk to? That was early on. I'm thinking--I've been thinking since he died why I did that. There was something about him, I trusted him. I don't believe that whatever I told him--and I know what I told him--that he ever, ever, ever mentioned that to another living soul. So, there was a lot of respect there.

And of course, he happened to be one of the funniest people who ever lived, and I'm very fortunate--. I just had lunch with Pam, his widow, last Saturday, and I'm very fortunate that I have a lot of his emails. I don't think I ever destroyed one email that he ever wrote to me, so someday I have to get them all together and print them out and give them to her.

He was also really unique. One time, I think it was probably around 1963, I said to him, "Julian, let's write a book." And of course the two of us, we were so far from writing a book as being able to fly to the moon, because one thing you needed was to have all of the pieces of paper together in one spot, filed and kept. We didn't have that.

I'm thinking, if we had written a book, wouldn't that have been great? From 1963. It would have been 1963. I just, I loved working with him.

He also--I'm not going to give you the actual incident, but one thing that was very meaningful to me was that the defended me inside SNCC because I was being criticized for being the kind of person who got there at nine o'clock, and was irritated when other people did not get there at 9 o'clock. Julian did not like conflict. He was very conflict averse. So when he took up for me in a staff meeting, that was very meaningful to me. I never forgot that. I am finding it hard to realize that he's gone. It's not that I saw him so much--maybe I saw him every year--but just knowing that he was there was something meaningful to me. When I got that email that he had died, and I--somebody sent it to me. It was totally--. I think it was Dorothy Burlage. She had seen it on the Associated Press. She was up like at four o'clock in the morning or something. When I woke up in the morning I saw it and I just couldn't. I said, "No, no, Julian." So, they were both totally different characters. Completely different characters. I was lucky to work with them. Really lucky. We didn't have too many moments of a high danger, you know, like I did with Jim. Julian was cautious. He didn't put himself in too many moments of high danger, although he did travel to Mississippi quite a bit, so there must have been some high danger there.

EC: How did you put out the *Student Voice* and how did you work with reporters?

DZ: Well, I think--I've been trying to remember. I remember laying out dummies of the *Student Voice*, but I think Julian brought it to the guy who put out the black newspaper, whose name I don't remember. [1:50:00]

EC: The *Atlanta Inquirer*?

DZ: Might have been, yes, somebody at the *Atlanta Inquirer*. We did not put-- . We didn't do the type ourselves. We didn't set the type. We didn't have the ability to make the photos, but I remember doing many dummies.

EC: Did the two of you write all the stories?

DZ: Yes, we wrote all the stories. And later on, we also tried to teach staff people and the summer volunteers, both, about how to deal with the press. He and I really saw eye-to-eye on how to deal with the press, because there were some press people we really liked a lot, and even if we didn't like them, we always told them the truth. That's something that I--we taught the volunteers. Since then, I've always taught people. I've said, "If you have a demonstration, don't say there were 500 people when there were forty-two people. Say there were forty-two people, because they guy who covers it the next time, he's not going to come if he knows." Now, nobody taught us that in journalism school. Actually, neither of us ever went to journalism school, but I did run the newspaper and I think he was on the newspaper, if I'm not mistaken, or with the newspaper, at Morehouse? I'm not sure.

EC: He actually--. When he left Morehouse, he worked with the Atlanta Inquirer when they were being formed.

DZ: Yes. So, we liked these guys and they trusted us, and we had really a-- looking back-- a really unique and wonderful relationship with them. A lot of them gravitated towards him. He was very beautiful and very charismatic, and I was this New York girl, you know? They weren't going to dwell over me, although Fred Powlich became quite fond of me at the end. But he was very charismatic. He was great to be

around. We did these live phone conversations. Well, they were live but then they taped them, but even then, oh, he was a master at that. Ten times.

EC: Explain what you mean by that.

DZ: Well, somebody would interview us over the phone. I was good; I was earnest and everything. He was witty and funny. I mean, he had to be one the funniest people who ever lived. He could just knock off these witticisms like it was just nothing. The younger he was, the quicker he was. So when he got--. Most people saw him when he already was down half his speed. You can imagine what he actually was when he was twenty-two. We were born on the same day. Date. The same day, not the same year. I'm two years older. So they knew if they talked to Julian they would get a good quote. So they would always get a good quote, then they would get the truth from us, and they would get what actually happened. If we didn't know what happened, we'd say, "We don't know what happened." These are all things that have flown by the wayside, you know? [Laughs] So, they were reasonably sure they didn't have to go double-checking and triple-checking and so forth. Then we called them constantly and we sent press release, press release, press release.

Now, we had--if I've got this correct. I'm not sure I do. We identified black people deliberately. Of course we didn't say black then; we said negro. Now it looks a little strange, but we did it deliberately because we wanted people to know that there were black people in the front of this, so that when people got arrested it was especially important. Now, I'm not sure that really came through to a lot of people wondering, because we didn't say white. White was the default, but we wanted people to know that there were black people in the leadership. I hope some historian will write that down

somewhere because it will look definitely strange in twenty or thirty years; why an organization that was black-led kept, making a whole point only about the race of a person when it was a black person. But there was a reason for that and we did that always. Always. Now, off the record, sometime--.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on]

EC: So, I want to jump ahead a little bit, but so, I know that you worked in the Atlanta office through the summer of [19]63. You and Bob Zellner [1:55:00] were married in August, [19]63?

DZ: Yes, we were married in August, but to say "through the summer" was not quite right because part of that was in Danville. Then, if we've got the dates right, another part of it was in Greenwood at the music festival. I wasn't--.

EC: So, based out of the Atlanta office.

DZ: Based out of--. Absolutely, yes. And got married in Atlanta.

EC: Then you and Bob relocate to Boston?

DZ: Yes.

EC: He's in graduate school and you create a Boston Friends of SNCC?

DZ: No. There was a Boston Friends of SNCC, and I created a Northeast Regional Office of SNCC. I always made it--. Nobody paid the slightest bit of attention, but I always made a big thing about that because I was not--this was not a Friends of SNCC group. I was a staff member and I took leadership directly from Atlanta, and I was a staff member.

EC: And did most of the Friends of SNCC not have a staff member? They were--.

DZ: That's right. Many of them had volunteers. Some of them only had volunteers.

EC: So then like Chicago and New York, are those also SNCC offices as opposed to Friends of SNCC?

DZ: Well, it's sort of mixed. I don't know. You'd have to ask people who work there, but there were staff members there, too.

EC: I guess that's what I was--.

DZ: Yes.

EC: So you're in Boston, and I know one of the things that you did was interview people who were going to be volunteers in the summer project, and decide whether they should, to accept the applications. Then you went to Greenwood that summer, of [19]64, as part of the national office in Greenwood, and at some point you're in Newark?

DZ: No.

EC: You and Bob?

DZ: No.

EC: I thought--.

DZ: We went back to Cambridge where we were living. He went back to school in [19]64, [19]65. I ran the SNCC office, continued to run the SNCC office there. I mean, the Northeast Regional, the Friends of SNCC, whatever you want to call it, in Boston. And got pregnant. Then I resigned from that particular work, but not from the SNCC staff, in the spring of [19]65. Then my daughter was born. We went back to Atlanta in the fall of [19]65, and then we took a year's leave of absence and Bob was the

campaign manager for the first anti-Vietnam War candidate in the country, whose name was Bob Cook, who was a Yale professor.

EC: So you were in New Haven?

DZ: We were in New Haven.

EC: That must have been what I was thinking of.

DZ: Yes. We were in New Haven, but one or the other of us always went to staff meetings. So, we were on leave but we were still going to staff meetings, we were still involved in staff discussions.

EC: Can I ask? So then when you said that you resigned from running the Northeast Regional but you continued to do work, what kind of work were you doing?

DZ: Oh, I don't remember if I did any work when we were still there. When we came back to Atlanta I worked. I brought the baby to work.

EC: OK, I just--.

DZ: Then when I came back--that was the winter of [19]65 if I'm not mistaken--the spring, it went from [19]65 to [19]66, that's when Stokely asked me to work on the Panthers. Now, while we were on leave, as I say, Bob always went to staff meetings, and I did too, if I was able. But at the time in [19]65, it was the custom; you didn't work after your seventh month. Now you work right up until the minute you give birth.

EC: Is that when you resigned? When you were seven months pregnant?

DZ: Yes. But I didn't resign from SNCC, I just stepped down from the office. Bob took over running the office.

EC: While he was in school?

DZ: Yes, but he was already--he was pretty--. And never graduated. I mean, never finished. So, she was born in July. I probably--. It was late May, he had already finished his semester and he started running the SNCC office.

EC: So, she's born in the spring.

DZ: She's born in July.

EC: She's born in July. That fall you're back in Atlanta?

DZ: That's right.

EC: At what point do you take the leave of absence? Is it--.

DZ: It was probably shortly thereafter. [2:00:00] Maybe the winter. Then we worked through the election, which was again November, I guess, of [19]66. Sixty-six. Then we stayed there a few--a couple of months after that. Then we went south and we were getting ready to go back to work with SNCC, because by that time--.

EC: Were either of you at the December, [19]66 meeting with Peg Leg Bates?

DZ: Bob was there.

EC: Bob was there?

DZ: But I wasn't there.

EC: Can you tell us what he said about that meeting?

DZ: Oh, well, he said that white people were asked to leave, and the only thing I remember was that most of the white people had abstained, and that he--as I remember. I don't know if the Library of Congress is interviewing him, but he apparently abstained. I should say that the most coherent recounting of that meeting--which, if you get ten people, they have eleven versions--is Betita, Liz Sutherland's version, in our book is the most coherent. I have heard other people say that white people were never asked to leave

SNCC, and I have heard multiple votes, each one contradicted the other, the last one at two o'clock in the morning, and so forth and so on. Hers is the most coherent, and I think it's probably the most accurate one.

But in any case, when we went back the first time, which was [19]65, before we left for New Haven, already there was discussion about SNCC becoming all black.

EC: Do you--. were you part of those discussions or just have a sense they were going on?

DZ: Yes. Well, they weren't--. Well, the substantive discussions were not conducted with white people there, but it was a not a secret and people were saying, yes. I remember--. I don't remember people's names, but I remember being in meetings where people would say, "Yes, we think it's--we want to go all black."

EC: What were you thinking at the time?

DZ: Oh, I was beside myself. Now that you've heard part of my little story. I went down to marry the movement. [Laughs] I was completely beside myself.

EC: And you've got an infant daughter.

DZ: Totally beside myself. Yes. Then we decided--. Then I said to Bob, "I am not disappearing without a trace. We have to write something." After all, who told us to write everything and keep everything was Forman, right? So, we were at the moment--at that moment, I think it was May [19]67, and we had been in Alabama with this baby, roosting there until we figured out what was going to happen to us because, in the meantime, Anne and Carl had said that they wanted us to come and work for SCEF, Southern Conference Educational Fund. We wanted to get--as I remember--straightened

out with SNCC before we decided, before we made a decision. I mean, our vast preference was to stay in SNCC.

So, we talked about it and we decided that we would agree to work in the white community, but we could not agree to be--to surrendering our vote. In other words, we would insist on being treated as regular staff members in the organization, and we would work in the white community. And furthermore, to do otherwise was wrong; that you can't organize white people in a vacuum, that we know what happens then. I wrote that statement, and actually I read it now and then. I have to say, it is extremely well done. It is well done, because it right away says, we are not doing this out of sentiment, we are not doing this out of longevity. After all, Bob was the first--one of the first field secretaries, period, and the very first white field secretary, and I came on in June of [19]62. 2:05:00] I outdated many of the people who wanted us to leave. I was there before them. We said we were willing to do that.

Now, looking back, there was only one place in Alabama I think we could have survived, and that was this little artsy-craftsy town called Fair Hope. And, Bob's family lived in Daphne, Alabama, which was near Mobile, and Fair Hope was further inland maybe, I don't know, thirty or forty miles, and Fair Hope had a reputation of tolerating artists who lived there and more unconventional people. I felt maybe we had a chance there, but I was very afraid. [Door opens] [Recorder is turned off and then back on].

So, I was very, very afraid, and I said to Bob, "I don't want to go there." He said, "Oh, it'll be OK, it'll be OK." I said, "I'm afraid we're going to be killed there." And fortunately, he--his mother intervened, and his father had a church but he had lost several churches because he had turned into a liberal by that time. He had lost many churches, I

don't remember how many, and his mother said to him, not to me, to him, "I don't want you to come here to Alabama because, whatever you do, we will pay the price and we will--who knows what will happen to us." So, he wouldn't listen to me at all, but he listened to her.

In any case, if SNCC had accepted it, we would have gone to Alabama, with his mother or without his mother, and the only place, as I said, I could have thought was Fair Hope. Now, how long we would have lasted in Fair Hope, I have no idea. It's conceivable to me that I, at some point, would have said, "I can't live like this. Good-bye." I mean, everything was up for grabs.

How it was going to actually work day to day, I don't know. We would have started organizing somehow in Alabama, in the white community, and then we would have gone to staff meetings somewhere where there would have been black people and white people. We would have discussed our work. Sooner or later I think the objective would have been that we start introducing some black people to some of these white people. We would have--. Knowing us, we probably would have looked for situations of conflict, like Laurel, like Mississippi. Who knows.

I mean, after all, fifty years before this, as we can tell from Robin Kelley's book *Hammer and Hoe*, that there were organizers in Alabama, and there were even interracial organizers in Alabama. And, according to a story that Martha Norman Noonan told us, she was able to detect traces of that interaction many decades later. So it's up for grabs. I think that the chances are good that we would have been killed. One of us would have been killed, or they would have set a bomb--thrown a bomb in the house, and they would

have tried to kill us like they did the McShirleys, but I'm not sure. In any case, it did go on the record, this piece of paper did last from [19]67 till now.

EC: What was the vote?

DZ: Well, we never were--never got it straight. We heard all kinds of various things. We ended up--. We heard there was one vote for us, not Forman.

EC: Actually I guess I should backtrack. So, you write this statement and then Bob takes it to SNCC.

DZ: That's right. That's right.

EC: What was it called then? It wasn't the executive committee.

DZ: It was the central committee.

EC: The central committee. He presents it. Does he talk about it or does he just bring the paper, the proposal?

DZ: Well, according to the minutes--. The minutes are written, are in Danny Lyon's book. So, as I remember, he made a presentation and then he was asked to leave the room. Then the minutes talk--they talk back and forth. You know, according to the minutes, people said, "Gee, this is a hard situation. You know, he was there, he's very brave. He's a legend. But we're moving on. We're moving on."

EC: In that [2:10:00] interim period between when you come back to Atlanta in [19]65 after your daughter is born, and then this moment in [19]67 when you make the formal proposal, do you have conversations about this with people you were close to in SNCC, like Forman?

DZ: Well, my overriding impression of those years was that Forman was in deep psychic distress. Let's see. His breakdown--his first breakdown was in [19]68. So

this is before his breakdown. What--. I remember talking to him after Peg Leg Bates, and I remember I was sitting--he was sitting on a couch, I was sitting across. I said, "Don't tell me you agree with this." He didn't deny it. I said, "I know you don't agree with this." "Yes, but Dorothy--." He called me Dorothy. "Dorothy, you know--." He didn't. He was in deep psychic distress.

I think he understood that--where people were. He was--he couldn't hold them back. He didn't want to be in a position of holding them back because he knew it would undermine his own leadership abilities. He was deeply uncomfortable. I think--my impression is that he would definitely have preferred an interracial organization lead by black people, which is what we had. Not an organization where we took on eighty white people from a Mississippi summer. That was untenable. That was totally untenable. I think that was his comfort zone. I think he was basically a class guy. He was for class--unity around class. I think that's where his comfort zone was. But he couldn't do anything to stop it, and he wouldn't. He wouldn't. But the fact that he was not out there gung-ho meant something to people. You know, he was making a statement by not making a statement, and he was in difficulty. I think Julian also.

Now, I don't remember ever--. But Julian left relatively early on. I don't know. Do you know what year he left? He left by [19]65.

EC: Well, I think it was in conjunction with the election.

DZ: But it was before that. It was before the election.

EC: Yes, then I have--. I saw a press release about him leaving SNCC and I thought--. I don't know. He framed it in terms of, he looked up one day and realized he

hadn't been doing any work, so he shouldn't be. But yes, I don't know the timing of that. I don't remember.

DZ: I don't know if that was the only reason, and I'm certainly not saying to anybody who ever watches this that SNCC died because white people left. I do think that the fact that whatever happened to SNCC causing it to disappear three years from then was a horrible tragedy for the United States, and has had a deep, deep impact every decade since then. It was truly unique. It was--. It definitely was a magnet with the absolute best, most creative, most innovative, most intelligent, bravest people, and we've needed it desperately ever since.

I myself think that what happened, the fracturing, was a factor, but I think there were other factors, and I think deep disillusionment following Atlantic City was a tremendous factor, and I think--well, it sounds very simple minded, but in a way it was people's faith in democracy, lower case D, that did them in, because it didn't prepare them for what was going to happen. If you look back on it and just see, oh, you say to yourself, [2:15:00] "Oh, we should have gone into Atlantic City saying--" and I was not in Atlantic City. We should have said, "Maybe this will work, but probably it won't. And next month we're hm-hm-hm." But we were not thinking about that.

EC: Bob Moses said to me that he thinks things might have moved forward better if there had just been a planned debriefing for the summer project students at the end of the summer. Something to sort of bring people together to debrief and then move on back to wherever. I don't know. So, what did you Bob do--you and Bob Zellner do at that point when the proposal was rejected?

DZ: So when it was rejected we told Anne and Carl that we were coming to work with SCEF. So we moved to New Orleans where I'd live for the next seventeen years, and we worked there for five years. We worked there and for SCEF for five years. And Anne and Carl had wanted us to take over the organization, and they had this idea that we would replicate their behavior and their division of labor. They had three children, one later died, but their idea of how they conducted themselves was, each one was six months on the road while the other, you know, was fanning the home fires. I absolutely did not want to live like this and I felt that it had a very, very serious effect on their children, and I was not about to do that to my children. And furthermore, since Bob had very little administrative ability, I did not want to end up running the whole thing, which I would have had to end up doing. He would have been on the road doing the things that he could do well; making the contacts, making the speeches. I would be home raising the two children and running an organization by myself. No, thank you. So, we stayed on this project and--.

EC: So how did you do it then?

DZ: Well, I stayed home and worked from home. I was--and Anne did me a tremendous favor; she insisted that I get paid separately so that I would have Social Security in the future. And every--I should think about her every month when I get my Social Security check because it's thanks to her because they were--five years we would have had nothing on the books. And Bob still--he traveled, he went to Mississippi. He worked on the woodcutter's project and the grassroots organizing work. I stayed at home and I did stuff from home. I wrote. I did all the things that I've always done; I wrote pamphlets, I wrote things--. I have it down on that piece of paper.

Then, finally, after we had been in civil rights--. We had been professional civil rights workers for ten years. I said to Bob, "We have to become regular people." You know, I felt like we were going to levitate into the sky. You know, I mean, nobody was standing there saying, you better get up at seven o'clock, you have a clock to punch. You know, we were--. If we had gone on much longer we wouldn't have been able to integrate back into the regular world. There's something about long-term organizers where they don't have regular routines, it sometimes separates them from the people who do--people that they're organizing.

So, he became a carpenter. He was a carpenter and he was able to join the union, and I went to nursing school to be a practical nurse. Then of course we continued doing stuff as volunteers and some local struggles that we got involved in. But we had other work, other jobs.

EC: So, can we go back?

DZ: Sure.

EC: So you're working--. Can you tell us about the civil liberties workshop that you organized? I guess it was carried off in summer of [19]63, right?

DZ: Yes. I think it was in spring. It was in spring of [19]63. Well, that turned out to be a totally unsung but very important episode in SNCC's history. I think I'm the only one who's written about it so far. I'm sure there'll be other people down the road. It's the product of this very close relationship that Anne Braden and Miss Baker had, [2:20:00] and they were survivors of McCarthyism, and McCarthyism was not dead; McCarthyism was very much alive at the time, although in retrospect it was waning. I don't know when the last--. Let's see. I think the House Un-American Activities

Committee was still having hearings even up to 1964, if I'm not mistaken, where their back was really broken by a group called Women's Strike for Peace. That was in the early 60s, [19]61 or [19]62. I'd have to check that. Women's--.

Previously, people who were called before the Un-American Activities Committee were faced with two very unpleasant options. First of all, they had to get lawyers. You couldn't go into a hearing without a lawyer. You had two options; you could take the Fifth Amendment, which is your guaranteed Constitutional right, and which the American mass media would make equivalent to saying you were guilty. All the mafia people took the Fifth Amendment. Anybody who didn't want to go to jail took the Fifth Amendment. Or, you took the First Amendment and you had no protection whatsoever and you could be cited for Contempt of Congress. Which is what happened to Carl Braden and Frank Wilkinson; they went to jail for a year.

So, there were very few protections. Previously to this, in the 50s--flying out of my head--Charlie Jones had testified--.

EC: Of SNCC.

DZ: Of SNCC.

EC: He eventually joined SNCC.

DZ: Yes.

EC: This was before he joined SNCC.

DZ: Yes, before he joined SNCC. He had been a super patriot of some kind and he had testified. By nineteen--. Anne was completely committed to fighting these investigating committees and fighting McCarthyism. And, parenthetically--make sure I come back to this--when I was living in New Orleans I wrote a paper when I was briefly

in graduate school, about the Eastland hearings that took place in 1954 against the Southern Conference Educational Fund. So, in 1974--1954. Sorry, 1954 was probably the height of McCarthyism, 1954, [19]55, [19]56. They did everything they could to smear the Civil Rights Movement.

So, Anne was a survivor of this, and Miss Baker was--I don't think she was ever-- that they ever thought of calling her, but Anne was always in danger of being called, and Carl had gone to jail for a year. So they cooked up together that it was very important to have some internal education about what SNCC was going to do if it was ever called by an investigating committee. It turned out this was extremely important, and there was--. I think the conference went on for at least two days, as I remember. I have no idea what the actual process was, but I remember a lot of agonized discussion, and whether SNCC could admit people without loyalty oaths, whether it had to be concerned about people's politics, volunteers' politics.

By then, Al Lowenstein was around and who had already told Bob Moses--no, no. He was around the next fall. The next fall. The next summer. But there were people always coming up. There were always rumors and people coming up to Forman and to Bob Moses saying, "Uh-oh, watch out this one. This one is a Red, that one's a Red," and so forth. So we had this agonizing discussion, and Bob at that time was very nervous about having white people--Bob Moses--coming in, because of the danger to local people, and he was doubly nervous about having anybody who was called a communist coming in, also for the same reason. There was a lot of agonized discussion, but at the end, people decided that they would not cooperate. This was a stunning victory, unbeknownst--. I mean, this totally has gone without any historical--. I think I'm the

first one who wrote about it, and I am convinced that there was--there had to be an undercover agent there and it was transmitted to the government, that if these people were subpoenaed, they would refuse to cooperate. Then, in 1963, [2:25:00] there was still an incredible amount of goodwill in reserve in the country for the sit-in heroes, and it would not have looked good internationally to have sit-in heroes go to jail, sent by the U.S. government, because they refused to talk about their views. That would have definitely looked very bad.

EC: Wasn't one of the big issues about whether or not--basically a political test on letting somebody in SNCC or working with SNCC?

DZ: Yes. Well, that's what I've said; there was pressure about that, about people's views. They decided no, they were not going to have an oath, and furthermore, if they were called by a committee they would not take the Fifth Amendment; they would take a First Amendment, they would go to jail. And later on, Julian told me many years later, that in the '60s and he said the '70s, he--and he was never able to verify this because I asked him within the past couple of years about it. He said he had read somewhere that the government had 6,500 black informers all over the country. So we had to have an informer, and that person probably still--if that person's still alive, they have not been unmasked and we've still got him, somebody.

EC: There was something that happened before that workshop, it was like maybe in [19]62, maybe fall [19]62, Carl Braden was in Mississippi and there was a lot of newspaper coverage about Red, Commie, I don't know how they put it, but coverage of that. And Bob was--Moses was really concerned about it. Do you remember that?

DZ: I don't remember that particular thing, but I know--I remember he was very concerned. He was very concerned. But he was never concerned from the point of view of, "Oh, I can't have these people around," and "Oh, they're going to screw up what we're doing." It was solely because of the danger that it presented to local people. And by then, you know, Herbert Lee had been killed, so that's a whole other story about walking around feeling responsible. So, I think it was a protective measure, and I honestly don't know. That was the fall of [19]62 you said?

EC: I think so. I think so.

DZ: I should be able to remember that, but I don't remember that.

EC: Can you talk about what you were trying to do when you were interviewing people to go to the summer project?

DZ: Oh yes. Well, like I said in the movie, I mean, it's in the movie. I mean, we were very, very hard-headed about it. We did not want crazies and we didn't want divas. Now, I think we succeeded pretty well because I think, of the hundreds of people who were there, I think there were a few divas and there might have been a few crazies, but considering the high percentage that there could have been, I think we kept it down. Now, I was only in one place. I don't know what other people were doing around the country. My impression is, that it ranged from being very hands-on to very loose, and that there were some places where people just said, you know, "Go."

EC: Do you remember how you were?

DZ: Oh, we were--we were totally rigorous, to say that least.

EC: Do you remember how you did it? How you approached it?

DZ: Oh yes. Well, we had a questionnaire which I believe was prepared by COFO. We didn't-- See, our whole way of functioning was we were taking direction from the center, from the hub, so it would have been unheard of for me to write an application for somebody. This was written by people in Mississippi. We interviewed every one of them personally, and usually there were two of us; a black person and a white person, and we wrote detailed reports, which--and who knows-- I think I know where they are but I don't know, and I'm certainly hoping they're uncovered after I'm in my grave, because some of them were not very flattering. Let's put it that way. So, what we were looking for was to get--make sure that nobody was an adventurer, like, "Oh, I think I'll do something exciting. I'll go to Mississippi." We wanted people who were going to be respectful of the black communities even if they didn't understand a thing about black communities. [2:30:00] The way we put it, we put it in very, very simple, concrete terms; are you going to wear shorts to church? Those kind of examples, to see how-- I don't know how clever we were because you didn't have to be a brain surgeon-- certainly not Ben Carson--to figure out what the correct answer was, but we were also looking at them and seeing their body language and their reaction. We wanted people who would behave. Who would behave, and who would realize that they were going into a very dangerous situation.

Now, you know that in this last reunion, a woman came up to me who I did not know at all, she said, "I know you don't know--." I'm talking about recently in Mississippi. She said, "You don't know who I am, but you interviewed me." There were several people who came up to me. She said, "I have to say, I've never forgotten it in my whole life." I said, "Oh my God, what did I do?" She said, "You scared the hell out of

me. You said, 'Are you ready to die?'" I said, "Oh. Well in that case, that's not so bad." [Laughs] So, I said, "You mean I didn't send you down there on false pretenses?" She said, "No. No you didn't." She said "It was one of the worse things I ever went through." She said, "But the good thing is, when I give an interview I remember what you did, and I tell the truth and I bear down on people." We did. Oh, we did, we did, we did. Because, in my mind, I didn't also be responsible. "Oh my God, you let this person go through?" I'm sure that if errored, we errored on the other side of caution. We probably didn't let some people go down who should have. Now, the one person I slipped up on was Abbie Hoffman. [Laughs]

EC: You let Abbie Hoffman through?

DZ: We let Abbie Hoffman through, but at that time he was wearing a suit and tie. I mean, he was a completely different person. He, ironically, is the only one--I'm sure I've told you this--that I know who actually went public after white people left SNCC, gnashing his teeth about how terribly he had been treated as a white person. Yes. In *The Village Voice*. Yes, yes, yes.

EC: Did he--. Was he in SNCC after the summer?

DZ: Well, the question was whether he was ever in SNCC. I mean, by stretching the--. I mean, that's the thing. People ask me now, was so-and-so in SNCC. I say, "Well what do you mean, in SNCC? Do you understand that we didn't have members?" "Oh, what?" I said, "We didn't have members, we had staff." So there's a lot of mushiness about that. If you were in a project in Mississippi and you were in a freedom school, were you in SNCC? You were in a COFO project, to be actually accurate. But he was one of the few.

EC: But he was a summer volunteer?

DZ: He was a volunteer.

EC: Where did he work?

DZ: I don't know, but this is easy to find out. It's in the stuff--. You should definitely look up that. It's *The Village Voice*. The other person I think who had bad things to say was Susan Brownmiller. If I remember. There were two of them. Two of them. Now, she was not SNCC, but she had a lot of bad things to say about white people being used and poor white people and poor white people. So, after all of that episode, there were press who wanted to interview us. We said no. We'd never. We were never interviewed. I just want to clarify that, what happened to white people--. It ends up that everybody's always crying over the poor white people, you know? If we all look back, it was--. Is it a surprise after what happened in Atlantic City, really? Would we have not done the same ourselves? Very likely so. So that's what always held me back from crying. I was always loyal to SNCC, but also, I can't say for a hundred percent that I would have--. If I had gone through what they went through, I don't know what I would have done. I mean, Bob Moses's suggestion about getting all the volunteers together, that would have been helpful. It would have been helpful--. I mean, you see him, Bob Moses, and it's very sad, in the movie. [2:35:00] What's the other movie about the freedom summer? It's just slipped my mind.

EC: The older one or the recent one?

DZ: The older one, the older one.

EC: *Freedom On My Mind*?

DZ: *Freedom On My Mind*. He's standing there. I've seen the film several times. He's standing there with a clipboard. He's in Atlantic City. He's keeping track of all the different delegations and the votes. He looks at the camera and he says, "If things go along the way we expect, we're going to win." So, if everybody--. And certainly if somebody of Bob Moses' stature thought we were going to win, was anybody going to say, "Hey, wait a second. What if we don't win? What are we going to do? What is the plan B?" We didn't have one. We didn't have one. Given all of that, is it any wonder?

Now, some people feel--. I don't know, Judy may feel or other people may feel, that going--becoming all black was a natural thing and needed to be done. It should have been done. I don't think I agree. I think we were a powerhouse. When you think of what we were able to do. It's not because we had all those white people, because we didn't have all those white people. I don't think until the summer of [19]64 we had more than twenty percent of the people who were white. Maybe twenty-five. I think there were some very good lessons that we taught. We taught that a black person can tell a white person what to do. That was unheard of. That was unheard of. We were told--. We taught people by example that, if the context changes then people's behavior can change. That was unheard of.

I tell people that we probably, for those brief years, are the only Americans who ever experienced racial equality. I mean--maybe equality is not the right word. That we achieved, in the South African term, a non-racial community. Not because we weren't racial, because everybody knew and was conscious of that, but because the context was, if you're going to be with us you're going to take a bullet. And you can take a bullet as a white person or a black person.

It was unique really, when you think about it. What other group was like that? I think we taught a lot. The country is so deeply racist that whether we could have remained that way--. Obviously we didn't. We couldn't. It was racism that did us in, and you know, people have different ideas about why SNCC came to end. There's a lot of contention about that still. I think there were many, many reasons, but the basic reason really was, this is a profoundly racial--racially disturbed country. In order to really get through it, we're going to have to have Black Lives Matter times a million. I mean, we're going to have to take it on every which way; culturally, socially, physically, academically, every way. Otherwise, that's the vacuum. The vacuum is racism. When there's racism then all kinds of people walk into the vacuum.

So, I can't feel sorry--. I still feel sorry that SNCC is lost, that was lost. I don't know if other people do. I think it may play out in a lot of racial ways, it may play out. There's certainly an awful lot of confusion about what happened, and you know, there was confusion right away after Peg Leg Bates. Within two weeks there were debates. This vote happened, this vote didn't happen. All of that. I don't know how we would ever--. I don't think there was any kind of coherent note-taking there. It doesn't seem that anybody--that everybody can agree with, that everybody can adhere to.

But I don't want this--my interview to be only on--to end on that note, because it's not the critical thing. It's not the critical thing, what happened to the poor white people. What happened to poor us? You know? That's not the critical thing. The critical thing is that I think that we showed that, without sounding hyper lowercase [2:40:00] democratic, we showed that there is an incredible resource and reservoir of real creativity and ingenuity. Certainly in the black community, and in the white community

that is willing to support black liberation. It's there, it's still there. It's there. It's definitely--. At different times it's going to come out, and people have hopes that each time it'll be the time that we can recreate that. Each time.

EC: I've heard you say that your--that some of the work you're doing now, it feels to you that you're fulfilling the charge that SNCC made to white people to work in their own community. Can you talk about that?

DZ: Well since--. Let's see, I'm--. For thirteen years I've been doing this, mostly you know that's what I do, in addition in my job, is work in--speaking out as a Jewish person about Israel/Palestine. And, I've come a long way in those twelve or thirteen years and learned an awful lot. My initial impetus was to do what SNCC said to do, which we--as you can tell, we were ready to do it, we said at least, in 1957 and it never came about.

EC: [19]67?

DZ: [19]67. Sorry. In the GROW project we tried to do white organizing in a moment of crisis in Mississippi. Now we say "we" and I use that sort of in quotes because, I was home with children and I was not traveling to Mississippi. There were several men who were doing that, and different--to different degrees of effectiveness. So, I took it to heart; this is what I have to do. This is what people expect me to do. I have to say, there are not a whole lot of SNCC people who say to me, "Oh, I'm going to join you," but I have yet, in thirteen years, have one SNCC person ever say, "I don't agree with what you're doing," and many of them have said, "Good for you that you're doing it because it's tough."

It's tough without having some of the benefits that SNCC had, because even while we were right there in the middle of it, I knew at least--I presume other people knew--that if I lived to be a million would I ever be able to sit in a room with people like this. I mean, almost every one of them out dazzled the other one. That's the other lesson, takeaway that I tell people. You know, SNCC stood everything--in addition to having black people telling white people what to do, it showed you that a person with a third grade education might be smarter than an PhD. This is very useful to know. There were a lot of things that were stood on their heads. Those are all carry-aways. We don't have that in this movement, and I have definitely--. I've told kids, I've brought kids lessons from those days. I've said, "You have to take care of each other. You have to send people away on R and R." That's what Forman did. Forman invented that. He invented that.

We don't have, you know, oh you walk into a room and say, here we are. We're all together. We can get sustenance until the next time. We don't have that because, when we're out there, we're out there. On the front lines with people who hate us. Hate us. Vicious and hateful people. And, actually it was one of the women in our book, one of the black women, who told me that she was in a demonstration in Israel years ago of progressive--with progressive Israeli Jews, and she said the abuse they had suffered there was worse than anything she had ever went through in the South. And people ask me and I say, "Well, the difference is, they didn't talk to you much; they just tried to kill you. Here, they abuse you. They don't--up until now have not tried to kill. The abuse level is extremely high.

So, I can't say that I go home and I rarely am able to say to myself, wow, we did a great thing today. [2:45:00] What I said is, "Well, we did it. At least we did it."

[Laughs] Hopefully it's going to mean something someday. I think it is starting to mean something.

EC: Can you tell me about Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson?

DZ: Yes. I met her probably the winter of--. I met her before I was on staff. I met her when we were in the loft. You know about the loft? People have forgotten about the loft. First we had the windowless cubicle, then we had the loft, then we had Raymond Street. There might have been something in between. So, I met her in the loft, which was also on Orban Avenue, I believe. So if that's the winter of [19]61, [19]62, I don't know when she got out of jail from Rock Hill.

EC: It would have been spring of [19]61.

DZ: Spring of [19]61. OK, well when she came into the office, there was--they always--there was a murmur because she was--she had a tremendous reputation as being brave as a lion. In those days, brave as any man, or braver than any man.

EC: That's how people put it?

DZ: Probably. I don't know that for sure. [Laughs] So, how to sum up Ruby and I. Until Ruby got sick, I think Ruby didn't really like me very much, but put up with me because I was a very hard worker. Later on, Cynthia Fleming, when Cynthia Fleming did her book about Ruby, she called me and she wanted an interview, and she said the word that I get is that you were one of the few white women that Ruby liked." So, liking was different from respecting. We never socialized. I don't think we ever had three minutes of chit-chat. It was work. And, she was very fierce. Very awesome and fierce.

And, I, like everybody else, was afraid of her. A little afraid of her. But she was never-- there was never anything I had to be afraid of because I did my work. That was the main thing with Ruby. Are you doing your work? I always did my work. But when Ruby got sick, then we became friends.

EC: What was her role in SNCC?

DZ: Well, Ruby was--even without having the title to go with it--she was sort of second to Forman. And, she--in modern terms, she did a lot of personnel work, and she kept track of where people were and what they were doing, what they were supposed to be doing. She did financial planning to the extent that we had any financial planning, with Forman. He respected her a lot. I'm not sure if I would call her an even-keeled person. I don't think she was. She was very emotional, and she had obviously had trauma. She was--. I think that thirty days of chipping or breaking rocks was an unbearable trauma for her.

EC: Well, she went to Parchman, too, on the Freedom Rides.

DZ: Yes, and she went to Parchman.

EC: Did she ever talk about that?

DZ: Not to me, no. She never--when we became sort of friends, when the barriers came down, she was flat on her back at Beth Israel Hospital, and I came in there and I was--. I mean, this is long before I became a nurse. Some people are afraid of sick people and some people aren't. The people who were afraid, they stayed away. Then there were the people who weren't. I wasn't afraid. We were living in New Haven then, but we would come to New York very often. My parents--we would stay at my parents' house and they lived one block from Beth Israel. I was able to get over there a lot. At

one point she was a holy terror in the hospital, and the nurses wanted her to do something and she refused. She jumped out of bed [2:50:00] trailing all these IV things and ripping them out. She was--looking back, I just--here she was in New York. What? I don't know why she was in New York week after week after week after week in the hospital. It's hard to believe that she couldn't--they couldn't have flown her home. I don't know. Here she had a little boy by then. She had a husband by then. Here, day after day after day she's in the--I think she was in there for weeks. Weeks.

So, then things--. Then Ruby was not--she became gentle, and we talked. We laughed, we talked about "Oh, so-and-so, can you believe so-and-so is up to this?" "Oh, tell me about it, girl," that kind of thing. [Laughter]

EC: You and Ruby Doris gossiping.

DZ: Yes. Then Forman would come and the three of us--our heads would be bent over and we would be telling funny stories. He was very kind to her. He was very gentle with her. And, I don't know--I actually spoke to her sister--whose name I can't think of right at the moment.

EC: Marianne

DZ: Marianne, who is a doctor, and when we had the SNCC reunion, I--. I think I tried to talk to her about what the medical issues were, which always was a mystery to me. I think it was a form of leukemia. It was very, it was virulent. I think she got sick and within two years she was dead. When she died we were already living in the South. Back in the South. We were in New Orleans. We came over from New Orleans. I remember that funeral, oh. So of course they had her hair done. That was the number one thing, first of all.

EC: What do you-- Explain what you mean.

DZ: She had her hair straightened as a corpse, and she--in her life--she was one of the first people who wore her hair natural. She always wore her hair natural. So, she hardly even looked like herself. I could hardly go up there. Oh God what a nightmare that was. Then we were outside afterwards, and I completely broke down, sob, sob, sob. Casey came over to me. "Why you crying so much?" she said. "Don't cry so much." I cried a lot.

So, there was a view-- I think Forman held this. I didn't agree with this. You know, that some--I don't know if she was poisoned or the government did something, and I think her immune system just completely crashed from what happened to her in the prison, but mostly, in breaking rocks. I was later--they explained to me--from side to side on the road. I mean, it was completely useless, useless, useless, harassing, horrible, physical work. She was a complicated character.

EC: Did you name your daughter?

DZ: I did. Catherine Ruby Zellner. After Bob's mother. So it was after two people. So, she was a very-- She was a difficult, passionate person, and she really cared. Now, to think that she got--now I appreciate that she got married and had a child and worked for SNCC and managed to keep all of that going somehow? I mean, really my hat's off to her. Then, I don't know how many months she was sick, I think she was twenty-six when she died. She had to have been sick a year, because I know she was in the hospital for weeks and weeks and weeks. In New York. So she didn't have much time. She had twenty-five years, you know?

Now, I don't remember her being a big architect of policy, but maybe she was in meetings that I wasn't--. You would probably know more than I would. But, she's the one that I remember she'd say--I mean, if you look at some of the minutes--she'd say, "Where are the floaters?" She said. She wanted to know where. "What is so-and-so doing?" When I used to answer the phone, people had to speak, I'd say, "Ruby wants to talk to you," voom! [Laughter] The men were petrified of her. Petrified of her. [2:55:00]

EC: So, how did you feel about going into Mississippi in Freedom Summer after you did the interviews and?

DZ: Oh, I was terrified. I was terrified. I spent weeks imagining. Oh, I can only get run over. I got run over and just broke my foot, what's so bad about that? [Laughter]

EC: So you were going to be like the draft dodgers and take yourself out of the action?

DZ: Here I was--you talk about a psychological issue--here I was vetting people to go to a place that I myself was terrified about going, was hoping something would happen. No, no. It was terrible, terrible. And ever since--. I'll never be the same. Whenever I see that sign. Here it is, years and years later, I have to hand it to you for living in that place. [Laughter]

EC: I didn't know any better.

DZ: But I don't think it's worse than Alabama. My heart didn't drop when I went to Alabama. They'd kill you in Alabama just as much. [Laughter]

EC: Yes.

DZ: So the other day I was talking about terrorism. I said, "We're the only ones who really--we're the ones who have been victims of terror. If you define terror as violence against the civilian population to create fear for a political objective. OK? If that's terrorism. We had nothing but terrorism. But of course, they're not terrorists because they're white. White people are never terrorists. In fact, this Roof, the one who killed the people in South Carolina. He was not a terrorist. The white people are crazy. It's the Muslims and the black people who are terrorists, you know?"

EC: [Recorder is turned off and then back on] You were talking about the difference in how people perceive who's a terrorist.

DZ: Yes.

EC: What was your work in Mississippi that summer?

DZ: In Mississippi I was one of the people on the WATS line. I did my eight hours. I did the first eight.

EC: What did that entail?

DZ: That entailed keeping track of people who were arrested. Doing some minimal work with the FBI, such as they were. Being a press contact. That was it, and that's what I--. I mean, the three of us split up the WATS line.

EC: Who's the three of us?

DZ: Judy, Betty and me. I did 7:00 to 3:00 or 9:00 to 5:00, whatever. So basically we were a contact for the parents, for the local people. I mean, the people local in the areas that the volunteers came from. Back and forth, and of course when Harry and Sidney came in and we worked on, you know, that tour. Mostly I was in the office, in literally the office.

EC: So did you get used to being in Mississippi when you were there?

DZ: Never. When we left we went to New Orleans, I said, "I'm in Paris." And New Orleans was segregated and I felt like I was in Paris. Oh my God. [Laughs] No, Judy has all kind of memories about going here and there. I didn't go anywhere. I was in that building. I didn't leave. I thought Bob was going to get killed. I thought, "I'm going down the road that Rita has gone." That's what I thought.

EC: [Recorder is turned off and then back on] You were saying about Forman?

DZ: You know, he didn't have manners. So, when you dealt with him you didn't do the normal thing about saying something good and then you'll say something critical, and then you'll--. You didn't play those games. He didn't play the games either. I mean, he'd call you up and he'd say, "Do blah, blah, blah." I mean, he didn't say please, he didn't say--he didn't have anything like that. But you knew when you knew him that he didn't mean anything by it. It wasn't an insult, it was the way he dealt with people.

I remember when Kennedy was shot. Actually, there is nowhere in any book. I picked up the phone. It was him on the phone. It didn't even ring. Did not ring. I think I was going to--was picking it up to call him. He called me. He said, "Did you hear? Kennedy's been shot." He was beyond shocked. Of course, who wasn't? His first thought was that Oswald [3:00:00] had been one of ours in the movement. He was very unnerved. Very unnerved. Then, the winter of [19]64, [19]65 was when I inadvertently found out that Barney Frank, the--who was the then the assistant to Allard Lowenstein--had been at a party--actually, we were at a party, and we heard that Al Lowenstein had

been--that Barney Frank had been in some meetings, and I called Forman. I said, "There's something going on." He said, "Go meet him." That's the kind of thing he--. "Go meet with him." I said, "OK."

So, I met with him, and then--. And of course he told me to write it down immediately, and I did, and fortunately Julian found it. He found it. I didn't know where it was. I said, what a--. He found it. I don't know how he found it. And of course, this is what they were planning to do, was planning to get SNCC out of the way, and it was a meeting of some very high level people in the Civil Rights Movement, in the room--.

EC: Is this the post Freedom Summer meeting where the National Council of Churches and all these--.

DZ: Yes. NAACP. Yes.

EC: They're talking about a coalition of civil rights groups in New York making decisions about what's going on in Mississippi?

DZ: That's right. To make sure that the next summer, the summer of [19]65-- which there never was, it never occurred--would not be controlled by SNCC. That SNCC was too out there, too far out there. They didn't like the loyalty oath issue. He verified that, and I wrote it. I mean, what Forman taught--of course, Forman did not teach us to put dates.

EC: Yes, I've noticed that.

DZ: Why is it that none of us--. None of us. Him and Judy was the only one to put a date on it.

EC: Well, some letters have dates, but the press releases just have months and days and no year.

DZ: But that's very common, you see. That comes from the newspaper. You read the New York Times, it says, "February 9." It doesn't say the year. On the story it doesn't. On the masthead it did. So.

EC: So are there other things that we haven't talked about that you think are important?

DZ: Not that I can think of. I'll think of them later. I'll think of them tonight, but it'll be too late, so.

EC: I'll send you home with a tape record. [Laughter]

DZ: No, I think I've had it.

EC: Thank you, Dottie. Thanks.

DZ: That was three hours, I think.

Female 1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, March 28, 2017