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Berkeley, California

Chude Pamela Allen

*Chude Pamela Allen: The Political is Personal*

Interviews conducted by
Amanda Tewes
in 2020-2021

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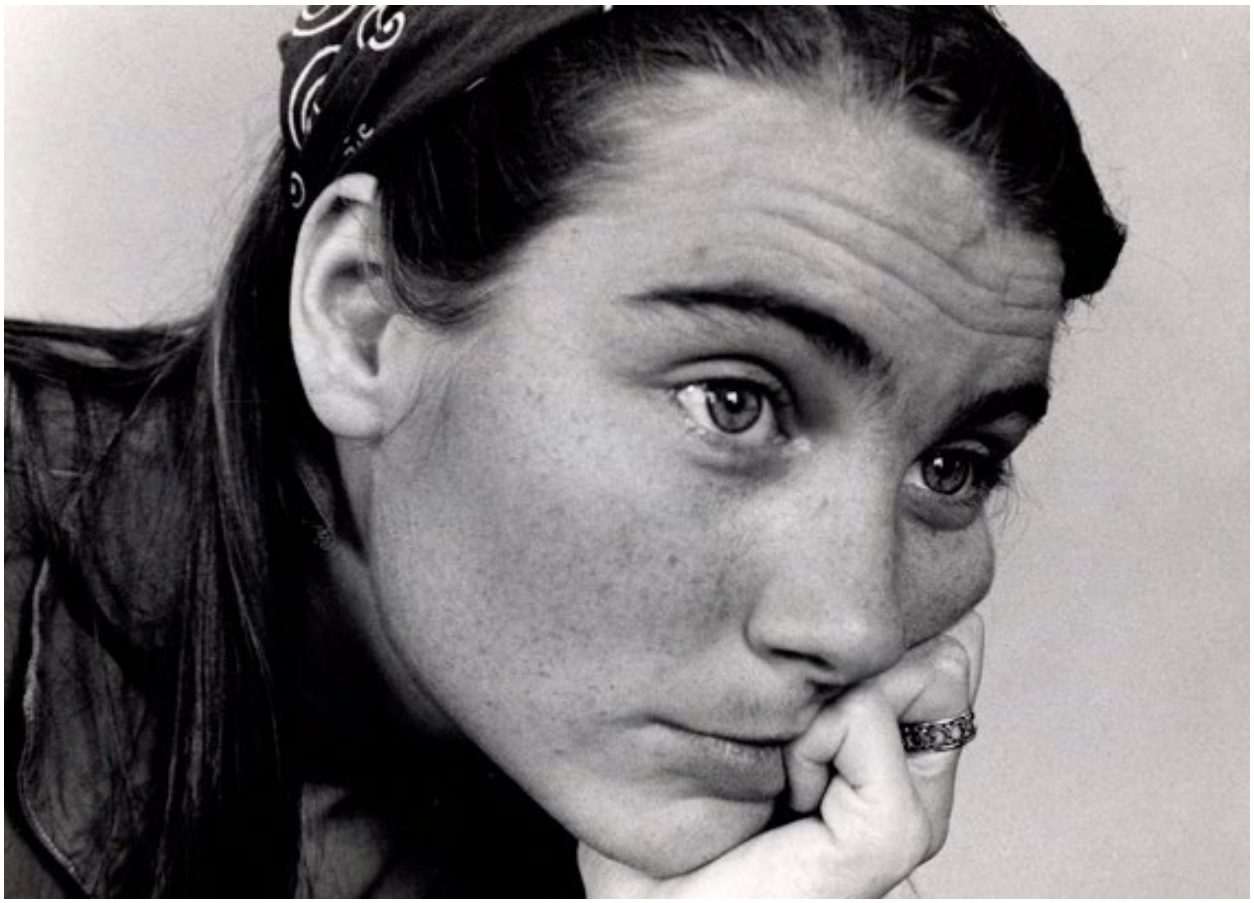

Chude Pamela Allen's self-portrait from *Free Space, A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*, 1970.

**Abstract**

Chude Pamela Allen is a writer and speaker, as well as an activist in the Civil Rights and women's liberation movements. Allen was born in 1943 and grew up in Solebury, Pennsylvania. She joined the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 and taught at a Freedom School in Holly Springs, Mississippi. She wrote *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*, based on the Sudsofloppen model for consciousness-raising groups. Allen researched and co-wrote *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States* with her then-husband Robert L. Allen. She has also helped organize the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, and continues to write and speak about her memories of civil rights work. In this interview, Allen discusses her family heritage; growing up in Solebury, and the community's demographics and politics; the importance of her early Episcopal faith; traveling to Costa Rica at sixteen; attending Carleton College and early activism; working at the Church of the Advocate in North Philadelphia and becoming more aware of racism; becoming an exchange student to Spelman College, being one of very few white students on campus and taking a course with Staughton Lynd; joining Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, including preparations for and work on the project, local activists and leaders, the deaths of other Civil Rights workers, speaking to students at Ole Miss, reactions from white peers, and the costs of this activism; meeting and marrying her first husband, Robert L. Allen; work at *The Guardian* and anti-war activism; work in the women's liberation movement, including connection to Shulamith Firestone and formation of New York Radical Women in New York, discussions and disagreements within the movement, formation of Sudsofloppen in San Francisco, connections to other women's groups, and mentor Patricia Robinson; moving to San Francisco in 1969 and experiencing housing discrimination; personal memory and its role in documenting the history of movements; researching and writing *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Movements in the United States* with Robert L. Allen; writing *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation* about the four processes in consciousness-raising groups; taking a trip to Cuba in 1972 with the Venceremos Brigade; the birth of her son, Casey, in 1975 and raising a mixed-race child in San Francisco; joining Union WAGE (Women's Alliance to Gain Equality), including connections to the women's liberation movement, newsletters and conferences, activists and leaders like Jean Maddox; meeting and marrying Norris Mackie; joining a spiritual cult in the 1980s; involvement in Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and ongoing education work about the Civil Rights Movement; personal writing and spiritual connections to Sojourner Truth; and the legacy of the women's liberation movement in the Bay Area.

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Interview 1: December 8, 2020

01-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a first interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on December 8, 2020. [In] this remote interview Ms. Allen joins me from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you so much, Chude, for joining me today.

01-00:00:25

You know, starting at the beginning, do you want to just speak about your family first? Can you tell me more about your parents and your predecessors—even before them?

01-00:00:37

Allen: Yes. I'm going to change glasses, hold on. There we go, this is better for the distance one. Where do I want to start? Well, in terms of my family, I was thinking about starting with at least the concept of contradictions, that nothing is all one way. I think that's important, because especially in talking about family, there are things that are very positive, and then there are always things that are not positive, and so I just wanted to start with acknowledging that. And I think two things. One is that this is not a culture that accepts contradictions. You're supposed to be on one side or the other. But the idea that two things at the same time could be true is not something that's culturally based here.

01-00:01:32

In my family there were the positive things, and then, of course, there were the problematic things. What's the link or what holds us together? And I think it's love. I came from a very loving family that was—I grew up knowing I was loved. I know that's not true for everyone, but it was true for me. I had a mother who was very nurturing, [Jeannette Luckie Parker], so that in those early years I was well nurtured.

01-00:02:03

At the same time, I'm the second child of four, and I'm the second girl. So we start out with the fact that there were two girls first, and then two boys. And to give you a sense of my family, in a way, is I have a strong memory of my father, [Stanley Milton Parker], talking, especially at the dinner table, about how much he wanted boys first and how his younger brother got a boy before he did. I remember this; neither my mother nor my sister remember it. This is one of those things, also—about memory and oral history—is that my view is a little bit different from both my older sister and my mother. Since it's such a strong memory for me, I believe it happened more than once. But I think it just went through—it was not something that stuck with them.

01-00:02:59

When I was first in the women's movement, the women's liberation movement, I used to think, Well, at least being the second girl meant that the disappointment—the big disappointment—had already happened. And then I came to start thinking, Well, no. [laughs] You're the second girl! So maybe it was worse. I don't know. I did not grow up feeling in any way that my mother and my father didn't love me, but it's very clear to me that my mother preferred men and boys, that there was a value judgment which has to do with patriarchy. So we can start there: I grew up in a patriarchal family.

01-00:03:41

I was born September 17, 1943, in Abington, Pennsylvania. Abington's with one B. Very soon after that, my family moved to a little town called Yardley, which was across the river from Trenton, New Jersey. And it was the intent of my parents to then, when I was around six, to move us to the suburbs of this little town across from Trenton, New Jersey. The suburbs were being, at that point, built. They bought a plot of land and they had chosen the particular blueprints, at which point the Korean War happened—I was seven at this point—and there were no building supplies. So my parents, being ready to move, started looking for a place.

01-00:04:37

And what my mother found was a place in a small village about forty-five minutes north of Trenton, New Jersey, on the Pennsylvania side, called Solebury, Pennsylvania. There was one store, one post office, and one church, and what was at that point the elementary school—although at one point it had been just—there still was the one-room schoolhouse from years before, but by that time there was an elementary school, as well, which we could walk to. So we were close enough to walk to whatever was in the village, but we did live in the country. There were woods all around us, a field in front of us. My family owned the field in front and a little bit of the woods. But the people around us when I was growing up did not build on [the land surrounding us], so we grew up very much with surroundings. Which means that I was not raised to be—I was not raised as a suburban girl, which is what my parents had intended.

01-00:05:44

My family, in terms of heritage, according to my sister, even the Scots-Irish ones who came over were not poor, they were not impoverished. Yeah, I come from kind of solidly middle-class background for many generations. My mother's mother had a university education. And my mother's grandmother—so my great-grandmother—was a teacher, my grandmother was a teacher, my mother was a teacher, and my sister was a teacher. So the female line, there have been teachers all along. And if we look at what I've done with my life, I've done a tremendous amount of teaching. I just haven't done it in an establishment situation with an institution.

01-00:06:42

So in that sense, we grew up—we always knew we had food. We always knew we had shelter. If we needed to go to the doctor, we could go to the doctor. Those kinds of basics, the basic rights that all human beings should have, I grew up with those. I did not grow up with excess. I have strong memories of my parents talking about money. I never knew how much my father made, but it was a stretch to get all the things, especially when there became four of us. But for thirteen years there were just three kids, and then the fourth was—when I was thirteen, the fourth was born. But it means that I came from that kind of stability. I knew I was loved, and I knew that the basic needs would be taken care of.

01-00:07:34

I was also raised to be a wife and mother. That was the role of women. That was what we were expected to do, was—and that we were going to be—my sister and I would be sent to college so that we would marry college graduates. That was economically important that we marry someone who could support us well. And of course, my brothers were also expected—they have a whole different storyline than us, but it's the same thing, that there were expectations of what we would do. So in that sense, to finish that part, when I was sixteen, almost seventeen and I spent the summer in Costa Rica with a friend, I wrote a boyfriend and I was saying how both she and I were somewhat depressed, because very soon we would be marrying and our lives would be devoted to our husbands and our kids. In other words, our identities would be in terms of wife and mother. That didn't quite happen that way. [laughs] But you know, when you're almost seventeen, that's what I'd been raised to expect and stuff. So that kind of sums that up.

01-00:08:57

At the same time, I come from an awareness of activism in the family. Even though my own parents and my grandparents were not themselves activists, my mother's father's mother, [Mary Barton Luckie], was a suffragist. They lived in Chester, Pennsylvania. And just for the class dynamic: she was recruited by the mayor's wife, who was a socialist mayor, so it's not like she was completely out there. But my sister says that more than once she heard my mother talk about how her grandmother—our great-grandmother—would talk about how she was socially ostracized. They were no longer welcome in [makes air quotes] society, because she was a suffragist. Now, her husband, [Samuel Blair Luckie], was a dentist, was one of the first dentists in the early years, and supposedly a very wonderful man. And he was born such that he was a small boy when Gettysburg happened, and he saw the wounded coming back from that. That was one of his strong memories. My great-grandmother was actually born right around 1861, in that period, I think if my memory's right. I will have to check the exact date, but I think that's right. I don't know too much about where they all came from, except that they came over here and became farmers, most of them on that side. On my father's side, actually, one of them came over and started a small [machine and screw] factory. That's

what he made up in Worcester, Massachusetts, and stuff. But they were kind of solid.

01-00:10:52

Now, my mother's mother's people were Motts. And I grew up being told I was related to Lucretia [Coffin] Mott. Well, that's not true. [laughs] So somewhere, as an early teenager, probably twelve or thirteen, that period, I was given for Christmas one year a story of her life, at which point I discovered, of course, that she was originally a Coffin and she married a Mott. And so I knew then that we weren't [makes air quotes] related to her. If there's any connection, it's in the larger fam[ily], the Mott family. It's the bigger part of the Motts. But they were Quakers and they were abolitionists. And when my grandfather died and I was clearing out the desk in his house—my grandmother had already passed away; this would have been in the early to mid-seventies—I found in one of the drawers an actual photograph of Sojourner Truth, which they used to sell them as a way to raise money, and two things that Lucretia Mott had sold. One in the early years was just a portrait that had then been taken—it was a photograph of [her], and the second was her as an elder. So clearly, someone in the family was going to abolition meetings and did buy these, and I have them, and that's pretty neat. [laughs]

01-00:12:24

Tewes: How did your family speak about this, this connection to abolition and even suffrage?

01-00:12:31

Allen: Yeah, well, with pride at that point. You know, it was with pride. I mean, that's the whole thing: being told you're related to Lucretia Mott was status, right, by then. And by the way, there is no way a white girl could be given a better role model than Lucretia Mott, so whether I'm physically related to her is irrelevant. The fact of the matter is, she was an incredible person. She was a radical—you know, you see her in this funny little outfit and the funny little hat, and it's hard to think of her as that, but she was. She was what was called a Hicksite Quaker, which meant she was a radical even in the Quakers or the Society of Friends. And of course, those women spoke in meetings, they were speakers.

01-00:13:15

And of course, we know that she's one of the women, along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, that called that first women's rights meeting in 1848 in Seneca Falls, [New York]. It was Elizabeth Cady Stanton that put the right to vote into their demands. Supposedly Lucretia Mott thought that was a little extreme, but it may have been more that she just wasn't sure. But by then, Lucretia Mott had been involved in the Philadelphia Abolition Society. The women in the abolition movement in Philadelphia practiced social equality with Black women abolitionists. And for that reason, their building was burned down by opposition. So there's this implication with some feminist

historians that somehow she wasn't as radical as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but she was very much a radical and, as I say, very good.

01-00:14:14

And two other things, since I'm on Lucretia Mott. [laughs] One is that her husband, [James Mott], had a store, a dry goods store. And she herself forbade any cotton made by slave labor in her home. Supposedly, her daughters hated it, because the cotton made by free labor tended to be more coarse, because of course the big plantations had the best land and everything. But she wouldn't allow it, but she did not feel it was her business to tell her husband what to do. And as a storekeeper, what was he going to do? He made the decision to just not sell cotton. He sold wool but not cotton. James Mott is also the person who chaired that woman's rights meeting in Seneca Falls. So again, you see, even if I wasn't related to Lucretia Mott, and even if it's James Mott's larger extended family somewhere, or even just Mott as Mott, these are great role models. These are great people to have been brought up thinking I'm connected to.

01-00:15:21

My great-grandmother, who was the suffragist, also was a temperance person. She believed in [laws] against alcohol. And there we just have to remember that back then men controlled women's earnings. If you were married, you could work, your husband could take your earnings, as well as his own, and go drink them all down, and there was nothing you could do. So there were reasons why the women were so hostile to drinking. But growing up, it was like one of the kind of jokes that her youngest—she had five boys—and the youngest lived with her. He used to drive from Chester up to Solebury to see my parents, partly because he could have cocktails with them, you know? [laughs] You didn't have drinks at her house! She lived to be 103, so I did know her. And in one year—I want to guess '55, but I'm not positive—she was Pennsylvania Mother of the Year. She stayed very, very active in the women's club movement. So even though I say I was raised to be a wife and mother, it does not mean there were not role models about a wife and mother being very active in the community and in terms of social struggle. There was that. So let's see, so that's my mother's side of the family.

01-00:16:45

My father's side of the family, I don't have any of those kinds of histories [on] them. But I do know that they came over somewhat early, and I know that it was a large family. They had a large family, so that my father, his father was one of three surviving children out of a very large number; I think there were ten or something. Because the parents died, too, and he lived with [his father's partner] in that family. The only memory I have of—I mean, I didn't know those—my grandfather's uncle and stuff, I didn't know. But the story always was that the family was big enough that they would have both a ham and maybe a roast on the table at the same time. So he grew up in a huge family, in a family—now, these were the people that owned the factory, [Harper &

Parker Manufacturing Co.], that made the nuts and bolts. But he was an orphan at that point, being brought up by them.

01-00:17:45

He became an actuary, and my sister still says, "Why didn't he stay? We would be rich!" [laughs] But he didn't. He left that and became an Episcopal priest. I grew up knowing my grandfather as an Episcopal priest, and knowing my father really as someone who'd grown up in the context of being the child of a minister and his family and stuff. We were Episcopalian, and the church was super key in our lives. My father was on the vestry when I was growing up. Women weren't on the vestry yet. And of course, priests could only be males at that point or ministers. It wasn't until [1974 with the Philadelphia Eleven] that the first—what was considered [makes air quotes] illegal—ordaining of women happened, and then a couple years later it became legitimized.

01-00:18:49

So I grew up—since we're talking about me—really pissed off that I couldn't be a minister. I knew that my father was hoping one of his sons would be a minister. And of the family—I mean, of the four kids, I was the one that was very religious and stuff. I also used to sit there and listen to whichever minister it was giving the sermons and knowing that I could do just as well. [laughs] You know, what do you say? It was a time when I think the shifts had already started to happen. I was born during the Second World War, and remember in the Second World War a whole lot of women—not my mother, because she already had children—but a whole lot of women went into the workforce into places they'd never been. So a kind of cultural shift had happened. And then, of course, after the war women were being pushed to go back into the home to give the jobs to the men. And there was this whole cult of domesticity again, that a woman could only be rewarded with a good life if she were the wife and mother of somebody. That's, of course, how my mother lived her life.

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But the shift had happened. And one of the ways the shift had happened was that for the most part, we were being educated equally, men and women—or boys and girls at that point—except for home ec[onomics]. That's the only thing. We didn't get to choose to go do shop and build things, we had to go learn how to sew and cook. But other than that, it was pretty equal. So again, there you were. You were going to school with the boys. They weren't a cut above; they were just like us. I think that's important. And I went to a coed college, so that continued in college. Whereas I am aware of one of my sister's friends, seeing her during one of the Christmas breaks—she had gone to, I believe it was Vassar [College]—and she had some kind of idea that the men were smarter over there at Harvard or Yale or those kinds of places. But I didn't, you know, I didn't have that. That was one of the things that the way I was raised did not—there were limits to what I could do and be, on the one hand. On the other hand, I was pretty free to evolve as I wanted to, within the

particular constrictions of being a middle-class white person, you know, what was allowed. So there's that.

01-00:21:31

Tewes: Can I ask, actually, a little bit more about the Episcopal tradition? What is it that really drew you to the faith and the idea of maybe wanting to be a priest yourself?

01-00:21:46

Allen: Well, I mean, I was raised in it. From the beginning, every Sunday we went to church. The particular country church we went to, my grandfather had been a missionary priest there before they were big enough to have their own priest. Missionary meant he didn't live there, he came every, like, once a month or something to do a service. So my father was very connected—we were very connected socially. And to a large degree, the socializing that went on in my community, they were both class and religion differences. So we were Episcopalian, and my parents, when they socialized, for the most part socialized with other Episcopalians and some Quakers. Although my father had had to go to—was put into a private school when his mother got cancer, and so he went to a private school in his last years of high school. And they played sports against the Quaker school. He was in an Episcopal school. So he always had this thing about Quakers. [laughs]

01-00:22:53

And in fact, [laughs] before I go back to the Episcopal Church, as such, there were certain people we were very clear we were not to marry. He didn't want us to marry a Quaker and we absolutely could not marry Roman Catholics or Jews, because of the religious thing. This was about religion. Now, the whole question of a person of color was not even on the table, I mean, that was not even being discussed when we were small. But there was that sense that Protestants were different from Roman Catholics, were different from Jews, and that this is who *we* were.

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And I was thinking about this when I was preparing, that I think I certainly was raised with a sense of pride that I was a WASP, a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Of course, as it turns out, genealogically I'm a Celt mostly. But in the United States, that's still a WASP by the time we're getting there. So my father had a lot of pride. And I think there were two things: one was that his mother was from French Huguenot background, where they had first gone to England and then they came—and they were persecuted in France. They went from England then to—her family grew up in Québec Province, I believe Montréal. I think the English connection, because they weren't *French*-French, you know, they'd been persecuted and stuff. I think Grandmother Parker was very strong about the fact that we're English. So I grew up with that. That was what made us special and important, was that we were White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. I have never met many other white women or men who talk about that, but that was definitely—and it was a matter of pride. It

wasn't so much those people aren't as good as us. But it was very much that, from my father's point of view, we're the best, you know? But it was against the Quakers, too. [laughs] They socialized primarily with other Episcopalians, and as I say, some with the Quakers. And you know, occasionally there was a Jewish family or a Roman Catholic family that might be in the larger social circle of the more public things that they did, but in terms of their friends, everybody—it was pretty homogeneous. It was, pretty much.

01-00:25:39

The Episcopal Church is, of course, the Anglican Church in England. So it's the Henry VIII spin-off from the Roman Catholics. And we were taught, again, to always say *Roman* Catholics. Because we were Catholics, also; we just weren't Roman Catholics. Right. These distinctions are irrelevant, but they were important back then. There was also within the Episcopal Church a high church and low church. Now, high church people were, again, more like the Roman Catholics, and they tend to have incense, which they swung around. [makes swinging motions] The minister tended to be called Father So-and-So. And the low church, which we were, the minister was more likely to be called Mr. So-and-So, or if you knew him personally, by his first name. There were those kinds of distinctions. But basically, it was a very strong Christian upbringing. That's what I had. A liberal upbringing. I don't ever remember any discussion about the kinds of fearful hell that Baptists and evangelicals and some Roman Catholics were raised with, but I was not raised with fear. God was loving and Jesus was loving. So again, as with my parents and self, I had that sense of security, that I was loved. You know, it's not a minor thing.

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And then, of course, the thing was, in terms of the priesthood and stuff, is it was like the Roman Catholics: it was limited to men. We had a different role. We could be directors of religious education. And of course, that's changed. You know, in the late sixties and then seventies that all began to change. But when I was growing up, it was a clear: this is for men, this is for women. There were these people called acolytes, these young people that helped the minister during the service. Those were boys. I don't remember when it shifted that girls could do it, too, but when I was growing up those were boys. So again, I could teach Sunday school, which I did, but I couldn't put on one of those funny little outfits and carry the cross and help the priest. So—

01-00:28:19

Tewes: I just want to back up for a minute and establish that your birth name was Pamela Parker.

01-00:28:26

Allen: Pamela Barton Parker.

01-00:28:28

Tewes: Barton.

01-00:28:28

Allen: And interestingly enough, the Barton was the great-grandmother who was the suffragist. It was her maiden name. Isn't that just odd that they gave that to me? [laughs] And they gave me the book on Lucretia Mott. They didn't give that to my sister, it was to me. I mean, who knows why these things happen!

01-00:28:51

Tewes: Right. And then you grew up in Solebury mostly?

01-00:28:56

Allen: From age seven until I left for college at eighteen, yes.

01-00:28:59

Tewes: Right. Can you tell me a little bit more about the community there, other than being a little beyond suburbia? What else could you use to describe that region?

01-00:29:08

Allen: There were some very wealthy people, which is why I was raised [with] a very strong sense of being middle class. If you're around some rich people, you know you're not that. And then there were some farmers and working-class people. Solebury is four miles from a little town called New Hope, Pennsylvania. New Hope was on the river, and across the river was a town called Lambertville, [New Jersey]—which is now, by the way, a very posh place, but then was a working-class town. So the Roman Catholics and the working class lived in Lambertville, and the Protestants and middle class lived in Pennsylvania—New Hope/Solebury—and the rich people were kind of scattered all around. They tended to live, a lot of them, in old Revolutionary War-era farmhouses that they had renovated and stuff.

01-00:30:04

Oh yeah, I mean, I grew up near where George Washington crossed the Delaware on Christmas night, 1776. That was just down the road fifteen minutes, you know? So it was very much—the lore, the whole Revolutionary War was very much in our consciousness. Not only did we, of course, study it in a way that, I think, here they—being California, kids study California history—but it was there! I mean, George Washington slept in this house. And you know, nearby was the Bowman's Tower, which was a tower to commemorate the hill that the troops used to [do] reconnaissance to go across that river to deal with the Hessians, the German mercenaries who were working for the British. So there was this whole—I mean, I grew up around all that kind of lore. Like, here it's the missions and the Spanish stuff. There it was the Revol[utionary]—and it was that word: Revolution/Revolutionary War. That was there.

01-00:31:28

And at the same time, I would say that my parents—and this especially means my father—when my father was not working, the forty-five minutes each way to go to Trenton and stuff, he was on the land or we went to church. But we

did not go around and see things. So one year when I was a teenager, my parents hosted, for the UN [United Nations], for some kind of UN event, they hosted a Yugoslavian couple who came down and spent the weekend with us, from the UN. And they wanted to see this place, this park, where the big famous painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware was. And I told them it didn't exist, because I didn't know about it—because we didn't do those kinds of things. [laughs] And then after they went to New York, I discovered a postcard, and indeed it did exist. But it's like we—how do I put it? When you live around that kind of stuff, you may or may not pay any attention, you know, because that's what tourists do.

01-00:32:42

But at the same time, I certainly knew that every Christmas night, [St. John] "Sinjin" Terrell, who ran the music theater outside of Lambertville, he and a group would reenact crossing the Delaware River. I never saw it, because my parents never took us to that kind of stuff, but I knew it happened. [laughs] I'm not sure what that all means, but I think it means that I grew up with a sense of history, of certainly the white settler history of the area. Pennsylvania was settled by Quakers, William Penn and the Quakers, so I knew about that. I did get taken by school to his house where he had lived and stuff, so I knew a lot of history that I'm just not sure my son or [nineteen-year-old] grandson know, quite frankly.

01-00:33:43

Tewes: Yeah, so you mentioned the class aspect in the community, but what about race or anything else there?

01-00:33:49

Allen: Okay. Yeah, this was basically a white community. In public school we had one Black family. There were two girls, both older than myself, and they had one brother—also older. They were all older than me, so I was not personally friends with them. I played sports with the girls, but I was not in—I didn't know them personally.

01-00:34:13

What I would say, also, to just step back, is that in elementary school there was a young woman who was Cuban. Now, the only reason I remember that she's Cuban is because I still have somewhere now, but I found once, this little—one of the school photographs she'd given me once. And she'd written on the back, "from your Cuban friend." Otherwise I would have said she was Puerto Rican, in truth, but she was dark skinned. And this is probably the first really clear contradiction that I know of, and I know that I was not conscious of it as such. But my mother was very clear, being a good middle-class white woman, that certain colors did not go together, that you were not flamboyant in your clothing. And so you would never wear red and turquoise together, for example. But Rosa *did*. You know, or Rosa would wear chartreuse and red—and Rosa was beautiful! I mean, we're in elementary school, but I still remember it—still—how good she looked. Now, I don't remember at that

point in any way thinking my mother was wrong or not telling me the truth, but I do know that it's still in my memory bank how good Rosa looked, and she wore these bright colors that Mother said couldn't go together. I think that's the first that I've been able to identify the first time I knew my mother was wrong, even if I wasn't quite saying it that way, you know? I didn't run home and say I want to wear red and turquoise, either, [laughs] I was just aware that Rosa looked really good. But then Rosa moved away, so then in high school she wasn't there.

01-00:36:24

I did one time talk to one of the other students—and this was a working-class white woman—who told me she'd seen Rosa, and that Rosa was dating a white boy. This was not okay. I couldn't figure out why it wasn't okay, but I was enough of a snob to think that the woman who was telling me it wasn't okay really wasn't all that smart or good looking, and so I didn't really have to take her seriously. But it's probably the first time I'd heard anybody object to interracial anything.

01-00:37:06

I do know that amongst the three [Black] students from our high school, that—probably seventh grade, but I wouldn't know—was it seventh or eighth? I do remember once my friends and I—because we would go to the dances. You didn't have to have a date, and then people would ask you to dance and stuff. They would always bring dates, and we didn't know where they came from. Because I did not know then that there was a Black community on the hill above Lambertville, I simply didn't know. That's a different state. They went to a different school, so I didn't know. But I do remember us pondering why Calvin never asked any of us out. He was very cute. And so I clearly didn't have yet the information that he, of course, totally had: that interracial dating was not okay. You know, this would have been the middle/late fifties in Pennsylvania.

01-00:38:10

So the community was white. The community was basically, where I was from, liberal, with one [Black] family. Liberals are very good about being liberal when there's not too many people from whatever group it is that they're being liberal about.

01-00:38:24

There was, within my church a—there became this connection, which I'll talk about later, with this Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, which had a Black priest. And he was highly respected and would—later my mother, you know, they would come out for dinner. They would come out, he would bring kids out to swim in my parents' pool. My father, when I was sixteen, my father remortgaged the house to put in a swimming pool. So that fits what my class is. They couldn't afford the swimming pool without remortgaging the house, but they could remortgage the house. And so we did [have a pool] the last few years, and that turned out to be a blessing, because my father got

rheumatoid arthritis. And they were able—they heated the pool—I mean, it just turned out to be a very good thing that he had been able to do that.

01-00:39:24

Tewes: Yeah, can we speak a little bit more about your parents, their livelihoods? I think—

01-00:39:29

Allen: Dad did not go to war. See? Anybody in my age group, one of the key questions is, "Did your father go to war? When you were born, was your father there? How old were you when your father came back? Was he the same? Did your mother say he's the same person as when he left?" These were all real questions. That didn't happen. My father needed to wear glasses, and so he couldn't have gone in as an officer. He already had one child, and he was considered—at that point he was inspecting scrap metal, and so it was considered a war job. He never went in. I think there was ambivalence about that on his part, but I don't know. Both his brothers went in, and my mother's brother went in. So most of the family had—there were people in the war. They all survived.

01-00:40:27

My mother's brother, once my sister asked—he was in the Pacific, he was in the Navy—and my sister once asked him how he felt about the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He paused, because these were liberals, and then he said, "Well, it did—" he already had a daughter; his daughter had been born—from his point of view, it ended the war sooner, and he survived it and was able to get home. You know, that's how he dealt with it, that horror, that horrible thing.

01-00:41:09

But my father didn't [go to war]. So then he ended up working for a rubber goods company. He first was in personnel, which I think fit his personality very well. He was a very sociable man and very—quite charismatic in many ways. And then he got moved, at one point, into becoming the head of the manufacturing division. The job had killed the two men before him, they had died on the job. And my mother was very ambivalent—this was a family-owned business when, you know, they took—the boss and his wife took them out to dinner and then said they wanted him to move into this job. And he asked Mother how she felt, and she said she was concerned. He said, "Well, don't worry. If he ever needs to take a—he can always take a vacation." Well, as she said, that never happened. You take a high-stress job, you don't go take a vacation [when you need it].

01-00:42:11

What I know about him in that is that, again, this particular small company had been unionized. As my father would put it, the old man fought the union, but once the union won, he said they would have the best union contract in the industry. So my father was negotiating for management with the union, but

under the—very different from corporations today, because we're talking about him being—his boss supporting them having the best union contract they could have.

01-00:42:47

I do remember in seventh grade, my English teacher, who happened to be the boys' coach—you know, in these small schools they do lots of things. So the English teacher was really the boys' coach, but he also taught English. And he, one day, was describing basically a closed shop and how bad the union was, because you had to join the union. So this tells you something about my family, is that I go home at dinner and I announce to everybody that unions are bad—because we used to talk, you know? I could talk. And so my father explained to me about unions. So I do not come from a union side of the family, but I come from someone who believed in unions and set me right about why unions were of value. He had respect for the union leadership.

01-00:43:38

There were a couple times when we were probably teenagers where we went to his factory for whatever reason. He took us around and we got to see—they made very high-quality fire hose, hose for putting out fires. They also, by the way, made hula hoops! [laughs] They didn't invent the hula hoop, but they made the hula hoop. But anyway, it was rubber goods and plastics and stuff. So he would take us around, and we would see how it worked. And the men treated him with respect, by first name, and he treated them with respect. It was one of those things that, again, it's nonverbal; you're watching people interact with each other, and the information you're getting is these men respect each other. That's what you're getting, you know?

01-00:44:33

That changed after my father was disabled out of the workforce in his early fifties with rheumatoid arthritis. For years I thought it was probably the stress, but it may now have been the Lyme tick, which had finally come down into Pennsylvania. And if it's not treated, it becomes rheumatoid arthritis. I don't know. But in those first years that he was out, he was asked to come back to help the management team negotiate a contract. I was [visiting] home at that point, because I remember him coming home so upset because the management people had not treated the union with enough respect to come in prepared. They had not bothered to prepare, whereas the union people had done their preparations. I mean, he was quite upset that these young men were that arrogant.

01-00:45:33

The other thing I'd say, in terms of my father's job, is that this is Trenton, New Jersey, and it has a range of—we're talking about white people—but a range of different ethnic groups. And my father was very proud of the fact that they worked well together in his factory where he worked. That somehow they had worked out certain of those—you know, the Polish and the Czechs and the Germans all that stuff. And so I grew up, again, with a sense of diversity that,

yes, was white-centric, European-centric, but still was about the value of people of different backgrounds being able to work together. So that's kind of neat.

01-00:46:25

My mother was, for most of my growing up, a housewife. She had graduated from [The College of] William & Mary, and she had been a nutritionist at [The Woods School for intellectually challenged students in] Langhorne, Pennsylvania, before she met my father. My father, by the way, just so we get that, also, he went to Franklin & Marshall, which was in Pennsylvania. So they both were four-year college people. And the story of how they met is supposedly that—so my father's father was the minister in Langhorne at that point, because he and his mother are sitting on the porch when my mother's walking along the sidewalk home from her job. My grandmother says to my father, "That's the one you're going to marry." And so my father has a friend of his invite her out on a date, and they go on a double date. He doesn't ask her out; he takes somebody else, and then he checks her out. But Grandmother was right! He married her. [laughs]

01-00:47:42

She was a year older than him, and that was big. I mean, you know, in the world we grew up in, the fact that he married a woman a year older than him was a point of discussion. He used to say she reached down and took the cream of the crop. [laughs] It reflects a value judgment. The man is supposed to be older, because he's supposed to be the patriarch and stuff. So my mother then was—once they married, she was a housewife and mother.

01-00:48:19

I was not planned. They had my sister, and I came eighteen months later. So nine months after my sister is born, my mother's pregnant again. Now, I only learned this years later. But according to my mother, she was asked out on a date when she was seven months pregnant with my sister; that's how much she didn't show. With me, she showed immediately. You know, people would look at her, and it was very embarrassing, because it looked like she was already pregnant again. I mean, there's actually a—which I'm not remembering now, but among Roman Catholic Irish there's a term for those kids that are born right—one after another, so there's like thirteen months between them or something?

01-00:49:08

Tewes: Oh, Irish twins?

01-00:49:10

Allen: [laughs] That's it, that's it. Irish twins. So we were not that. But still, it was enough for her to be aware that people were looking at her like something was wrong with her, because she was already pregnant. I have no idea how that affected me or didn't affect me. I just know that that was the reality. I was not planned and I wasn't—at the beginning at least—particularly wanted. And

when I was born, everyone would have been very happy if I'd been male. So that's what I can say about that.

01-00:49:43

So when my youngest brother was three—now I was thirteen when the youngest was born. My parents had that problem of the blood, so that a baby can be born Rh negative, and the problem is the blood of the mother does not match what they need, so they used to die. And so my parents, I gather, had partly—the brother that's three years younger than me, my mother had had a split placenta with him, and so there was already that question of whether or not it was safe to have any more babies. I don't know his last name, but my best friend's Uncle Bruno [Richter made, from a doctor's invention], the clamp that allowed for blood transfusions for infants. So then she did, my mother did get pregnant. And in fact, the youngest had to have a blood transfusion. And just in those funny odd ways of life, I once met Uncle Bruno, who because of his invention saved my brother's life, you know? Kind of a fun one.

01-00:51:01

So when he was three—meaning I was sixteen—Mother decided to start a nursery school at the church, because he didn't have any friends. We lived in the country, and none—we were all older than him; the next brother was ten years older. So she started what became a very successful nursery school, to the point that eventually she no longer qualified to teach there. This is what happens. Things get institutionalized, and if you don't have the right degree, even though you started it, even though you're a great teacher—which she was—you're now pushed into administration, which she was not great at. Her thing was teaching. But she did start this, and it did mean that that brother had three years of nursery school before he went to kindergarten.

01-00:51:50

Now, she did not earn a salary, she earned a—I don't remember what they called it—she earned about $600 a year. I just remember that was like a volunteer stipend kind of thing. And how do I want to put this? Okay, and so my father would make the comment always that her $600 threw him into a different tax bracket, so he ended up having to pay more taxes. That's what he would always say. I have no idea if that's true. But what I do know is true is that the value system that I grew up under, of this middle-class Protestant patriarchal system, was that the man was to support the family, and it was an insult to the man for a woman to work. It reflected badly on the man.

01-00:52:53

My father's youngest brother, his wife went back to work after—they had just two kids—the two kids were in school. She worked as a secretary. She'd been my father's secretary—an exquisitely beautiful woman. And my father's younger brother, who was coming back from the Navy in his Navy suit comes in to visit, and I guess it was like love at first sight. She was a lovely woman. I mean, she was physically lovely, and she was a very nice woman, good aunt. Anyway, she went back to school, and my grandfather used to say, "Oh, that's

for Nettie's dollhouse." Meaning she was buying it for trinkets and stuff for the house, because she had a need for lots of trinkets. There had to be a way that it was explained that did not in any way imply that they needed that money in order to survive, because that would have meant that my uncle was not a good provider. Very sad.

01-00:53:52
Tewes: The story about the tax bracket, do you think that was the tension beneath that, between your parents?

01-00:53:59
Allen: Oh yeah, yeah. In other words, he was saying, "Well, I'm letting her do this thing, but in fact, it's even costing me money." And Mother used the $600 to have a cleaning woman come in and clean, that's what she used it for. She at least claimed the money and said, "I'm going to use it. Now, if I'm over there in the school every day, I'm going to have, once a week, have someone come in and clean my house." And that's when I discovered, as a teenager, that there was this Black community in New Jersey, because that's where Mother was driving over to pick up someone to come clean her house. Yeah.

01-00:54:40
Tewes: You wanted me to remind you about Shem [O.] Wandiga.

01-00:54:44
Allen: Ah yes! Okay. I'm still in high school. The Kenyans have won their independence from England. Jomo Kenyatta decides that one of the things he wants to do is send students to the United States for education. So in our community, the request came—I don't know how—well, I'm sure through the Episcopal Church—for people to take students. So two high school students came and lived with two families in our community. And we were assigned to a young man named Shem Wandiga, who was a bit older, and he would come and stay with us on vacations. So he was going first to a Black private school, and then he went to Howard University. He ultimately got his PhD, then he went back to Kenya and was—if he's still alive—is still a very revered [professor of chemistry]. But he would come and he would stay with us. He was there for all our holidays, and Mother stayed in touch. He married a Puerto Rican woman before he went back, and they had two daughters. And at some point, she went back to Puerto Rico. Mother always assumed it was because of the treatment of women in Kenya, but I don't know. By then I'd lost touch with Shem. But it means that in our home, we had an African young man for a number of years who was always there, who was there during vacations, over the summer, that kind of thing.

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And so I did want to mention that, because it's one of those things that's easy to forget if I'm not thinking about what it was like growing up. And then I'm remembering—oh yeah, Shem. What I can tell you is that my mother knew a lot of information about where he came from, how many brothers and

sisters—all those kinds of things. I didn't ask questions. And in fact, when I look back over my life, especially in terms of going South and stuff, I'm not somebody that asked a lot of questions. If you didn't choose to tell me, I wasn't going to ask you if you had brothers and sisters. I used to wonder about that. Why is it that I seem to not have had—it wasn't that I didn't have curiosity, because I'd be totally delighted if somebody wanted to tell me their story, but that I had somehow picked up the inhibition that you don't ask people about their private lives.

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So one time when I was still working—and I was working at UCSF [San Francisco] where there were lots of docs and stuff—I'm at some Christmas party and this older doctor starts telling me about having spent a year in England. I can't remember whether it was Oxford or Cambridge or where it was, but he's somewhere. [laughs] And he's talking about how the English don't talk about themselves, and that it's not considered proper. And that he became ostracized, because at this party, at some social event he asked somebody what they did. So even what your job was, was not legitimate to ask. I thought, Oh okay. Then probably I had been more or less raised with some kind of thing about, It's not polite to ask people about their private lives. And that, of course, my mother, being the mother, the adult with the young man, would not have had the same prohibition, because she would be like taking that mother role and wanting to know more about him and to be supportive. I look back over my life, and it's like, I know information if people gave it to me, but I didn't ask.

01-00:59:07

Tewes: And I also want to think about some of the other family life aspects in your youth, particularly around politics. You've mentioned several times that this is sort of a liberal community in the sense that many mid-century white folks were. But what was their political persuasion, and did you all ever discuss that as children?

01-00:59:34

Allen: No, not really. They were Republicans. My mother says that's what the county was. So if you wanted to have any say in how the county was going to be run, you needed to be a Republican. But I always point out to people that it's Eisenhower Republicans, not Republicans today. And supposedly back then, rich people paid a huge proportion of their income to taxes and stuff. I mean, this is a different era. They would have been anti-communist, but I never heard them talk about communism, per se, except a little bit around the fact that they weren't Christian. Remember, my parents are Christians, so that's the distinction. My mother read a lot of historical novels and novels, my mother read novels. And so I do know now that once I picked up in a used bookstore one that she would have read, which the whole storyline is about the whole question that the bad guy, being the communist, is because he's an atheist. You see, these things get combined. That's why they're bad, is because they're atheists.

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I do know that when the McCarthy hearings were taking place that we would come home from school, and Mother would be ironing and listening. But I have no memory of her talking about it. But I do have a strong—still, sixty years later—I have a strong memory still of the energy, the tension in the house, that she was not happy. They would not have been in support of that kind of hounding people, and just the horror of that whole period. And we, of course, were being raised—remember in school, we were the free ones, right? The Soviet Union, those were the bad guys that wouldn't let people think for themselves. We were the good guys that supposedly were letting people think for themselves, which, of course, another contradiction, right? In fact, the McCarthy era's going on, and I'm being taught in school that we're the ones that have freedom of thought and freedom of speech. But I don't remember them talking about it.

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I also know that whereas many African American people my age were strongly affected by the killing of Emmett Till, I have no memory of any discussion about that. We would not have gotten *Jet* magazine, which showed the pictures of his mutilated body when the casket was opened, when his body was sent to Chicago for the funeral. I would not have known any of that. I don't mean my parents didn't know, and I don't mean there might not have been people in the community that knew—I don't know. But they weren't talking to me about it, and I had no knowledge, that's what I would say, no knowledge of that.

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So in terms of their politics, I think my father, in particular, believed in the goodness of our country and our government. He truly believed that. So that when the Vietnam War happened and when it was so clear we were not doing—we were not the good guys, it was very hard for him. It was very hard for him. My mother's family had been Democrats. Back then, when you married, you—my mother's family were Presbyterians—you took on the husband's religion and you took on the husband's politics. So that's one of the reasons why I couldn't marry somebody who was Jewish or Roman Catholic, because I would be expected to take on their religion, right? So that was part of it, that these things were kind of, I want to say, narrow. I want to say their politics were narrow. I think they were well intentioned.

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I do know that my mother was—I think that if my memory's right, if I have this right—most people in this country didn't really know about the concentration camps until the fifties, that there was a period when it wasn't really talked about. But I do know that my mother became a—she read Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. The first part of that is his story about being in a concentration camp, and then it's about his form of therapy and his world view. But she knew his work, and I think that she wrestled with those kinds of questions of evil and what that meant.

01-01:04:30

As I've said, my father, he grew up in the church. And the church was, in many ways, a social thing for him. On Sunday mornings, we went to the communion service, which was at eight o'clock. It was a half-an-hour service. And then he and a couple of the other men made breakfast for everybody. He's very social, and he's out there making breakfast, and we're all eating together, and it was quite fun. Then we would stay for the kids' part, the church school part, the Christian education part. Sunday school, that's what we called it, Sunday school. And my parents would go home, because they'd already been to church, and then Dad had done his social thing.

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Mother had some kind of conversion experience after my brother, three years younger than me, was born. Probably partly because of the whole crisis around the split placenta and having to be in bed for the last period of time, and him being born very quickly. And the whole—all the anxiety around that, and I think the pressure. She also once told me that both her mother and her mother-in-law expected her to have a perfectly clean house. And here she is with three small kids—five, three, and then one—in this situation. Plus, she was never a good housekeeper. [laughs] She was an intellectual in the period of time when her job was to be a housewife and mother. That's what she was raised to be, but that's not what she—she wasn't particularly good at it. She was good at the nurturing, very good at the nurturing part, but she was not good at keeping the house spick-and-span and raising kids at the same time. That was never her strength. But it was a pressure on her, because that was the value system.

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So I think that the way she talked about it, it sounds like it was a—we wouldn't say mental breakdown, because there was no doctor involved or going to a hospital or anything like that, so that would not be the correct way to put it. But she did have some kind of crisis, and it resolved for her around a deeper understanding and commitment to God and to Christian faith, as it manifested in the Episcopal Church.

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Anything else about them? She was a quiet person. What we would now—I would now say there's this whole thing about this idea of highly sensitive people; about 10 percent of the world's population are highly sensitive. They have trouble with too much noise, they have trouble with too much people at them, etcetera, etcetera. And I think that was my mother. She needed a lot of quiet time. Once my father came home, there was none. He was definitely not a highly sensitive person. He was definitely an [extrovert], he got his energy from people.

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Now, so she insisted every day for, as far as I know, the whole time—even when we were very small—that she have an hour in the afternoon to herself.

When I remember it, of course I was already old enough then to—we had to be on our beds. So we could do whatever: we could read, we could play with our toys, we could take a nap. It didn't matter. But we were to leave her alone, and that was her quiet time. My father did have quiet time on the weekends, because we had this big field. And so he rode a little tractor around for a couple hours mowing the field, and that was his quiet time. But it was like in that male way of doing something at the same time. Some males, hyper males do it with fishing. For some reason when they fish, they can finally calm down, right? He did it with mowing. So they did each have some quiet time.

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But when they were still in Yardley, when we were very small, there was a crisis in—this would probably be mostly the Episcopalian grouping of these young couples, with the father/husband coming home and there being these little kids. And the husband needing time to calm down, and the woman being nuts because she's been isolated with these kids all day. And so the local doctor suggested they have cocktails. So beginning very early in my family life, cocktails was an institution. It also reflects, again, the times. And as my brother says, if you look at something like *The Thin Man* series of mysteries from this period, you will see how they've romanticized drinking. I mean, the man is clearly an alcoholic, but it's all very funny and stuff, and he's of course very clever and stuff. She tries to keep up with him, and it's so funny because she can't. The next morning they wake up and she has to put an ice pack on her head, and ha, ha, ha, all this stuff. It's all made very light. But the thing is, it was an alcohol community. Everybody drank. Episcopalians drank, and in fact, that was one of the jokes my sister reminds me, is "Whiskeypalians." We grew up with adults drinking, that's what they did.

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And I think for my mother—I used to think back in the early—when I was in women's liberation, that part of my mother's drinking was because of that frustration that she really ought to have been some kind of a—like a psychologist working on a one-to-one basis. She was very bright, definitely an intellectual, cared about people, was nurturing, and didn't have that. I don't think that's true anymore. I think that would have all been very nice. I think a part-time job doing something like that and raising kids would be ideal for her. But what I think now is that she was somebody that couldn't deal with too much stimulation, so alcohol was one way to kind of numb that out a little bit. So over the years, that would become more and more of a problem. Because as AA says, alcoholism is a progressive disease. And so I come from a family where alcohol would begin to cause certain problems later on. Less so with me, because I was—it's progressive, and it hadn't gotten that bad.

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For me, I would say one of the benefits of the fact that they drank was that they left me alone, and I could—we lived in the country, so I could go out at night if I wanted to and walk around. Nobody said, "Where are you?" They didn't even notice, you know? [laughs] I mean, there was a very nice way in

which being in the country, for me—this is not true for my sister; she needed people—but I was happy taking the dogs and going for hikes and walks and stuff in the night with the full moon or in the day.

01-01:11:36

And it was one of the things when I get to college that was so hard for me, is that I come to college, and all of a sudden there's this thing called in loco parentis, which is only for the girls. So we girls had to be in at a certain hour every night. It seems to me it was ten o'clock during the week, and maybe it was midnight on Saturday night. Something like that. I was highly offended. I had not had hours, you know? I mean, when I went out on a date, we were supposed to be home at a certain time, and usually I think we were. But it's not like anybody was waiting up and going, [points to a watch] "Hey, hey," that kind of thing. I didn't have that. My parents trusted me. And I was, by the way, trustworthy. I was a goody two-shoes at that point in my life. What I was doing had to do with, I want to say, expressing myself. I'm not sure that's totally the right way to put it. But you know, being out there—not about sex. I was that—we can discuss sex later—it was more about just being able to be adventuresome.

01-01:12:48

So that became a problem when I was in college, because I believed in—so then we get into that question of being a goody two-shoes. But if a rule's not right, if a law is wrong, then I didn't obey it. So there was more than one night that I climbed up the fire escape and went into the dormitory after hours. [laughs] The most fun one I remember is with—these two guys and I climbed the water tower one night, and we're up there in the middle of the night looking around. That was the most extreme. But it was this thing that, Wait a minute. You can, if you'll pardon me, you can fuck at three o'clock in the afternoon. It doesn't have to happen after ten o'clock. What is this? We were basically dealing with, again, a contradiction that they needed it to—the parents, some of the parents were requiring that their daughters have limits. But of course, those were totally just limits on the outside. What happened in the arboretum or what happened in the wintertime in what we called "the cave," the place where people could go where the lights were low, or the coat closet if you were into that, that was happening regardless of whether you got home at ten o'clock.

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What was hard for me, also, though, is that there were girl students, female students, who were happy to have hours, because it meant they did not have to stand up to their boyfriends to get home. This was simple. This is the rule. I have to now be able to go home, go back, whether to study or go to sleep, whatever it was. That offended me terribly. [laughs] It just offended me that people, instead of standing—making their own decisions about what they wanted, would be—that's an example of in loco parentis also infantilizing the girls. You know, not requiring of them to be able to make their own decisions and the consequences, living with the consequences of them. I've jumped into

college, but that's one of the effects of how I was raised, that I was given that kind of freedom, of which I am very grateful, very grateful for it.

01-01:15:26

It was not as positive for my sister. She was much more the rebel, but she also was much more the people person. She would have been much happier in a suburb, or even more if we'd stayed in a small town, but with access to her friends around her all the time. And when she was already an older teenager and then in college, she still feels she could have used much more guidance [from our parents] than she got.

01-01:15:56

On the other hand, I would say, that part of its personality. I am very much my mother's daughter. So one of my sister's big complaints is that when she was an early teenager, my mother, and another woman and her daughter, and my sister's friend, they all went to New York to celebrate my sister's birthday. And how wonderful this was, and why couldn't Mother do this more? Or why couldn't Mother take her to such a place to go shopping? We didn't do a lot of shopping. We lived in a small town, and Mother took us across the river to one place, which had an upstairs room, and there were a few little dresses in your size and you tried them on. She had a dressmaker. But I mean, we didn't go to the shopping malls that were starting to happen outside Philadelphia and stuff. My sister goes, "I would really—if Mother only could have done that." And I say, "Linda, I couldn't do it." [laughs] I didn't do it!

01-01:17:00

I mean, I can remember my—I live—by car it's five minutes from Stonestown [Galleria], right, from the shopping center. I can remember when my son was very small, he went through a—well, not very small; probably early grade school—he went through a period where he wanted to go to the mall, and I would dutifully take him out there. And then one day I said, "Don't you want to go to Stonestown?" And he goes, "Why would I want to do that?" I went, "Oh, thank goodness!" You know, I'm not one of those women that likes to shop and enjoys it. That was [not] going to be my bonding with—even my daughter-in-law, that's not what we do together. My mother was never going to be that kind of person. That's not who she was. My sister would have loved Aunt Nettie, the one who went back to [work] and had all the little tchotchkes for her house, loved to shop. But no, I didn't come from that. I came from a woman who read and thought about things, and was quite quiet, and then in the evening would have cocktails. And then if we were lucky, everything stayed even. And there were times when it wasn't.

01-01:18:20

Just as one example—this is a community thing, not just a family thing—is that when my brother, the youngest one, was six months old, my parents were at a party down the road. And the host—my mother was very small. She was like five foot one-and-a-half and 100 pounds. And he picked her up—they were all swimming, it was a swimming party and stuff—to play Tarzan. I

mean, they would all have been drinking. Who knows what was going on. But he slipped on the grass, and she went over his shoulder and she broke her wrist. Now, this is probably the most extreme of anything that ever happened. But my brother was six months old, and all of a sudden my sister and I were taking more care of the baby, and someone had to be hired to come in and help, because my mother was—there was nothing she could do. She couldn't pick up a six-month-old baby with a broken wrist.

01-01:19:14

I would just add to that then, in terms of what it means if you live in a community where people do that kind of thing, is that it's dealt with as, "Oh, we had too much to drink." So you don't get consequences. Just like the culture right now. There's very little emphasis on consequences, people taking responsibility for what they do. "Mistakes happen," is not the same as—saying, "We had too much to drink," is not the same as saying, "I really messed up," you know? "We really messed up. We really were acting in a way that was not okay." It was not safe, what they did was not safe. So I grew up in that kind of environment. It wasn't a lot. It was only occasional—not a lot.

01-01:20:08

I can balance that with the fact that this same woman who sometimes drank too much and sometimes said mean things when she drank—that was the hard thing with her—and was super sweet and nice the rest of the time—the same woman is the same woman who took in my aunt's child, infant, when she had to go in for an operation. This was my father's sister-in-law and brother. Pardon me, my father's sister and brother-in-law. Anyway, Aunt Doris had to go in for an operation, and so Gordon came to stay with us as an infant. And it was a long enough time that I—that along with helping to take care of this baby, I was aware of how hard it was when Aunt Doris was better and could take the baby back. To take a responsibility for an infant means you bond, and you bond with somebody that is then taken out of your life again.

01-01:21:13

And yet, she turned around and did that a second time with one of the neighborhood people. When I say neighborhood, I mean probably three miles away—remember, this is country—who I used to babysit for. Because this woman had an older child that was probably seven or eight, somewhere in that age time, and I would babysit. And she became pregnant by a man who was not yet divorced, so she had a child out of wedlock. Now, this is huge back then. This is not minor stuff, this is big time! This word [makes air quotes] illegitimate was used. Somehow this is a lesser human being, because they've been born out of wedlock. This woman had to go in and have an operation, and my mother took that baby in and we took care of him. That one was twofold. It was, one, that again, there was going to be that wrenching when the few weeks were up, but just painful. And secondly, that my mother somehow, much as she believed in waiting to have sex until marriage—this was a very important value for my parents—at the same time, she in no way put that onto a small child. And then I babysat for the baby the day that the

parents went and got married, when he finally got his divorce. [laughs] And she comes back, and what she says to the baby is, "You're now legitimate." I mean, in a way it breaks your heart; in another way it's just what it was. I never heard my mother say anything bad about that woman.

01-01:23:10

Since we're on this, I should also say that there's the value, for women, around whether you were widowed or divorced. So a widow is a grass widow and a divorced woman is a sod widow. The value judgment is there. Oh, and there was a person down the road from us who had remarried, and she was not judged negatively, because—boy, don't you love this—because her husband had—the first husband had been mentally ill. And since he was mentally ill and had to go into a mental hospital, it wasn't [makes air quotes] her fault. So therefore, she didn't carry the same stigma of being a sod widow and divorcee when she then remarried. So these are the kinds of things we grew up with around women. Men didn't have this kind of problem, but women did.

01-01:24:08

This also reminds me, since I was just thinking about the divorce one, is that I grew up in a community where there were a lot of—New Hope was a gay mecca. And so in the community, there were some gay men. I didn't know there was such a thing as a lesbian. I grew up in a gay mecca. I know lesbians who used to go to—now I know them, but I didn't know that. I only knew there were gay men. And I can say two things. One is that some of the gay men we knew, they were part of my par[ents']—the social circle. One of them, whenever there was a party or something, he would escort one of these divorced women. So he appropriately brought a woman, and she, of course, had an escort, but they also were gay and divorced, they were, you know what I'm saying, a little bit away.

01-01:25:02

But I'll also mention at this point then, because I brought that up that when we—I went to elementary school through sixth grade, and then the junior high and the high school was in New Hope, so four miles away. They all came to the elementary school in Solebury. It was New Hope/Solebury school system. And so then we went there. When we made that transition—meaning from sixth grade to seventh grade—we could no longer touch each other as girlfriends. Because of the fact that there was a homosexual community, the homophobia was very intense. So from the minute we reached the New Hope school, the junior high and high school, we were beginning to be taught that there were certain things we could not do that were essentially about homophobia. So whereas in elementary school girlfriends held hands and we were the way girlfriends were, we all of a sudden had to learn we couldn't do that anymore. It's not so much that we understood why, it's just that those were the rules. As I say, I didn't know there was such a thing as a lesbian, so how could it be wrong for me to touch my girlfriends, right? But it was.

01-01:26:23
Tewes: Right.

01-01:26:24
Allen: It was one of those things.

01-01:26:26
Tewes: Thank you for sharing that.

01-01:26:27
Allen: And we're right at—

01-01:26:28
Tewes: Yeah, we're about wrapping up for today. And I think we'll start next time with your college career. We've already started thinking about that. But is there anything you'd like to wrap up about our discussion today?

01-01:26:40
Allen: [looks at notes] Let me just check and see if—I made a few notes. Oh, the hair [story]. We have to start next time with Costa Rica before we go to college.

01-01:27:00
Tewes: That's fair.

01-01:27:02
Allen: Other than Girl Scout camp, that's my first time away from my family. I mean, it's my first time *really* away from my family, and of course, into a different culture. So yes, and then I can tell the hair story.

01-01:27:16
Tewes: Okay.

01-01:27:16
Allen: Good.

01-01:27:19
Tewes: That is going to wrap up for today. Thank you so much, Chude.

01-01:27:24
Allen: I hope this was—

Interview 2: December 15, 2020

02-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a second interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on December 15, 2020. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California.

02-00:00:21

So thank you so much, Chude, for another session here. You know, when we left off last time, you wanted to mention a little bit more about a trip you took to Costa Rica when you were sixteen. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

02-00:00:34

Allen: Yes. I think that the theme for today is partly going to be about the experiences that were outside of my family and community, the things that began to expose me to a wider world. And in my tenth-grade year, I transferred from the public school to a private school in the community, so I was a day student. One of my best friends was a boarding student there, and her family lived in Costa Rica. They were a US family that had moved there, and she invited me to come and spend the summer there. I don't know why I had the intelligence to do this—I think I might have mentioned this last time—but I asked my father if I could go at a party, where he was feeling good. And he said sure, if I could earn half the money. So I spent the spring of—that would have been 1960—babysitting, which is how I would have earned money at that age, at sixteen, at age sixteen, and that summer went with her to Costa Rica.

02-00:01:41

So the things about Costa Rica that are important is, number one, it's the first time I was on an airplane. That's very different from now, when little kids ride airplanes. But for us it was a big deal. It was a big deal when my father flew somewhere. We would drive up to Newark and see him off. And back then, of course, there was no worrying about security and stuff, but you'd stand and watch the plane go. When my mother picked him up, we'd all go and we'd watch the plane coming—this was a big deal. So for me to go—that was big. And by circumstance, there was a strike and air—I don't remember whether it was the pilots who were—probably the pilots were striking. But anyway, so we get there to the airport, and then we had to be put on a different plane, so it added to the anxiety of, of course, the experience. But it was also my first experience of being around a strike, so there is that. This, of course, meant that I went to a different country and I went to a place that spoke a different language. And with the exception of Canada, that was my first experience of being in a different country.

02-00:02:51

As I say, the people themselves were from the United States, they were white people. And what happened there were a couple different things. But one of

them was that this was a family that was very, very different from my parents and my family. I would become aware in a way that would have been different from how we're saying it now, is I became aware of class. I became aware that this particular couple, my parents would not have chosen to be in the same social circle with them. I don't mean to say that they would have been disrespectful. In fact, if they had come to visit my friend the next year when she was at the school, they would have been more than gracious. They could probably even have invited them to spend a couple nights at our house. I don't in any way mean to say that they wouldn't have been very hospitable and stuff. But I was aware that, in particular, my mother would not have considered her mother as being a social equal.

02-00:03:55

And what's important about that, in part, is that I liked them so much. [laughs] They were very, very different. And in many ways, her mother was more like an older sister. She was a very vivacious and—what's the right word? I don't want to say it in a way that sounds really patronizing—but childlike. She had this kind of exuberance and just fun [sense] of life. And her father was a very quiet man, he was an intellectual. Opposite of my parents, where my father was the social one; my mother was the quiet one and the intellectual. And so I was aware that there were differences. At the same time, being a US couple who'd moved there, and he had invested in a plantation, they, of course, were living better than they would have probably lived in the United States—and I was aware of that. She had a maid. They had adopted a Costa Rican girl, so they had two of their own daughters and then a third daughter, so there was that aspect of the kind of kindness and openness that they had.

02-00:05:09

Every day—I was there in the summer, which was their rainy season—in the afternoon it rained. And so normally we would do something in the morning, and then spend the afternoon, early afternoon at home, and that's when I would write my letters. And we're going to talk more about writing in the future, but I just want to say that virtually—most afternoons I wrote letters, either to my parents or my boyfriend. It was one of the things that has stayed with me as a wonderful memory from that experience, was the writing and the writing of letters. The other thing was that the father had bought a whole lot of very nice books—I think it's Heritage Book Club [Heritage Press], but anyway, all the classics. And so walking along the corridor between the living room and then the bedrooms, there was this bookcase full of wonderful books. My mother was the reader in our family and we did have a bookcase and everything, but not of this quality books. That was another thing for the afternoons, the afternoons of reading. So that's important, I think, because it was a clue to the kind of person I am. That kind of then went into the background, this idea that maybe every day I would be happy if I wrote. You know, that was a totally new idea.

02-00:06:36

And the other, of course, being the quietness that—her father was very quiet, and her mother was vivacious and everything, but there was still a quietness about the home. And my parents, of course, were not quiet. That was new. That was new. And they were very good to me. They were very lovely, wonderful, and we did lots of things.

02-00:06:57

They lived right outside San José, the capital. It was exquisitely beautiful. I have no idea now, but I assume it's all developed. But back then—this is sixty years ago, because I was sixteen, almost seventeen, and now I'm seventy-seven, so it's essentially sixty years ago—there was a lot of countryside around them and rolling hills, and it was just exquisitely beautiful. In fact, and I have no idea why this is such a—[laughs] the way I articulated then, but I would have been happy to have been a cow on one of those hills for the rest of my life. I mean, in the sense that there was something about the peacefulness that I was drawn to and the beauty, just the beauty of it. Really beautiful.

02-00:07:44

Her mother—not her father, her mother—then took us down to the east coast to visit someone she knew who the family had a ranch. And then with a bunch of the other young people, her mother as a chaperone, we went to the west coast for a day or two, where we were at a little resort with black sand. That's what I remember about it. But the point being that her mother took us places so that I would get to see things.

02-00:08:15

And then, as I say, the father was—along with a Costa Rican partner, because Costa Rica required that if you bought land that you had supposedly—back then you had to also have a Costa Rican partner. So they had bought land in the jungle, and they were making a plantation. I do not for the life of me remember what they were growing, but I wanted to go see it. And so we did that. We flew on a little one-engine plane to a place that was in the middle of nowhere. Again, North American white overseer of the plantation picked us up in a Jeep, and then it was a couple hours up very bad roads into the jungle. It was, to me, thrilling. I came from the country, so this was partly—you know, the countryside is important to me. My friend hated it. We were in a cabin that would be for the next family of workers who hadn't come yet, so we were staying at the end of a line of cabins with—the foreman, I guess, he would be called actually, rather than overseer, [which] has an implication that I didn't mean. [laughs] Foreman. He and his family lived at the other end of this line of cabins. My friend couldn't handle going out to go use the outhouse, and the fear of the spiders and of the snakes and different things. And so she actually left, and I stayed a few more days. I stayed up there, because I was having such a wonderful time. Every day I would walk up this line of houses and say hello, you know, *buenos días* to people, and spend the day with the manager and his family. That was kind of like an adventure.

02-00:10:08

I didn't have any understanding at that point of what was going on economically, what that meant for outside investment coming in, how this was distorting the economy. What I once read, subsequently, is that in these areas that—the people were selling their land for cash, for money. The one thing they wanted was to—according to my friend—was to go to the capital. So part of the arrangements in buying these people's parcels of land was to give them a trip to the capital, but then they came back and they were wage workers. And so over time this began to impoverish people. They no longer owned their own land; they were dependent on wages and what they would be paid. But of course, when I was sixteen in 1960, I had no understanding. All I knew is that it was beautiful, everybody seemed happy, and I loved being there. So I had no sense of the politics at that point.

02-00:11:24

The other thing I'd say is that there was a lot of still-buried artifacts from previous Indigenous people. It was against the law to try to dig them up or take them, so that I didn't have any temptation to do that, because I was a goody two-shoes. But I know I wrote my parents that if it wasn't against the law, I'd be out there trying to find some of this stuff, right? With again, no respect for the history, because I didn't know it. But I was respectful of the people that I met, and I was thrilled, just thrilled to be there.

02-00:12:07

So those are kind of the way it was similar and different to how I'd grown up. I grew up in the country in one of probably—at that point—most exquisitely beautiful places in the United States: Bucks County, Pennsylvania. So it's not that I didn't come from natural beauty, but this was just a whole qualitative—for me—qualitative jump in just beauty.

02-00:12:36

We, of course, socialized with a group of international students our age, people our age. But my friend had a Costa Rican boyfriend. Whatever else I can say—and I don't know a lot about my hosts' politics, but they simply were not prejudiced against Costa Ricans. They had adopted a girl, and she had dated someone, so that was something that I learned. So one day—

02-00:13:10

Tewes: Was this your first experience with an interracial family and then interracial relationships, seeing that work?

02-00:13:16

Allen: Well, I don't think I would have thought it as interracial at that point. It is true he was brown skinned; she was brown skinned. But I wouldn't have thought about it that way. It was more they were Costa Rican; we were US. I wouldn't have thought of myself as white either, I was just from the United States. I have wondered sometimes with thinking about the kids in the social group we moved in, one of the guys that I liked for a bit, he was dark skinned, he was from Texas. He probably was Chicano, but I don't know. He didn't speak with

an accent with me, and he certainly didn't identify himself—that was not the issue. There was a class dynamic. I mean, I certainly understood the difference between—her boyfriend spoke English, and that put him in a different category than the peasantry or the local people. So there was a class difference.

02-00:14:15

The other thing around class was that one of the neighbors had been a Copacabana girl and was now married. She was a white woman, and she was married to a white guy. And she was living there. I knew fully well that, again, my mother in particular would not have anything much to do with somebody who'd been a Copacabana girl. But the woman was totally nice and lovely to us. And we went to visit her to learn about how to put on makeup. I mean, to think that I—[laughs] I mean, what a joke! But anyway, that's what we did. I learned a few things. One is she could no longer—she had been wearing high heels and she had had that problem that happens—I think it's with the tendon—where you can no longer have flat feet. So even her slippers were high heels. The other thing was that as she was teaching us about makeup, she told us that she never let her husband see her in the morning until she had her makeup on.

02-00:15:19

That has stayed with me. It was like, I'm not going there, [laughs] that is *not* something I'm going to do. Also, I might point out, that I didn't need to. I was pretty enough myself that I didn't have to—I never got much into makeup. But what was clear to me then was that you make choices and there are consequences. If you choose to wear high heels, because that makes you sexy, you can also—I didn't know then that you could also get an incredibly bad back—but she could no longer have flat shoes. And I wanted to be hiking around in the hills, I didn't want to be tripping around in a pair of high heels. [laughs] So I learned those things.

02-00:16:05

And then we were going to go to a big dance, and she lent me a dress. So I'm beginning to deal with contradictions again. Remember we talked about contradictions last time, too. Here's somebody that my mother would not consider a social equal, that I would not normally have had any chance to meet, who was being incredibly generous to me and had given me a dress—which, the fact that she said how much it cost I think is interesting, too. It was a hundred-dollar dress. Now, in 1960, a hundred-dollar dress was a lot of money. We went there beforehand and she did our makeup and all that stuff. But I'm just saying that for me, here's this thing: these are lovely, wonderful people. In the homogeneity in which I grew up, they would not have been in the social class that we were a part of. And yet, I was finding they were just very generous, good people.

02-00:17:11

Then the other thing that happened, which is around the hair, is that back then, when I was growing up in the forties and the fifties—and we're now in 1960—[white girls] did not have straight hair, period. And if your hair was straight on any given day, you wore it in a ponytail. These were the rules. Everybody used to say about little girls when they're born, "Oh, isn't it too bad she has straight hair," or "Oh, isn't she lucky, she has curls." Now, of course the beatniks are already around. But like where I grew up, I didn't know anything about beatniks. What I knew was the rule was that you had to curl your hair and you couldn't be seen in public with curlers. Oh, that's the other thing, given the class I came from: you couldn't be seen in public in curlers, and you have to have curly hair or wear it in a ponytail.

02-00:18:06

So one night we're going to go double dating, my friend and her boyfriend with a friend of his. We'd been part of this whole social grouping, but we were going double dating to the movies. They came, and I had my hair in a ponytail, because I hadn't had time to curl it that day, and even then my hair was very straight and didn't hold a curl very long. He said to me, "Would you wear your hair down? I like it better down." And of course I said, "But it's straight." [laughs] I mean—and no way you can understand this now, but this is 1960—"But it's straight!" He said, "I like it better." I said okay, and so I wore it down. We are talking about hair that's approximately this length, [indicates her shoulder-length hair] a little bit better cut, because I haven't had my hair cut by a professional in ten months now because of the COVID pandemic, and because the hair now, at seventy-seven, is a lot thinner than it was then, the strands themselves, so there was more body.

02-00:19:08

But anyway, we go to this movie and we see *The Blue Angel* with May Britt. If anybody looks at the movie with May Britt, you will see immediately there she is with straight hair. Straight hair. I'm sitting there, and I'm looking at this lovely woman and this whole story, and she's got straight hair. She never curls it through the whole [movie], as far as I can remember. What I remember is she has straight hair, and I'm going, Wait a minute here. I decided never to curl my hair again. Now, this is probably my first conscious rebellion against social norms. And I came back to the United States without curling my hair. Now, I brushed it when I was drying it, and it flipped up nice—looked a lot cuter than now because there was more of it and, as I say, it was—the bangs were professionally cut and stuff. But basically, I came back and said, "I'm not doing this anymore."

02-00:20:16

Tewes: Did you see that as a rebellion?

02-00:20:17

Allen: Oh, absolutely. If the rule is you must have curly hair or wear a ponytail, if that's the rule, you don't not do it. Or you know what you're doing. Now, last

time I had mentioned about the contradiction early of my mother saying you couldn't wear bright colors together, like the aqua and chartreuse or whatever. But anyway, the big bright colors. And I was aware that my friend Rosa could, but I didn't turn around and say, "Oh, *I'm* going to wear bright colors!" I hadn't reached that point.

02-00:20:55

The other thing about the question of the hair is that when I was in ninth grade, still in the public school, I was going to a dance one Saturday night, and whatever we'd done that day I hadn't had time to curl my hair. And so there I was caught with: either I wasn't going to the dance or I was going to go with actually straight hair. And this time I opted to go to the dance. I opted to go to the dance as if I had perfectly lovely, curly hair. I probably got more—back then you went alone and the boys asked you to dance and, you know, it was that kind of thing—and I probably got asked to dance more that night than I'd ever [had before]. And so I had made the connection that how you approach something, what you think about yourself and the situation is key. But I hadn't made the connection with the hair. I went right back to curling my hair and stuff. That was the first time I had realized that, and that's now—

02-00:22:03

As an aside, I can remember in the women's liberation movement when we would give talks, I would try to explain to women learning how to [give a] talk, you don't start out the talk by saying, "I hope I'm going to make sense today. I was up all night with my baby." You don't do that. You start out as if everything's fine, and then at the end you say, if you feel a need to, "I hope that was clear. Please forgive me if anything wasn't, because I was up all night with my baby." But you don't clue people in that there's a problem first. And that's what I learned that day, you see, at the high school dance in ninth grade, was that if I walked in as if there wasn't a problem, there wouldn't be a problem.

02-00:22:45

I also have seen that with physically disabled people. One woman in particular who was seriously, seriously disabled, who the first thing she would do when you met her or when someone met her, was let you know you were fine. She just took this—in other words, she let you know she was fine. But she did it by letting you know how happy she was to meet you and all the things, and just the way she carried herself. You knew that you could relax and be yourself with her and not focus on and be uptight about her disability, that she had claimed that. Then later you might learn more about it or talk to her about it and stuff, but it wasn't like in your—between you.

02-00:23:36

In that sense Costa Rica was that conscious shift to, I'm not going to do this anymore. I know I'm fine. The first time was I'm going to go to the dance and I'm going to be okay, and what do you know, it was great. But the second time

it really was, I'm not doing that again. That's *done*. And with minimal, minimal exception, never did.

02-00:24:05

The dilemma, if we jump just for a moment to college, is that by the time I get to college I have—my hair has grown even longer and I have my bangs. I used to wear a black turtleneck, and so I was identified as being like I should be in the theater group, right? But I was wearing my silver cross, and I was a good two-shoes. So it was like this misfit thing of, like, I looked one way. It was a whole complex thing of not looking the part. You know, I mean, I looked like a something I wasn't, because I was not going to be active in the particular social life of the theater crowd. I actually did work in the theater at one point, but the social life was much too far for me. [laughs] I was a goody two-shoes. And we'll talk about sexuality at some point in the future, so we'll talk about that then. So—

02-00:25:02

Tewes: Thank you for sharing those learning experiences, those early formative moments of change—or recognition of change, I should say.

02-00:25:08

Allen: Yeah.

02-00:25:10

Tewes: You were going to move on?

02-00:25:14

Allen: Well, what I was going to say is what happened when I came back. Well, first of all, I was to stay six weeks. And her parents wouldn't take me in to get my visa renewed, because they wanted me to stay, so I was there another two weeks. I came back and two things happened: one is the boyfriend I'd had broke up with me, partly because I hadn't come right back. And the fact that I hadn't had a choice in it didn't matter. We will talk more about that boyfriend when we talk about sexuality. So that was one thing, coming back to finding out that what I'd thought was the real one was no longer the real one.

02-00:25:54

And the second thing was that my friend wrote and said that she would not be coming back to school. That, in fact, her father's partner had swindled him, and they were losing everything and having to move back to the United States—to whatever family they were from—West Coast. So I never saw her again, and I never saw any of them. And of course, we wrote for a little bit. We had very different lives, so we went—the other thing also was that she wrote and said that the boyfriend, the Costa Rican boyfriend, had joined the US Army as one way to then qualify to become a US citizen, and had been killed in an accident.

02-00:26:38

So the ending of this summer, which had been an opening for me, a tremendously, tremendously wonderful opening to new kinds of people, new country, just an awakening to my own writing, to my own—all those things, there was then this loss. Loss upon loss upon loss. So I came into my senior year in high school with all those things: the wonderful experience, the social stand that I was no longer going to curl my hair, and the loss of my best friend and her family's loss and the loss of—that her boyfriend had died. This was all as I came into my senior year. So that, I think, does Costa Rica.

02-00:27:47

I sometimes wonder, like, what does it—when you've lived a very insular life, which I basically had—I went to Girl Scout camp, but we haven't really left the Christian insular white world at that point, middle-class white world. This is my first real experience. And as you've pointed out, which I was not even conscious of, that there was interracial dynamics going on in that family. I just was aware that they were open to Costa Ricans, and that they were—it was just a delight to live with them. So—[laughs]

02-00:28:27

Tewes: Well, I'm sorry to hear about the end of that story, but it does sound like it was a very formative point in your life. We spoke more about high school last time, so I'm thinking now might be a time to think—looking forward to college?

02-00:28:45

Allen: Ah, two things [before we talk about college]. My senior year I go back to school, and this is a small school. This is a small, private school. I think there were nineteen seniors. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think that's right. And two things. One is I'm co-editor of the yearbook. I have come up with a plan from the previous year that was taken from—my public school art teacher had had his—he was the advisor for the yearbook there. And my ninth-grade year, they had done this really creative yearbook, where they did not have people lined up and lots of—I mean, they did a lot of creative stuff. I just thought that was great, and that somehow with a small school you ought to be able to get everybody in, a picture of everybody in the school without having to line people up. Anyway, it was a whole *idea* of what to do.

02-00:29:40

I had a male co-editor, and the boyfriend who was no longer the boyfriend was the layout editor, and there was a male photographer, and we had an advisor, of course. So almost immediately, the ex-boyfriend tries to push me out, because, you know, we are doing—as we will talk more about a little bit of domination issues here. I'd come up with this plan. Now he says to me, "You've done it, you've done your job. We boys can take over," as it were. And so I'm wrestling with that. I am also still terribly, terribly in grief about the loss of who I thought was the perfect boyfriend. This is going on when the co-editor, the layout editor, and three other of the boarding student seniors

steal the nurse's car and drive off to New York City and get totally drunk. And on the way home they get the car stuck in a corn field, almost back at the school. So needless to say, they're all kicked out. You know, this is the end of them.

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So then it was, basically, along with the male photographer, it was we women students put this thing together, the yearbook. The only real mistake, as far as I'm concerned still—because I still have this yearbook, is the one thing that I kept the layout editor's idea about—which was very much, when you look back on it, what a young person would do—which is to have this exquisitely good photograph of the headmaster made this big, and just his face blown up big. It's so much not the way it needed to be done. [laughs] However, it shows you that there was still a way in which he had a bit of sway for me for a while, and that was one of them. So I needed to—

02-00:31:53

Tewes: What's great about that story is that you're working and thinking about narrative and presentation in a book form from an early age.

02-00:32:01

Allen: Yeah, that was—oh yes! And then when I go to college, freshman year, I find a sophomore and the two of us put in a proposal for doing the yearbook in this very creative way. And of course, we don't get it, and I'm completely heartbroken and I'm in tears, etcetera. You know, I mean, it was just heartbreaking. I actually did it a second year. My whole life would be different if these people had accepted my plans for this radical yearbook. [laughs] So much would be different because of the focus that that would have required. But in high school it was a very positive—once the guys disappeared and I didn't have to worry about the power struggle going on, it was a very positive, creative experience. Yes. So that's my senior year.

02-00:32:56

Is there anything else you need to—oh, why I chose Carleton, I suppose, is the next question?

02-00:33:05

Tewes: Yes, please. We should say that you went to Carleton College 1961 to 1965. Yes, please tell us why you chose Carleton.

02-00:33:18

Allen: There were a couple things. One is I live in the country in a small town. I go to a very small school—remember there were nineteen of them, well five of them—whatever it was—I think there were thirteen of us that graduated in that class, so we're talking about a small school. So my parents had suggested that I might look at a small liberal arts school, which made sense. The other thing was that I knew I didn't want to go to a women's college. I liked guys, and I considered myself an equal to them, and I wanted to go to a coed school.

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So my math teacher suggested Reed [College], but Reed was too far away. Reed was all the way across the country. I think I probably would have been a lot happier there. Again, it would have changed the trajectory of my life, but that was too far. My parents did say that if I chose Carleton, which had been recommended—we were talking about Swarthmore, Oberlin, Carleton, Reed; these were the four. And my mother's father and my mother's brother went to Swarthmore, so Swarthmore was not an option for me, and it was like almost next to where my great-grandmother lived; that was too close. And it was near Philadelphia, so it was too close to home. So it was the Midwest. And we visited a couple, I applied to a number of schools. One was Antioch, and my mother just said that I didn't quite fit there. I've always wondered if I'd gone to Antioch with all the radicals and the oddballs that went there, whether I would have turned out to be a lot more—a traditional person, [laughs] because I would have been so out of my element and I don't know if I would have been radicalized.

02-00:35:11

But I ended up going to Carleton. I knew it was a good school. I was accepted. I did not see it. My parents told me if I went, I would not be able to come back on vacations. But that never happened, because there were a number of people from the East Coast. We sometimes drove with—one of the phys ed teachers lived in—had family in Philadelphia, so we would drive back all together. So I always did go home for the vacations, but I was willing, when I went there, to maybe not come home. I was going to a place I'd never seen and I didn't know anybody. You think about these things later, and you're like, Wow, how do you do this thing? But of course, when you're young, you're just totally into the new experience.

02-00:35:57

I was being put in a room with three other roommates, two of whom were from the Twin Cities. Carleton is fifty miles south of the Twin Cities, in Minnesota. So I wrote them both to say that I would be flying in on this day, and was it possible to stay with one of them overnight and come down to Carleton? And that's what I did, so that I had—I was able to at least make that entry thing a little bit easier, because I'd met Sarah [Hawthorne] the day before and been with her family.

02-00:36:34

There are two things to then say—well, there are three things to say about Carleton. One is the in loco parentis that we already talked about, which I just was so offended by. Second was that very quickly I was aware that I had made a wrong choice in terms of my reasoning. I partly chose the Midwest, because I wanted to get out of what I called the [makes air quotes] cynical East. And you know, I was going to [a high] school, again, with all these boarding students, many from New York and many from—even actor families and stuff, so they were in a different world from me. And I thought, Oh, I don't want to be around all these cynics, I want to be with just—essentially good

Christians, good Christians is what we would say now. So I get out to Carleton, and they're boring, they're boring. I thought college was going to be sitting around—certainly at all meals—talking ideas. "What are you learning in class? What do you think about this?" They were dull people. They studied hard—and study was not what I was interested in, ideas was what I was interested in. There is a difference. It was almost a shock—well, it was a shock, I mean, it *was* a shock! [laughs]

02-00:37:54

However, somewhere in that first week of school when the freshmen go early, I'd been in a group. We got assigned to little groupings, and there was a student from a different dormitory who latched on to me. And she was very different. She was from Portland—Portland, Oregon—and she had spent a year in Europe. She wore—talk about makeup, again—a whole lot more makeup than anybody I'd ever seen, because wherever she'd been, that's what they did. And she loved opera. My mother loved opera, but the rest of us could have cared less. She was one of those people that could do anything. She just was a straight-A student, she sung, she could draw, I mean, you name it, she—so she was quite an enthralling person. And very early that fall, she started this hot and heavy—I have no idea where it went to in—we're not talking sex here. All I know is the hot and heavy part—hot and heavy relationship with a young man from New York City. He was a political activist, and they were [makes air quotes] in love.

02-00:39:11

He wanted her to come up to the Twin Cities, where he was participating in a demonstration against fallout shelters. This is 1961 now. This is one of the key questions here, is Russia, the whole issue of the bomb, Cuba, the whole question of missiles in Cuba, this kind of thing. So they are doing a demonstration and she doesn't want to go alone, and he's already gone up, because he had to go up to—he was one of the organizers. And we rode buses; we didn't have cars, we weren't allowed to have cars. So she wanted me to come with her, and I said sure. And so we go up to—I don't know if it was Saint Paul or Minneapolis. The demonstration is in front of some big department store where they are selling all the equipment you would need in your fallout shelter. The first thing we do is go in and take a look at it. And it, of course, is like what we'd say now is camping gear: cots and sleeping bags and the canned food you'd need, all the stuff you'd need to survive underground in this so-called fallout shelter.

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Now, the previous summer before I left to go to Carleton, I had asked my mother why we didn't have a fallout shelter, because a man down the road had built one. And you know, there was this scare that things could—we could get bombed. My mother had said we couldn't afford one, and so we were just going to have to pray that there would never be a bomb. Now, I'm of that age when we were in elementary school we were being taught how to cover ourselves like this, [covers head] underneath our little teeny-weeny desks to

protect ourselves from the bomb. We'd grown up knowing that we could get bombed, and with this fabricated idea that somehow we were going to be able to survive.

02-00:41:07

So now it has reached the point where people—you know, you need to go underground, and you need to buy all this stuff to go down there with you. Then we go outside to the picket line, and we're walking around. And she, of course, hooks up with the guy she's interested in, and I'm just walking by myself. Pretty soon, one of the other activists comes and starts walking with me, and I say, "You know, I'm not against fallout shelters. I'm here because my girlfriend wants to be with her boyfriend. That's why I'm here." He says, "Well, tell me. Do you want a world in which the rich will survive, or do you want to work for a world in which everyone could survive?" This is the moment when I became what you would call an activist. This is the moment. This is the moment of truth for me. Because I realized, all of a sudden, No, I didn't want a world in which only the rich survive. I wanted a world in which we could all survive, and that I was willing to work for that.

02-00:42:17

Now, there's a reference about the sixties, about how women—they joined things because of the boyfriend, and your politics could change because of a boyfriend. Well, we should acknowledge that this man was adorable. He was two years older than me, and he was quite wonderful. He belonged to something on campus called Action Party. So I went back, and the friend I'd gone with was not the least bit political, and she and the guy didn't last that much longer before they broke up and she wasn't interested. But another friend that I had made who was on the same floor as me, she was, so we started going to the Action Party meetings. This rather handsome redhead didn't come back after Christmas, so he was gone. But we were there, and we kept going to meetings. So I began to get involved in politics, and this is where I found people who talked ideas. This is where there were interesting people, people who cared about things and weren't just interested in what mark they could get so that they could get into graduate school. So this is where I found my place.

02-00:43:26

And by sophomore year I'd been elected—I can't remember which things I was elected to. But anyway, I was on the student—what you'd call the student council. I was on, at some point, the Women's Board. And of course, my big issue was hours for women, changing the hours for women. The other thing back in that period was that girls still had to wear dresses all the time. The only time you could wear pants was if the—it got to be certain degrees below freezing. I can't remember whether it was 15 below—not below 0, but 32° being freezing—and so it was 20°, it had to be, before we were allowed to wear pants, slacks, wool slacks, or something to class. We were allowed to wear, of course, dungarees or pedal pushers or whatever you want to call it around the dormitory on the weekends or after classes, but we were not

allowed to go downtown without having a dress, without looking proper. So one time this—the friend that I'd gone up to the demonstration with—she and I decided to go have a picnic. And so we went downtown to buy some food, and we were [makes air quotes] seen. We were seen in our dungarees, and we were brought up to the Women's Council and we were punished. We had to stay in a certain number of days. I mean, this is big stuff, right? You know, somehow it *mattered*.

02-00:45:07

When you think about how we are now around the whole discussions around transgender, around people—the looseness around gender and what—and you realize that back then, the *need* was so great that females be defined one way by the clothing they wore, and males another. So that back then, with the homophobic laws, one other thing was if you had genitals that identified you as female, you had to have a certain number of [items of] female clothing on or you were breaking the law. Same with if you were male. It was a very different period. But the absurdity of it, right? The absurdity of, No, you can't go—you have to be a proper lady. Of course, I confronted that again when I went to Spelman [College], to the Black women's college. But here I am still at Carleton. So the whole question of dormitory hours, the question of what you wear, these were the kinds of things that I was mainly focused on those first couple years, along with being, of course, for peace.

02-00:46:18

Now, some of my friends that I got to know through Action Party and stuff were members of an organization called Young Socialist Alliance [YSA]. That was the youth group to the SWP, the Socialist Workers Party. And there were others that were YPSLs [from the Young People's Socialist League], which had to do with the Socialist Party, the International—whatever, da, da. By circumstance, a couple of my friends were SWPers. And so the second year—not the first year, but the second year, second summer after my sophomore year—my friend, the same one who'd been going to Action Party with me, she and I—she came to visit me at my home, and we went to the Student Peace Union conference in Princeton, New Jersey. Princeton was like a forty-five-minute drive from where I grew up, and that's where the conference was happening—convention, I don't know what they called it. But anyway, it was the gathering of people from all over the country. What was going on was a political struggle between these YPSLs and these YSAers. Now, I didn't understand any of this stuff. I judged people by how they treated each other, that's where I was. I liked my friends that were YSAers. I thought some of their politics were kind of like, Well, that's interesting, but hey. I don't have the foggiest idea, to this day, what the particular disagreements were. But what I saw was that the YPSL people were being mean to my friends.

02-00:48:01

And when I went back to Carleton at the beginning of my junior year, I got the Student Peace Union group to disassociate from the national group

because of it. Not because of politics, but because of meanness. [laughs] Which, by the way, has maintained all my life, one of the key questions around political activism: are you replicating exactly the personal social relationships that you say you're opposed [to] in your own groups, or are you trying to build an alternative? So meanness is not one of the things that I have ever wanted to be part of what we're trying to build. It doesn't mean that I have, all my life, been not mean. I mean, you know, we all have our contradictions. [laughs] But it is my politics that how we treat each other one to one, group to intergroups, is as important as how we structure a society. That they are all connected. And you don't get to be a bully in one place and not turn out to be a bully somewhere else in your other politics. To me, it's all connected.

02-00:49:25

Tewes: The interpersonal is as important as the mission or goal.

02-00:49:29

Allen: Yeah, or the personal is political, on one level.

02-00:49:32

Tewes: Yes.

02-00:49:34

Allen: In this case, maybe even better is: the political is personal. If I believe that everyone has a right to be treated with dignity, well, hello, that starts with me treating people with respect and insisting that they treat me with respect.

02-00:49:59

Let's see. The other question for the first couple years at Carleton, one of the key ones was that I was an active Christian still. And I was an Episcopalian when I was—I became a religion major. One of my favorite professors was in the Religion Department and was an Episcopal priest. And yet, there weren't any other active Christians, much less Episcopalians, running around in Action Party and doing political work. So it was like there was a split. I had this split between what I believed in, in terms of a spirituality, and the people I was working with politically. The professor I liked so much, he was very progressive. But I can remember some of the other students, they were not progressive. We will get more on to that. And so it was a split. [laughs]

02-00:51:08

I wouldn't necessarily have thought about it as a crisis of identity, but I was very unhappy at Carleton with these contradictions: being a spiritual person in a situation where most people that I respected and who were caring about ideas and had good values were not. Where the college itself was so-called religious and required everybody to go to some kind of church service on Sundays—and I tended to go to Quaker meeting with my friends—but there was no real—well, I mean this becomes, in any kind of situation—but especially around, I think, Christianity, this becomes—one of the questions for Christians is: how can there be all these reactionary Christians? How can

there be all these people who don't care about other people, that are claiming to be Christian, if you take some of the gospel seriously—which I did. So it was hard, it was very hard.

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And then at the end of my sophomore year, coming back to my home, I didn't have a job. The previous summer I had worked at a resort with my sister up in the Adirondacks. The previous year—to go back in time for a minute—the previous year, having graduated from high school, I worked part of that summer as a mother's helper at a resort in the Adirondacks, but that was a family in my church. So even though I'd *gone* somewhere else, it was—nothing was different. The next year I went back—my sister had been there the previous year—I went back to this resort as a waitress and worked for the summer.

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The one thing I want to share at this point is just that, again, I was aware of class. Not that I was *aware* that I was aware of it, understand. We're using terms now that I would not have thought of. And that's because the waitresses and the busboys were all college students, working in a resort where people tended to own their own homes or rent a home, and then would come in to the resort place where we were for their meals. They were summer people, they tended to be there all summer. They were a lot [of] old money. Now, remember where I come from in Pennsylvania, there was a lot of old money. There were a lot of Main Line people [from Philadelphia], family people that came out. They were rich people, and they were not demonstrably rich. They were the old-money types. Well, these were, too. These were old-money types.

02-00:54:21

And yet, there was also, of course, the cooks. And the cooks were culinary students, with a chef that—I can still remember how he looked—and who definitely ruled the kitchen with an iron hand. But we waitresses and busboys and cooks did a certain amount of socializing together. And yet, I was thinking about this a lot the last two days. It's clear to me that I understood there was a line past which those young men would not go. Now, understand, I was a goody two-shoes. I have no idea what other people did. [laughs] But for me, we could do light flirtation, we could have fun together. I'd heard that the cooks and the waitresses didn't get along. They liked me; I liked them. I think a lot of it was because, in retrospect, being still an innocent sexually, being that that was completely out of the question for me—I was waiting until marriage, and that was what God wanted me to do—it put me in a category where I think they understood, as well as I understood, we were never going to go anywhere. Because first of all, we were never going to fall in love and get married, because that wouldn't have—my parents would never have accepted that—and there wasn't going to be sex. That wasn't going to happen with me. And it left me free to like them, you know, just like them.

02-00:56:01

And those are important things when you've lived in a pretty much—a very limited context. And you know, [if] you send your children off to college, you're sending them off to basically people of the same class. You're setting them up to be taught, and for their minds to be further developed in, the values that you believe in, or you wouldn't be sending them there. This was a different thing all of a sudden, where these people—these are young men that are going to become cooks for the rest of their lives. If they're lucky, they're going to be chefs, they're going to do well in their profession. And for that also, they have to be very clear that they behave themselves, because they need the training and they need their chef's recommendation.

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So looking back—never then, but looking back—I can see this is one of those situations where you get to see the class dynamics between women of a higher class and working-class men, where they are the ones that will suffer if they cross that line and get caught. You know, even if, as we're normally used to, that the girl gets blamed for everything. So even if she gets sent home, she's going back to college and a whole different life. He needs to have the recommendations from this place for his next job placement. I'm aware now that there were those dynamics going on that I was only semiconscious of. But I do know that it makes a difference when you like people. And it throws off that us-and-them dynamic that has been either subtly or not-so-subtly inculcated into you all your life. I think that was an important aspect of that summer. But then—

02-00:58:00

Tewes: It also reminds me of you telling me—sorry [to interrupt]—it reminds me of you telling me that your parents expected you to go to college in order to find a man who was proper to marry. [laughs]

02-00:58:12

Allen: Of the appropriate class, right. So I would be well taken care of. Yes, yes. But for me I think that summer—I mean, there were other things that were going on, but I just think that I liked them, we got along. I mean, it was fun, it was great fun. And so that part was good.

02-00:58:40

But the next summer, I wasn't going back there, and the next summer I was back in Pennsylvania. My friend and I had gone to the Student Peace Union conference, and then she went home and I needed to find a job, and I wasn't finding one. My mother heard from one of her friends that that woman's daughter was going to be working at the Church of the Advocate in a camp for young people. My friend had not gone home yet. My best friend and roommate from college, at that point, was from Chicago. She'd grown up in the city; I'd only grown up in the country. I could probably count on my hand the number of times I'd been in a city by then. You know, it's like, that's not what I did. So I had to go to North Philadelphia to the Church of the Advocate

to be interviewed about whether or not to take this job. They wanted me. The job, by the way, was going to earn me about $2 a week or something, I can't remember. But it would be experience, and it was in the Episcopal Church and all that stuff, right?

02-00:59:51

I don't know how to get there. But my friend, having grown up in Chicago, knew how to do it. I mean, she could figure it out. So my father, who works in Trenton, drops us off at the train station. We take the train to central Philadelphia. She reads all the maps and she gets us to the Church of the Advocate so I can have the interview. Then I get the instructions from them that when I come in on the train, I should get off at the North Philly Station and take a cab, which I will do each week. I would be there all week living with the minister and his family, and then on weekends I would go back to my parents in Pennsylvania, in the country, and then I would come back. Every Monday I would come out of the station and I would go to the cab driver, who—the cab drivers were white—and I would say I wanted to go to Eighteenth and Diamond St. And the first statement would be, "Do you know what you're asking?" Because this was a Black neighborhood. And I would say, "Yes, I'm going to the Church of the Advocate." It was one of my first, again, consciousness of segregation. They did not expect me, as a white girl, to be wanting to go into the Black community to a place, period. And they were wanting to make sure I knew what I was doing. But how I got there originally was because my friend knew how to travel around a city. I have no idea otherwise what I would have done. [laughs] But who knows, you know, something would have worked its way out maybe.

02-01:01:36

But anyway, I started working there for the summer. And so we lived with the minister and his family. This was an African American family. Father Paul [M.] Washington, his wife Christine Washington. They had four kids, four children. The youngest was a boy who was my youngest brother's age, which would have been about six at that point. There were four of us, there were four white girls, college students who'd come to work there. One was from out of town, out of the state. She was from New York State, and so she stayed there all the time. The other three of us went home on the weekends.

02-01:02:20

One of the first things we began to talk about was the—we noticed how pale everybody was back home. I mean, we'd never thought about this, but all of a sudden we are in a community in which there is such a range of color. These kids are coming to the camp every day and we're going to the public swimming pool with them and we're just part of an environment which is not white. And then on the weekends, we're going back home. We didn't think about it so much as Black and white then, but we would come back and acknowledge how pale everybody had been. We were aware of difference.

02-01:03:07

It was many, many years before I really got clear on the fact that this was my first experience with de facto segregation. That until then, I had—even though I lived in what was essentially a white community with one Black family—and as I think I mentioned, that there was a Black community across the river. I didn't know about them, because they went to a different school; it was a different state. So this was my first awareness that a community could be all Black or a community could basically be all white. And it was not an intellectual awareness at first. I think the word is visceral. It was like more in my body, which is why I think we didn't use words, abstract words like white. We used pale, and color. Not colored, as much as color. And range, I mean, what a range. That was something that was happening for me.

02-01:04:14

The other thing that was happening is that this was a poor community. Now, the previous minister there had been a white minister. And the whole reason that we knew this, knew about the Church of the Advocate and the summer program, was that he had then gone to be the minister in the small town where these other two girls were from, where I had originally grown up. My mother was friends with their mothers, and until age seven I'd grown up in this small town, too. So he was the reason that they knew about the Church of the Advocate and the summer program. One of them at some point told me that he had said that the reason he left was that one time when a woman came with her baby, who half of his face had been eaten away by a rat or rats, he couldn't take it anymore, he just couldn't take it anymore. So on that kind of level, I knew there was poverty.

02-01:05:18

And I knew that during the day—I was assigned the young teenage girls, the thirteen/fourteen-year-old type, that age group. I knew that they could come in the day, but they could not come at night. It was too dangerous. And the young guys who sometimes came—the church was a—it was like a compound. So there was the minister's house; there was the church itself; there was a parish hall with a gymnasium and stuff; there was the curate, the other—the second minister's house. It made a square, and the inside was a courtyard, so it was safe at night. We were inside. We could go over to the parish hall and hang out with the young boys and play basketball. We could do whatever we wanted in this enclosed space. The kids then, who came, they had to go home at night. And I can still see—especially two of them—but we would be in the minister's house at his front door, and the kid or kids would get ready, and then we'd open the door and they'd tear out, because they had to run home, because it was violent. So I saw that, but it didn't really register, if you understand what I mean. I saw it, but I didn't have a sense of the fear and what that meant to live that way.

02-01:07:04

At the end of the summer, at the end of the camp, I invited three of the boys—the minister's son and two of the others who had been with us all summer

long—to come out and spend an overnight with my family. My family was like that, we were very welcome to invite people. And so my brother was around—he was three years younger than me—so I'm at that point I'm nineteen, they're probably thirteen and fourteen, he's like sixteen. So it fits. They come out for the night, and it's a nice night and there's a moon. And so we decide, Well, let's go out in the woods. We have flashlights and we take them out into the woods. And they're talking about, "Well, if somebody jumps out from here, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do—" and we kept saying, "Hey, it's fine. Don't worry about it. It's safe." I mean, we had two dogs with us and I used to do it alone, you know? It's like, "Hey, this is fine." And that's when I *got* it. That's when I understood that they lived with a level of fear that I had no comprehension of, and that you don't just toss it away. It's part of who they were. And here they are in the dark, in a strange place. To them, there was a lot of—the question of danger that I simply had not internalized for myself.

02-01:08:45

The other thing I'd say that happened around those young men, especially, was that I used to tell them if they just studied hard they could go to college. I didn't have a clue, not a clue about what that—that if you're poor, it's not all that easy, even if you are bright. Even if you could go to college, in the sense of you have the ability, it doesn't mean: one, you've gone to a school that's good enough to have trained you to go; and it doesn't mean you have the money to go. But I didn't understand that, because what I'd been taught was if you studied hard, you could go to college. That was my world view, that's what I had been taught.

02-01:09:34

Let's see, the other thing around—and this is around partly—well, first around self-image and stuff. I discovered from the kids that one of the big insults was, "You're from Africa." Now, I didn't understand this at all. I didn't understand how much that was an internalized racism about being Black. Every time I was like, "What are you talking about? Why are you calling—saying that? There's nothing wrong with being from Africa." I didn't understand, I didn't understand internalized racism. I, in fact, didn't understand racism. That's what happens—when I go to Spelman and to Atlanta, I begin to really understand that. But I certainly didn't understand that they were internalizing a hatred of their own color, and therefore their own bodies.

02-01:10:29

The other thing that happened was that within the group of young girls I [taught], they had a friend who at age twelve had had a baby. So that question of sexuality and what can happen in situations, again, was completely outside my range. We were Episcopalians and we were good little girls at that point, so it was all about waiting for marriage. There was no question about getting birth control so you won't get pregnant. It was waiting until marriage. But we used to go to this pool, and there was a quite adorable young junior lifeguard—so probably that means, I guess, he was sixteen or so. Totally

adorable. And at some point, he hears from these young boys that would come around that we know about sex, we know about how to keep from having babies. We know how babies are made, let's put it that way, we know how babies are made. So at some point that summer, he and a couple of these young men asked two of us if we would explain to them how babies are made. So we're up in the third floor of this minister's house in our bedroom with these young boys, explaining to them about how babies are made. And of course, telling them they have to wait until marriage. [laughs]

02-01:12:05

But the point is, what I was learning was they didn't know anything. They weren't being given any information about—even I couldn't give them any information about: how do you protect yourself, contraceptives, which at that point would still have been rubbers probably. The point is I didn't know any of that, but I, at least, could tell them what you had to do to make a baby. And so if you don't want to make a baby, you might want to think about that. That much I could tell them. I've always enjoyed that image of us up there, because here we are in this minister's household, and they don't have a clue what we're doing up there. And of course, being goody two-shoes, what we're doing is perfectly okay, even though it's a little out there.

02-01:12:54

Right. And so, I think that might be all my points I need to make about the Church of the Advocate. [reads notes]

02-01:13:05

Tewes: I just want to clarify for the record—if I missed this here, I'm sorry—but that you're teaching the day camp at this church, so you're, in many ways, a religious counselor.

02-01:13:18

Allen: Well, yes. And, good, I'm glad you brought that up, because of course the lead-in here was that at Carleton everything was—there was my spirituality, my commitment to the Episcopal Church, and then there was my politics. And all of a sudden, I'm in a situation where every morning we go to—the first thing we do in the camp is we go to church, and then we'd break up and we'd have Sunday school, and then in the afternoon we'd run—we'd have some kind of activities. And then the camp's over, and then the young boys come back in the evening and hang out with—there were a few male counselors, as well as us female counselors. One of the male counselors was African American from the community—now in college—and the others were like us, were white college students.

02-01:14:10

But there, for the first time, I think, from the time I left home—well, really because I hadn't been political before then—all of a sudden there was a sense of connection. That even though the camp and the church, we were not at that point protesting or doing any demonstrations ourselves, it was still a situation

in which I was learning about and taking a stand around certain things, just by being there, being able to be in an interracial situation. And I had tremendous respect for the priest, Father Paul Washington.

02-01:14:54

Before I then talk a little bit about him and his wife and their relationship, I would also add that at the end of the sixties, towards the end of the sixties, two things happen at the Church of the Advocate. One is with Black Power and separatism. The question comes up of: they did have meetings at the church. In [Father Washington's] autobiography, I remember reading that he said that he had always sworn after he had experienced discrimination—exclusion because he was Black, that he would never condone exclusion. And now he was in a situation where the Black Power people wanted to have a meeting at his church and they wanted it for Black people, and what we he going to do? What he did, which I think is so interesting—and shows again the caliber of the man—is he decided what he would say to whites was, "If you choose to come and there are not enough seats, I ask you to give your seats to the Black community." You know, and so it wasn't—in other words, "This is a meeting for Black people. I will not exclude you, but they have—if there are not enough seats, they get the seats," which I thought was pretty neat.

02-01:16:19

The other thing was that there was this whole turmoil in the mid-sixties about ordaining women. This is the reason I left the Episcopal Church, because they wouldn't ordain women. And so it had reached a point where in the Episcopal Church, it partly has to do—as with the Roman Catholics—that the ministers or the priests have—they're supposedly able to take—the laying on of hands goes all the way back to Jesus, right? So there's this moment when someone who had hands laid on them lays hands on you, and that is what partly consecrates you into the priesthood. I think I have that all right, although this, again, is a lot of years ago. But there was still disagreement within the Episcopal Church as a whole. There were women wanting to be ordained and ready to be ordained, they were qualified to be ordained. But the Church had not said yes yet, as a national body. And the Church of the Advocate, meaning again, Father Paul Washington, agreed to have, essentially, a renegade service at the church, where they ordained—the bishop ordained these women. So before it had become acceptable within the Church as a whole, they had already gone ahead and done it.

02-01:17:51

I'm, of course, already off in New York, I'm graduated from college. I'm already married. I'm in a different world at this moment. I've left the Church. If I'd been younger, this is probably where I would have been, you know? I probably—I was a religion major. The year I was a senior, the one scholarship for women to go to theological school was withdrawn, because women [makes air quotes] got married and left, so why waste the money on them, right? I don't know whether it would have—by the time I was a senior, this is not what I would have been doing, wanting to do next. But it was a very

volatile and changing time within the Church, and I'd already left, so I was not a part of that. I've always been intrigued that that happened, also. And I think the first woman bishop was there for—she had come out of that church. I mean, there were—Black bishop. It was just a very progressive place. So when I say that even in, for me, in '63 [when] I'm there, there's a way in which there's a sense of progressive politics, even though I'm there being a counselor in a day camp.

02-01:19:21

And I don't know how many of the people who might have been there in that summer went to the March on Washington. I know that the young man who was the head of our counseling group, the top counselor, he was going. I know that, because we talked about it. But I couldn't go, because I was going off to be a delegate for my college at the National Student Association, which was holding its summer conference in Indiana, I believe—but anyway, in the Midwest. And so I had gotten on a bus and gone off to do that, and was there during the March on Washington. SNCC did send some people, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee did send some people *to* that conference to tell us what was going on in the South and to try to build support.

02-01:20:24

But for me, the big question was hours for women, and I'd been part of a whole committee subgroup at the NSA convention, working on a questionnaire and trying to raise consciousness. I should say about this that within a very few years, Carleton and many schools were already having coed dorms. I mean, the shift is about to happen, and when it happens, it happens pretty big for a lot of colleges. But still, for me, it was how to break out of this: girls need hours, boys can do anything they wanted. I guess I want to be clear about that. I don't know if I was clear last time. The guys did not have hours. We are not talking about everybody having hours, and wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to? We are talking about a double standard, you know, and that was what offended me so much. I wouldn't have liked it the other way, but I wouldn't have been as offended. I would have just joined with some of the guys to try to end the rules, but it wouldn't have been this thing that somehow they got to do anything they wanted and we had to be in at a certain time.

02-01:21:35

Tewes: Right. You know, we're coming to near the end of our time today, and I wonder if you want to finish with your story about the Washingtons or if you want to think about the larger impact of this summer on the trajectory of your activism?

02-01:21:48

Allen: Actually, I'd like to just end with the Washingtons. Again, I am in a different kind of home. I am in a home where two people are very different from my parents. [laughs] And one day the four of us white girls are sitting around the

dining room table when Paul Washington comes home. He used to come home sometimes late, and Christine is there. Somebody asked them how they met or how they got married. And the idea that he was the minister in the church, and he basically had identified her in the congregation as one of the congregants. I think she may have been in the choir, too. But the point is he had looked at her and decided she'd make a good wife. He was about to take a position in I believe it was Ghana. I might have to check that. [It was Liberia.] But anyway, he was about to leave, and so he asked her if she would marry him. I mean, there was some courting that went on. But that particular evening when he's telling us, the four of us are like, What? [laughs] What? You know, because it was so clear that they barely knew each other when they were already courting to marry. And this was so out—again, so outside even—what are we now—1963 social world of falling in love and romance and all that stuff. Like, What? And yet they clearly loved each other.

02-01:23:25

They had a very peaceful home. Again, this peaceful home stuff is very important to me. You can have love without people being—you know, fighting all the time. I don't remember if I said last time that my aunt had said my mother seemed to think that love had to do—that part of loving had to do with fighting. That it was an energy dynamic with my mother, with both my father and then the man she was with after my father died, there was that kind of energy dynamic. You know, this house didn't have it any more than the family in Costa Rica had it. It was a different dynamic. Oh! There could be other ways people could love each other. Very important, very important.

02-01:24:16

And then lastly, I would say that in contrast to a lot of white activists, my first experience with a family of people of color was living with a family, and a family of—who I respected and just felt very close to. When I think about how people relate and how they learn about other people is: I didn't bond first with an African American in a romantic relationship. I bonded first with a woman who was younger than my mother, but still a wife and mother; and with a man that was a bit older than her, but still—and of course, in a position of authority as an Episcopal priest, but still was a human being that I respected very much. Not everybody had that gift of having that kind of experience.

02-01:25:18

And then, of course, I had all the experience of the young people, too, but they were all younger than me. And the people right around me, there was the one African American counselor, and he and one of the white—the woman that couldn't go home, because she was from New York State, they started a romance. I think it was a pretty simple romance, I don't know. But I do know at the end of the summer I was visiting my grandparents, and one of my cousins was there, and that is when I experienced racism. I hadn't from my family and I hadn't from my community. No one had ever said anything negative. But at my grandfather's and grandmother's—my mother's parents—my grandfather told me how brave I was, which made no sense to me, until

years later when I understood that he came from Chester, Pennsylvania, and it was a violently, horribly racist city. And there's more I can talk about that. I later understood that, Oh, he came out of a situation where Black people had been demonized. And so for him, he was very proud of me for being brave.

02-01:26:44

But my cousin, who came from a big school near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that was integrated, but with all those problems of white kids and Black kids, she wanted to know how my friend, the white woman, could kiss those lips. And I add this here, because that's a level of, first of all, I didn't know what she was talking about. I'd never seen them kiss, for one thing. And then two of the [white] counselors were—also had fallen in love, and I never saw them kiss either. But it was like, What? What? I was just beginning to confront the fact that coming from a liberal white, but basically all-white environment, I had not been confronted with prejudice and the ways people are racist on a person-to-person level, much less institutionally.

02-01:27:49

That's how that summer ended, was with my realizing that my cousin, at least, had real feelings about African Americans that was completely outside my experience. Because what I'd had—and this is a good place to end—what I'd had was a tremendously positive, wonderful experience over that summer in a Black community living with a Black family. And I couldn't understand why anybody would be afraid. I couldn't understand why anyone would think there would be any problem with kissing any of them, you know? My experience was so different. For me, the dynamics were not about romance at all. They were about young people, and about a family that offered me yet another view of how people can love each other and build a family together.

02-01:28:59

Tewes: Before we close up for today, I do just want to ask: you'd mentioned your journey to being an activist in other areas of life. Did you see any of this experience as activism?

02-01:29:14

Allen: Let me think more about that. Write that down to ask me at the beginning of the next one. Off the top of my head what I'd say is no. I would see a difference between demonstrating and organizing to change things, and what I—and being in Church of the Advocate in North Philly. I'd say that was more in the same category as Costa Rica: a cultural experience that opened me up, and in which I experienced a tremendous amount of love *from*, as well as love towards the people. And again, as with Costa Rica, opened me up to visual differences, you know?

02-01:30:03

Tewes: Yeah. Well, that's a good place to end it. Thank you, Chude.

02-01:30:05

Allen: Good!

Interview 3: December 22, 2020

03-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a third interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. This remote interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on December 22, 2020. Ms. Allen joins me from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California.

03-00:00:24

So thank you, Chude, for another day together. You wanted to follow up with some things you were discussing last week, and so I thought I'd give you that opportunity to do that at this moment.

03-00:00:37

Allen: Thank you. What I realized afterwards is I thought it would be useful to have an example of the kind of community I grew up in. As I've said, it was basically upper middle class, middle class, homogeneous, small.

03-00:00:52

So one of the things that happened once was that the local policeman stopped a woman at night and pulled her out of her car, because she was rolling through a stop sign. And she was a member of the community who said afterwards that she was not stopping because he was in his car—we're talking about country, so it's a country road—he was in his car and she could see somebody was sitting there by the stop sign, and so she was scared. Now, the reason I want to share this is that he was fired. You know, he was fired. There was no question that he was wrong. And given everything that I'm about to experience by going south, when all of a sudden policemen are not your friends, I just thought it was good to add the point that I came from a community where the people in the community expected the policemen to be there to take care of them. And the fact that he would hide over to the side and think it was all right then to stop a woman and pull her out of her car was not appropriate.

03-00:02:06

The other thing I wanted to ask you: did I share the soccer ball story about my mother and my brother? No? Okay. Because I thought this, again, gives a feeling for the kind of mother I came from. I did not know this story until her funeral. My brother, this is the story he told at her funeral. It turns out that in elementary school one day when they were on the playground, he threw all the rubber balls onto the top of the roof of the school. And so Mrs. Cathers, who was the principal, called my mother. And she came down, because Mother was a homemaker at that point, and so she came down and met with the principal. What is this now, sixty-five years later or seventy years, you know, and I'm remembering the name of the principal, right? Anyway, Mother goes and meets with her and my brother. And so Mrs. Cathers says that he had thrown all the balls onto the roof, and so she said, "Why?" And his answer

was—and this is probably a fourth grader at this time—he says, "Our soccer balls got destroyed over time, and they keep promising us new soccer balls, but they're not getting them for us." And that's why he threw the rubber balls on the roof. My mother turned to Mrs. Cathers and she said, "Well, I will support whatever you decide. But I want you to know, I agree with him." Now, that's pretty clearly my mother. Mrs. Cathers, of course, then takes my brother, and the two of them go the four miles to the closest town and buy soccer balls. But my mother, that's kind of the person she was. When we talk about my going to Mississippi and stuff, that's the caliber of the woman we are talking about, who would support my doing that. So those were the two stories I wanted to share before we move on.

03-00:04:23

And now we're at the point where I'm going back to Carleton [College] after my sophomore year is finished, and I've spent the summer at the Church of the Advocate. And did I mention that I then went to the NSA convention, the National Student Association convention?

03-00:04:41

Tewes: This is 1963.

03-00:04:43

Allen: This is 1963, correct, and that my big issue was dorm hours for girl students, because the boy students didn't have any hours. I wasn't sure last week whether I had emphasized that the guys didn't have hours. They didn't have fire drills. And yet we did, the girls did, because after all, you had to be sure that everybody could get out if there was a fire. But for some reason, nobody—we all knew that was not the reason. We all knew it was about making sure we were all there. So that unfairness, that inequality, was very much an issue for me.

03-00:05:22

So when I went back to Carleton, I learned about this exchange program to Spelman [College]. I hadn't known much about it, but they were looking—they were, at that point, recruiting one or two juniors who might want to be on this program. This program had been going on since 1961, since the spring of 1961, when a student named Gail Parsons had gone. And she had written home letters, which had gotten mimeographed, and so we were given copies of her letters to read as one of the things to help us think about whether we'd like to go. The following year, in '62, a woman named Cathy Cade had gone. She had been partly—part of her high school had been in Tennessee, where she had gone to a segregated school, and she was quite thrilled about the idea of being able to go into a situation which she had not been allowed to do living in a segregated state. And the third year, a Southern white woman student had gone, and she'd lasted a week and then had left. At the same time, each time there was a student from Spelman who came up to Carleton and took that student's place. So I had seen the different students, but I didn't know

them. None of them were in my dorm and none of them were in my classes, so I didn't actually know them.

03-00:06:54

But I read this and I was interested. I, first of all, had not been happy at Carleton. And second of all, I'd been thrillingly happy at the Church of the Advocate in North Philly. I somehow assumed [laughs] that a Southern Black women's college would have something in common with a Northern Black poor area, urban area, which of course it did not. But anyway, it was what stimulated me to apply, and two of us were accepted to go. So there were two of us from Carleton who went down to Spelman, and two students from Spelman came up and took our places at Carleton. I didn't know the other student. We were in the same class, but I didn't know her. And we did not—we were in different dorms when we got to Spelman.

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One key difference between Carleton and Spelman was that the Carleton women's dorms were connected. Because, I think, of the cold, there was a tunnel that went through all—on a very cold day, if you were in the furthest-out dormitory, you could take the tunnel up to the front of campus. There were four dorms. But at Spelman, each of the dorms were separate. That meant that once the hours had come, you were into one dorm and you could not interact with people that were in a different dorm.

03-00:08:23

By chance, the woman who had come up to Carleton two years before, in '62, [Barbara] Joy Douglas, was in the same dormitory as I was and was absolutely thrilled that somebody from Carleton was going to be there. And so she is one of the first people I met. She was just exuberantly happy to meet me. Even though I hadn't known her there, she still knew Carleton. I made the point last time that at the Church of the Advocate, one of the key things is that I first bonded with adults and young people who were Black, not with peers. Now, here's my first real peer bonding, and it's with a girlfriend. It was as strong a friendship as any friendship I've ever had, so it was a very profound for me, and a wonderful friendship. She was very different from me. She was very vivacious and was not politically active at all, she was a math major, and we somehow connected in that kind of way that sometimes can happen when people are different in a lot of ways. But there's also, of course, similarities. One key one being that we both were committed to trying to bridge that racial divide that segregation created.

03-00:10:03

She was from Montgomery, [Alabama], and when the spring vacation was coming around, I just assumed I would go home with her, because that's what you would do normally, you would go home with your girlfriend. But this was not normal. This was a Black college in the segregated South. Now, there was a difference. Atlanta, where Spelman was, was legally segregated, but it was not enforced. Of course, it was whites coming into the Black community, but

still people could be together in an integrated situation if they wanted to be. But the restaurants and public venues where whites did not want to allow Blacks to come in, that was segregated and that would be enforced by the law. So you have someone like Lester Maddox, who then eventually becomes governor of Georgia, who did have segregated restaurants. He wanted segregation. So Atlanta was that kind of city, where essentially liberals could associate and where you had a certain amount of interracial events happening in the progressive wing, mainly the Black community. I went to Emory [University], went places where there were a few Black students, but it was not—people were not required to integrate, to allow Black people into their establishments. This was completely different in Montgomery, and what she told me was that we would all be arrested. In other words, we could not do it, I could not go. And that's, of course, true in Mississippi, that in many of these deep-South states, you were breaking the law. And the law was not just that white people don't have to let Black people in, the law was you *cannot* be together.

03-00:12:26

This was not true for me, no one ever said this to me. But Cathy Cade once told me that when she was at Spelman in 1962 standing in line to go to the cafeteria, one student who was standing next to her said to her, "I've never been this close to a white person before." So you know, we were going into a situation where many people had experienced extreme segregation. Mine was extreme in the sense that I might have lived in what was basically a white community. But as we said last time, when I started working at the Church of the Advocate that summer, I started going from a Black community to a white community, and it was all what's called de facto segregation, but not—there was no law behind it.

03-00:13:16

So the friendship was key. And that's not the only friendship. Then the other thing that happened—[laughs] so Barbara Joy runs into me, like, first day, "Hi, I'm Barbara Joy. I was at Carleton," etcetera, etcetera. About two nights later, maybe one night later, I'm in my dorm room, and my dormmate's gone down the hall to see somebody else, and I've already gone to bed. It's dark. Somebody knocks on the door, and it's Barbara Joy. She comes in and she sits at the bottom of my bed, and we don't turn on the light. I have no idea if this discussion could have happened in the light. But she begins to tell me about what it was like and how hard it was to be Black. And she says to me that she does not believe that a Black person and a white person can be friends, that you could ever overcome the distrust that she, as a Black, would have towards a white for their racism. The possibility of them, if it got hard, turning their backs on the friendship, that it just was not possible.

03-00:14:34

And then she left, and I was there with this fact that the first person who's really made friends with me has now told me she doesn't think we could be friends, because I'm white and she's Black. That was my first experience in

beginning to have a little grasp of what it can be like when people—when you start a relationship on the basis of history, and people's long-term history, as well as people's experience. That the first question in the other person's mind [would be], Is this person going to be like the ones I've known before? I did not know how to proceed, but the next day Barbara Joy was her friendly self.

03-00:15:22

And then I will say through this whole friendship is more than once I made mistakes, big mistakes, mistakes of arrogance or whatever. She was the kind of friend every person should have, which is that she called me on it, and we moved on. I've often thought that the friendship worked, because at each stage I was willing to really hear her, and to then try to make whatever changes I needed to make, including understanding.

03-00:15:56

Now, one example of the mistakes I made was that I had thought it was a wonderful idea to also write letters home, and to have them typed up and shared, just like my fellow student had three years before. In the first letter, I'm writing back about what she'd told me, about what it's like to be a Black person. And of course, I had my parents send me a copy and I give it to her. Thank goodness—you know, at least if I'm going to be insensitive, I have the good sense to at least share it. [laughs] Because that allowed her to tell me that wasn't okay. She had told me in confidence, and I had gone and basically said, "Oh, let me tell you this person's private life." I never did, again, tell anything without her permission or whatever, and I've never written the details; the particular details she told me, they've never been repeated. So that was an important lesson, and it was one of the first.

03-00:17:09

The next thing that happened is that—it must have been maybe the second night—I had discovered that there's this group called the Canterbury House on the Morehouse [College] campus. Spelman [was] one of seven colleges [in the Atlanta University complex], and the male college that's kind of like the brother school to Spelman was Morehouse. And on the Morehouse campus was something called Canterbury House, which was run by a retired Episcopal priest, and had—two of the Morehouse students lived there. So it was basically a center for Episcopalian activity at the center. And they had Friday night dinners with programs. There would be, during the time that I was there, times when white students would come from some other college, and we would all have dinner together and things like that. So I go this first night, and I don't remember the program, but I'm part of this primarily Black group of Episcopalian students and this one priest.

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And so afterwards, three of the young men asked me to go out for a Coke. Now, I didn't know that girls weren't allowed to do that, that Spelman girls were supposed to go home. [laughs] And in particular, there were certain places you weren't supposed to go, period. You know, they were very much

focused on making you young ladies. But these young men did not tell me that I was not allowed to go. That would have been fine at Carleton, as long as I got in by the hour. So I went, and the four of us are sitting at the little table and we have our Cokes. And the older of the three young men opposite me says to me, "Would you ever marry a Negro?" And I had never thought about this. I was at the point of being willing to date, but marriage was not yet on my horizon. And so I said something along the lines of, "I would try very hard not to, because it would be very difficult. But if I really loved him, yes, I would." And then we all went home, and that particular young man—oh no, then I said to him, "Would you marry a white woman?" He said, "Well, I can't. I'm already married." To which I said, "That's not fair." That was not a fair question then, right? But the point is, that's what I said, and we went home. I thought I had said yes. The young men thought I had said no. So the entire time I was at Spelman, no Black student—male—ever asked me out. And I used to wonder sometimes why, but you know, it was fine. I mean, I knew that the Spelman students were ambivalent about the white girls dating, so in some ways it was fine. But it is an interesting thing that I know now, only because about two years later I met the two young men that had been at the table who had *not* asked the question, and they told me that that's what they had interpreted. So that's how I know that *they* thought I said no; I thought I said yes.

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I think that's an interesting thing, that for years I didn't remember how key that was, the question of intermarriage. By the time I'd gone to Mississippi, there was this whole obsession about sex, about interracial sex. But one of the other Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement who was in Mississippi was a lawyer. And in either '65 or '66, he had worked on a school desegregation case, and he said the whites were opposed because of the question of intermarriage. He kind of reminded me it wasn't just about sex, it was about marriage and family, changing families and integrating families. So it is interesting to me when then I look back even to my experience at Spelman, that one of the first experiences I have is being asked, How did I feel about interracial marriage, and in particular would I? Would I do that?

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So I took classes. I was in a college. I took a class in sociology on the city, I took a class on Christianity and literature, and I took a class in Russian history. They were all off the Spelman campus, because I was a junior, and juniors were allowed to take classes in the other—in Morehouse and [other] schools. And I liked boys, so, you know, I foolishly did that. And then my fourth one, which was my—it was not for credit, because it was finishing up a Christian ethics class from Carleton—was with Staughton Lynd at Spelman on nonviolence in America, studying the whole question of nonviolence through the different movements for change and coming up to the present time.

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In terms of the classes that I took, I have a memory which only came when I started doing memoir work again that it finally came up, about the sociology class. And this, as I say, was on the city. Some reason, early in the class, one of those days, the discussion became around the whole question of integration, segregation, Black/white relationships. And I still remember this now, once it came back up, is that I'm one of two girls in the class, and I'm the only white person in the class. This one person starts talking, male, about how much he hates white people. And I say, "But I'm not for segregation. I'm not—I don't believe in that." This young man says to me, "It doesn't make any difference. That doesn't change anything. *Your* feelings don't change anything." I don't actually think he said those particular words, but that was the meaning. He said, "That doesn't change anything. [How you feel changes nothing]." Well, hey, talk about politics! [laughs] Key issue.

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What's ironic about it, because I haven't yet talked about the student movement, is that I'm already demonstrating. And I don't know if there was a single person in that room who was going to the demonstrations. I certainly don't think there was anybody that went to Mississippi, because then I would have known him, or if it was the woman, her. So I tend to think that the person who was challenging me was both saying to me, "What you feel doesn't count. You know, things have to change. It's how you change things." But I was the one that was—actually had joined the movement to try to change things. It's an interesting dynamic. That's all I can say.

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I think now that that was, without my being conscious of it, one of the profound things I learned. I think I integrated it very deeply, because it took a long time for the memory to come out. But I will also add that nobody in that room made me feel bad, nobody made me feel like I wasn't welcome, nobody said anything negative to me. And even the young man who said, "I hate all white people," said, "It's not personal." You see? Just like your feelings aren't going to change anything, it's not—my feelings are not personal to you. I mean, it's like, That's how I feel, given the situation. So it was a pretty profound experience.

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There's no reason to talk about the Christianity and literature class. Nothing significant happened there. The Russian history class is important only in that it really demonstrates, one, my arrogance; and, two, my real lack of interest in scholarly work, and my interest in being out there making change in the world. Because it was actually a graduate class, and there was only one other student. We were with this very—this older white man was the professor. It would mean nothing, since studying was not where my brain was at, except that I had to write a paper. I'd written it on Catherine the Great, because I once wrote—I mean, I read a book about Catherine the Great and I really liked it. So I wrote this paper, and I passed it in. And since I was really focused on, by

that time, going to Mississippi and about nonviolent direct action and about understanding racism, that's not where my brain was at—or my focus. He hands it back to me, and for the first time in my life a teacher says to me, "I don't want you to regurgitate what you read. I want to know what *you* think." Now, I was going to Carleton, one of the prestigious liberal arts colleges in the country. I was arrogant enough to be in this class, because I thought I was too good for these schools I was at. And here's this teacher who teaches me one of the most profound things I was ever taught. And so, again, I'm just really clear that places with prestige do not necessarily teach you more than places where people are really committed. And this being a white man working in a Black university, I would assume that he had made a real commitment to be there and to help people—the students who came to him—to learn to think and to become good academics, which is not what I was. But he certainly gave me a clue. I have a tremendous amount of both respect and gratitude for him and for that.

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Where my thinking was—to the degree I was really putting any energy into studying and stuff—was, in fact, the nonviolence class and its connection to Christian ethics. So I want to step back a minute and speak just briefly about something that happened at Carleton at the beginning of the Christian ethics class before I went to Spelman. We were reading Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," and that was our assignment and we came in to talk about it. This is an all-white class. You know, at that point there's a handful of Black students on the campus, but this is an all-white class. And the students start talking about how they identify with the white students in the South and how—that the Civil Rights movement is moving too fast, and what about the white students' feelings? [laughs] And I'm going, What about the Black students' feelings? What about the inequality? You know, again, it was one of these staggering moments where I didn't fit. I *totally* did not understand these people.

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I did not understand them for years and years and years, until when I began to write about this period, when I'm going to think about this period, it was like, Oh! They're up there in Minnesota. Most of them are Midwesterners. They haven't had a good experience like I have. They've had probably *no* experience, and all they know is the racist propaganda that the culture has given them. And in truth, as Cathy Cade, who'd been there two years before me at Spelman, has commented more than once: people in the South knew more about each other, even though there was this rigid segregation. Even though there was not this—not allowed to be social equality, they still *knew* each other, because they were in small communities together. And so the contradiction was there, but at least—so that the whites, as they got older, would be very clear to make sure everybody understood who was dominant and who was submissive. But it doesn't change the fact that they at least knew who each other were. And so I realized that these students, in being

confronted with this question of integration and whether or not—you know, some of the white ministers had protested, had written this letter that the movement was moving too fast. It then made sense to me that what we were dealing with was fear, and fear that was based on racist propaganda from the dominant culture. It was not based on anything real.

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In Minnesota, just as an aside, I would say that most prejudice was directed at Native Americans. They were more the group that would have been—and there was a small Black community in the Twin Cities, but it's not like that was a big—that many of these students would have been in integrated situations. I can't imagine, for example, in that class that if someone had been in a situation that had—a school where there were both Black students and white students, and there were problems, they would have brought it up as *that* issue. You know, this was a Christian ethics class. What is the appropriate response on the part of Christians, good Christians to—in a situation where there was an adversarial relationship? But that's not what was going on. They were totally identified with the Southern [white] students and felt that they shouldn't be forced to have to go to school with Black students. And I couldn't relate, I just couldn't relate.

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Tewes: It is interesting to me that this is the Christian ethics class, and you're seeing these students respond in this way and you have such a different response. But were you internalizing that as, Well, that's the way I live my Christianity, or was this, I have different set of values in another way?

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Allen: No, it was more, They're wrong and stupid and bigoted. [laughs] I mean, please understand, what I have just described to you is years later trying to understand. At the time it was just judgment. These people are—I'm not sure whether I was using "racist" at that point, probably "prejudiced" would have been the word we would have used. But no, I didn't see any—I couldn't see them as human beings who were confused, I saw them as wrong. I knew they were wrong—and they were wrong, by the way. [laughs] But judgment prevents you from being able to figure out ways to begin to have discussions to change people. Judgment is: I want to get out of here. I can't wait to go to Spelman. I don't want to be with these people.

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The other thing I would say is that in the Christian ethics class I had to do a midterm, and so it wasn't—this particular professor, who was my favorite professor, he did open book, so it was not a question that I had to go somewhere and sit. But I had this question that I had to answer. I mean, I had to do an essay, and there was a page limit. Well, once I got started—and of course, I got started about the situation in the South and racism and identifying especially with small children finding out that people hated them just because of the color of their skin. I wrote more than I should have.

[laughs] I remember when he answered me, he said, "I should have deducted [points from] you for going over the limit, but I couldn't." And when he retired, we were all asked to write a little something, and that's what I wrote him. I said how important it was at that moment in my own history that somebody did not lay down a mechanical thing on me, but let me—you know, but acknowledged me for what I was learning and doing. So where I have said that for the Russian history class I was not a good student, I was not really there—this professor was getting more than he was asking for. And instead of penalizing me, he acknowledged me.

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And in a way these things—you know, we keep doing the weaves. In 2014, I went back to Carleton and did a convocation. And after the convocation, they had a luncheon in which we sat at tables of six—much better than tables of eight—oh my goodness, talk about a political lesson! You want people to talk to each other? Don't have more than six people at a table, then they can talk as a group rather than just to the person next to them. So anyway, he was there—Bardwell Smith is his name—and his wife. And afterwards they had a microphone so that I could answer questions of the students who'd come. Students had signed up to come to this after I would have given my talk. And he stands up, and he said that he realized, in listening to me, that the reason *he* went to Mississippi in January of '65 was because of me, and because—you know. And it was, you know, because he would have known that I'd gone to Mississippi that summer, but he'd also read that in my final exam, you see? The one place where I really was focusing and trying to understand, and sharing both intellectually and with my heart, was in this class. And he acknowledged that that made a difference for him.

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Tewes: Amazing, Chude! [laughs]

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Allen: I mean, I make a point of telling people that I wasn't a good student in a lot of ways, but it's not that I wasn't focused. What I understand now—and I see it in both my son and my grandsons—is that some of us are single-focus people, and we do best when we're not asked to stop this and go do that, but to really allow us to work, think through whatever it is we're doing and really put our focus there. I am not one of the activists from the Southern freedom movement or from the women's liberation movement that went to school and got PhDs while I was active. No way. I couldn't have done it, because I'm a single-focus person. I know someone that got two PhDs. And she went to Mississippi two summers in a row, so she was very dedicated, willing to risk her life. I said to her one time, "How'd you do it?" She said, "You compartmentalize," which I'd never thought about before, and I can't do. In terms of myself as a—you know, this whole point of this oral history is, in part, because I was an activist, because I worked in these movements, is that I was single focused. When I was there, that's what I was doing. So even at

Spelman, where I put my intellectual focus was the "Nonviolence in America" focus, because that was helping me learn about nonviolence.

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And then, I think this is a good time to talk about it—and learning about the history of the United States and learning about what it meant to be white and what white people had done, and learning about racism, what racism—how it had affected people who had been brought here against their wills and enslaved. That meant that I was doing, of course, a lot of other reading, too. Not reading necessarily my textbooks; [laughs] I was reading other things. You know, Howard Zinn, *[SNCC:] The New Abolitionists*, about the early SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] people and what they'd done.

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But a book that had a strong impact on me was John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*. Now, I knew my friends, my Canterbury friends, the kids that I hung out with and stuff, I knew they hated this book, and they hated this book because, How could a man change—dye his face a different color and go out and in, whatever it was, two months, learn what it meant to be Black? But that's a title. I now also know that writers do not control titles; publishers control titles. So I have no idea whether John Howard Griffin would have said that or not. But what I know, in rereading this book again when I started revisiting this period of my life—so that would have been in the late eighties—was that this is a book about white people. By changing his color so that he appeared Black, John Howard Griffin learned what white people were like in relating to Black people. That's what this book is about. And you know, he and his whole family were driven out of their community. White people do not want to hear how—you know, what they're like. We can talk about this in other ways, too, but the ways in which racism or sexism or class oppression allows—degrades the dominant group. So he got to see that. He goes to get a bus ticket when he starts out, and the white woman selling the ticket to him looks at him with loathing. So it's a whole story, and you learn different things.

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But for me, given that I came from such a naïve background sexually, is the thing that stunned me was that he hitchhikes at one point, I believe in Mississippi, but that was—I haven't read this book in a while—[laughs] and he gets picked up by a man in a truck, a white man. They're driving along and the white guy starts telling him about how he has had every woman Black employee. And John Howard Griffin asks, "Well, what if she didn't want to?" And he laughs and said, "She wouldn't have a job." Well, that's my first knowledge of sexual harassment and of sexual abuse on the job. Up until that point, there's no way I would have known. By the way, most people wouldn't have—this is not talked-about stuff, on the whole. I'm not talking about the Black community. I think the Black community *did* know a lot of the stuff. They knew about rape, they knew about these kinds of situations. So it's not

that some people didn't know. If you were a victim of it, if your community were victimized by it, you would know. But in my community, I didn't know that women might be forced to have sex in order to keep their job. This was new information to me.

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The other thing that stayed with me very strongly was that—again, I think it was Mississippi, but it was rural. He gets picked up by a Black man who brings him home, and they are extremely poor. They share their food with him. All he has is a couple candy bars, which he cuts up and gives to the kids, which is this wonderful treat for them. But he's just so stunned by how gracious and sharing they are. So here's what I'm reading: the white people are pissers, basically, and the Black people are kind and good or at least acknowledge him, and in this case it was profound. So that book had a big effect on me.

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I'm trying to learn about, like, what *is* this racism stuff; and trying to learn about how it's not enough for me to not want to be racist, that I have to begin to change my behavior in ways in which I was arrogant or which I thought I knew—I mean basically, what I discovered at Spelman is I didn't know a whole lot. We're talking spring of 1964. White kids in white schools were not being taught Black history, so we didn't know anything. You know, how could we possibly know anything? And the prejudicial stereotypes we'd been given were not ones that said, Look how brilliant Frederick Douglass was. What does this mean, to have a person of that caliber come out of slavery? Look at the brilliance of the orator Sojourner Truth. Look at the abilities of someone like Harriet Tubman, who became the first woman to ever lead US troops in battle. Look at these people! We didn't get any of that. Why would we get any of that? We were not even, basically, taught that people who were enslaved were people. You know, this is a big change. It's not that many years old that now people are referred to as enslaved people, not slaves. I mean, the difference is huge, right? The "people" stays there. So all of a sudden, I'm being taught that to the degree people are not fully human, it's the white people, and that people who are seen as Black are being mistreated, in a number of ways, by my people. So I have to then deal with the question of being white.

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Now, there were a certain number of issues at Spelman around us white girls being there. Certainly by the end of that semester I would say that most of the students felt that thirteen white girls—which is what it was for the spring—was about twelve too many. So it's not like they loved us being there, for whatever the variety of reasons were. But I know in my case, it was because I was an activist, because I said my mind, and some people liked me very much and some people didn't. I will say here that—then I had to come to terms with the fact that I had made mistakes when I came, and that there was, within me—that I had been raised—I would now say raised with white supremacy.

You know, this is something that I now understand better than then. But I was starting to understand that as a white person, especially a middle-class, educated white person, the idea is you're [the] center, your rea[lity]—and remember, my father raised me to be very proud of being a WASP. We were the best of the best. You're [the] center, and then there are—well, there are the Jews and there's the Roman Catholics, remember, but then there's also the people of color. But you're [the] center.

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What happened for me at Spelman, even though I wasn't yet conscious of this, is that I could no longer say my reality is the central reality, [that] how I have experienced reality and how I perceive it is the fundamentally right one, because it wasn't. So I was dealing, you know, with guilt. I was dealing with that whole question of, What does it mean that my people have done these things? I will say here, also, about my mother, is that at some point I wrote my mother that. My mother wrote back and she said, "Remember, God loves you." In other words, whatever mistakes you're making, you've made, whatever your weaknesses, God loves you. Well, I was still very religious then. And what a gift, right? What a gift. I could go down on my knees and I could ask God for help.

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The other things that happened were that I kept going to Canterbury House, and so I became friends with these guys. Remember, it was asexual, nobody asked me out. [laughs] So I became friends, and then I did things with the Canterbury House people. Well, one of them was a retreat that had been set up between one or more of the white Episcopalians [from white] colleges and Canterbury House. So we went off to the Georgia mountains for a weekend, and that was quite profound, because I'm si[tting]—the first night all the Morehouse and Spelman students are sitting on one side of the room, and the white students are all on the other. And I, of course, am sitting with the Morehouse [Black] students. So this is like, again, a visceral experience of, Wait, I'm not over there with the white people, I'm over *here*. And I remember distrusting them. [laughs] Who *are* these people, right?

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The leader was a man, an Episcopal priest named Malcolm Boyd, who was already very active in doing antiracist work. One of the things he did was write poems—excuse me—write plays, little playlets, where he changed the stereotypes. So the Black characters would say things about the white people that white people normally say about Black people. For example, that they smell. You know, "Those white people smell really weird—" because that was one of the racist, prejudiced things that were said about Blacks. That kind of thing. Another Black character could say, "Well, you know those whites, they dance so well. They're really good with their bodies." You know, those kinds of things. He had picked them out—I've never been able to find one of these, because it would have been lovely to actually see what we laughed at. But the point is, he used humor. And by the end of the evening, it was no longer an us

against them kind of dynamic. And then we could come in the next day, Saturday, and whatever our discussions were, could do it as Christians together, rather than in an adversarial position. So I got to see how humor can help, and how sometimes turning things on a head can help.

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I was also having a lot of difficulty at that point at Spelman, because I was coming up against the ways in which some people really didn't like me, and I had made some mistakes. I asked him during a break if we could talk. And so we went out on the porch. It was pouring rain. When it rains in Georgia, it rains like it used to rain out here on the West Coast, you know, where it just rains and rains and rains. We're standing out there on the porch with the rain coming down, pouring down off the porch, and I told him that I was having difficulty. What he said to me was, "Sleep. It's very important that you get enough sleep." And I already was sleeping—sometimes missing a class, because I kept sleeping, again, because I would just sleep so much. But his point was that sleep is one of the ways to help stress when you're in a stressful situation. And in particular, you don't want to make more mistakes, because you're so stressed. And so sleeping is a way to rejuvenate yourself, and therefore be in a position to try to act in a way that is appropriate, to begin to have the energy and the focus to make the change you need to make. One time, probably twenty years ago, but I wrote him and I told him that he had done this. [laughs] He wrote back and said it was really nice to know that sometimes you did something right. [laughs] It was very sweet, but it's true. It's one of those kinds of recommendations that I find myself now—I would now add *eat*.

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Tewes: Simple but very useful, for sure.

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Allen: Yeah, yeah. Self-care. Take care of your own body, because then you are in the position to have the resources to deal with whatever it is you need to deal with. So that—

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Tewes: Right. So you're talking about this internal crisis—maybe crisis isn't quite the right word.

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Allen: Oh no, it's a good one, yeah!

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Tewes: [laughs] Okay, reckoning, perhaps, about guilt and understanding racial identity. How did that translate to your activism on campus and through Spelman?

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Allen: You know, I think that what was happening was there was this whole—I had this whole life called being—going on a demonstration or going to these interracial parties, and being part of the movement there. And then I had the life on campus. I had thought when I came that everybody would be involved in the movement, but it wasn't any different than at Carleton, you know? A very small number of students were involved, and the vast majority were there to, whatever: to do their work, to get their degrees, to go on to grad school maybe, or to get married, whatever it was—who knows—get a good job. Even if like in the South they might be—they wanted—yes, it would be good for segregation to end. It didn't mean that they were putting their bodies on the line. But one thing I can tell you is that it required a willingness for nonviolence to be involved in the movement.

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When I first was there, again, one of the very first days, I saw a notice for a demonstration. The big demonstrations in Atlanta to desegregate the restaurants had happened in December and January, and there were still a bunch of people in jail. I got there at the end of—right at the end of January/the beginning of February. This was a demonstration to go down to the jailhouse and demonstrate in support of the people that were still in jail. So I go, and I'm totally surprised, because there's not that many people. There's just a small group of us that are going down to demonstrate. And it was like, Where is everybody? Well of course, many of the activists were in jail. And I was confronting the question that, Oh, just because they're Black and just because this is against racism, doesn't necessarily mean they're going to join.

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This is an example of the kind of person I was. I go back to my dorm afterwards and I go onto my floor, and there all the girls are hanging out together, and I say, "How come you weren't at the demonstration?" [laughs] I mean, I've been there two or three days, right? That's one of the reasons some of them didn't like me: I was pushy. It's like, "How come you weren't there?" However, one of the women did me the favor of answering. She said, "I couldn't be nonviolent. If somebody hit me or touched me, I would beat the shit out of them." Of course and be killed by the cops, right, probably. But the point being, that she couldn't—it had never dawned on me that anybody might not agree with the nonviolent movement.

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This is a huge question today when people want to somehow say, "We can all go to the same demonstration, and we can all do what we believe and somehow it'll be okay." Well, no. A nonviolent demonstration means that everybody on it has made a commitment to, one, be nonviolent, even if they're attacked; and, two, to follow the leadership. So if you didn't agree with the leadership that day—say the leadership said, "Okay, we're going to stop now. Things are getting tense. Let's go," and you think we should have stayed and sat down on the street, and stayed there and gotten arrested, you still followed

leadership. And then you went back and you talked about it and made a decision for next time. But you didn't do that anarchistic or individualistic thing of, "I don't agree with this. I'm going to do it my way." People's lives were at stake. That was one of the times that I was not as tactful as I could have been. But this particular woman, in particular, was very kind to me to explain to me that she wasn't going to go do that, period. She didn't believe in it, you know?

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Tewes: And what was it about nonviolence that appealed to you?

03-00:56:53

Allen: Well, I would say coming from the love-thy-neighbor Christian background would be part of it. Violence is wrong. I think I would have believed that. I was very, very influenced by Staughton and Alice [Niles] Lynd, who were pacifists. They were Quakers. Oh, I can tell you this story about going—I used to go sometimes to Quaker meeting with the Lynds on Sundays, and we would drive. There was an actual Quaker house, and we would drive to the Quaker house, and then, of course, we'd get back in time for lunch. So the Lynds had two kids at that point. One day we're driving back, and Barbara hits Lee, I think is what it—the girl was the older one—she hits her brother [or says something mean], and Staughton pulls over to the side of the road or the street, and he says, "You need to say you are sorry." And she's not going to do it. He says, "We're not leaving until you say you're sorry." And she's not doing it. And I'm hungry. [laughs] I want to get back for lunch! I mean, I was ready to beat the shit out of the girl, you know? That's when it dawned on me—I mean, I don't mean that literally, but you do know what I mean; I mean I was ready to smack her—I mean, tell your brother you're sorry so we can go have lunch. And so that's when I realized, Hey, this nonviolence/pacifism stuff is not so easy.

03-00:58:31

Now, there's two questions. One is pacifism. And the pacifists were very impressive people. There was a whole march of pacifists from Québec down to Guantánamo for peace, and they had gotten arrested in, I'm pretty sure it was Georgia, on the way, because they were an integrated group, and they weren't allowed to walk as an integrated group. But they weren't about to *not* walk as an integrated group. They were not hostile to or violent against anyone else, but they were not going to sacrifice their own principles, so they all landed in jail. Barbara Deming, who was a key intellectual figure in the women's movement, too, she was one of the pacifists from that, and they were in prison for a while. They witnessed to the jailers and stuff, but they were not about to compromise their principles and their integrity. They were very impressive. A man came up from—Clarence Jordan, who was part of a Christian community called Koinonia [Farm], which was having lots of trouble with racist violence against them, but they themselves were peaceful people and interracial. I was meeting and learning about these really impressive people, and also learning how hard it was.

03-01:00:10

But at the same time, the movement—SNCC in particular, and the movement—was about nonviolent direct action. You didn't have to be a pacifist, you didn't have to say—you know, we used to have these discussions. [laughs] "Well, what would you do if you had a baby, and they broke into your house and they were going to pick up that baby and break its head against the wall. Would you fight back then?" We used to have these discussions. And at the beginning it was, like, "Oh, I couldn't hurt another person." You have to understand, I was twenty years old. But other people were like, "Hell no! I would defend myself." There was this continuum. And at this period, I was still a little idealistic, in the sense that I thought that the important thing was not to try to hurt other people or to hate other people, but to try to believe that every person has a core humanity that you could reach. Or I might have said then that God is in everyone. I hadn't yet come to feel that there are times when even if God is in everyone, that person can't access [God] and they're going to hurt you or hurt people, that maybe they need to be stopped. I wasn't there then. I went into this—even into Mississippi—believing in nonviolence as the [only] way to make social change.

03-01:01:48

But I *was* more aware that maybe I couldn't always do it on a personal level. I mean, we're also talking about, If you're going to love your neighbor, you also had better be loving the people around [you]; or, If you don't love your enemy, you ought to be loving the people right around you. And to that, I still am someone who believes that there is no point in trying to change anything if you can't even change how you relate to the people closest to you, that these two things are connected. Otherwise, all you're doing is duplicating the leadership. Now it's going to have a different color or a different class or whatever. But if they're going to use the same techniques, if there are going to be just as much bullies, if there are going to be just as much nasties—so in that sense, I may not have always acted as a pacifist might. But I believed in the principle that we treat each other with kindness and respect, and that I was joining a movement to fight for that for everyone. It seems to me a good moment to point out that I also expected that people would treat me that way.

03-01:03:03

Huh. Where are we in terms of—

03-01:03:07

Tewes: Well, in getting towards your decision to join Freedom Summer in 1964, perhaps we should discuss how you connected with SNCC?

03-01:03:21

Allen: Ah, okay! [laughs] By now SNCC was no—their office was no longer across the street from Spelman. Some of the earlier [exchange students]—like Cathy Cade, she just went across the street and hung out with the SNCC people. When I was there, the office was a little further away. But what we did see was a lot of the SNCC field workers, mostly male. When they came back from

wherever they were and needed a break, they would come on campus. We would give them some of our meal tickets so they could have something to eat, we would help feed them. And we had these interracial parties that SNCC people would go to. I knew, I was around SNCC people. But the organization on the college campus was the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights [COAHR]. It was, in 1960, one of the first groups that formed, and it was part of the group that then formed SNCC. And whenever I comment to some of my fellow veterans that there was this difference between being on the campus group and SNCC, they always say, "But the [Committee] on Appeal for Human Rights started—" it was one of the groups that started SNCC, but there's still this separation by then.

03-01:04:44

Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, who is running, basically, a lot of the SNCC office and stuff—and a highly respected leader—she's still going to Spelman at that point. But she's off doing that or she—you know, people are in jail. What I know are the people that are still running the local group. And then I also get connected with Georgia Students for Human Rights, which was the white group coming—the students coming from a number of the white schools. And I was, along with one of the other Spelman students, I would go to their meetings, too, and then report back to the [Committee] on Appeal for Human Rights. So I was involved in that. That's kind of organizational work.

03-01:05:35

But it's not through the [Committee] on Appeal for Human Rights that I get recruited into going to Mississippi. That happens through Staughton Lynd in the "Nonviolence in America" seminar. He has agreed to become director of the Freedom Schools, and so he is beginning to talk about what we then called the Mississippi Summer Project, and he's then talking about that. We're starting to talk about that in our seminar, the nonviolence—the whole reason for bringing people into Mississippi to—because it's such a racist state and it's so violent, and there's a feeling that they will just kill off the Black activists. But if they could bring in up to 1,000 whites—especially white students, many of whom were coming from prestigious schools—they will force the country to take a look at what's happening and they will force the country to care. So that was the focus.

03-01:06:43

And remember Jerry Brown went, when he was Governor [Edmund Gerald "Pat"] Brown's son. Lots of important—so-called important—people went, as well as those of us that just came from white families. And of course, at Spelman and Morehouse, people—and other Black schools—they were being recruited, as well. So it depends on the statistic, whether it's 10 percent of the volunteers who finally went were Black or whether it was 5 percent. It was a small percentage that were Black, and the majority were white. Part of the purpose of that program was to force the people in the North and the West to pay attention to what was going on in Mississippi, and to allow the local

people in Mississippi to see that they weren't alone, and that there were people who cared. So I was recruited that way.

03-01:07:44

But the question about SNCC is: SNCC did have its spring conference in Atlanta in the spring of '64, and the focus was going to be on the Mississippi Summer Project. I went with a friend from Carleton who'd come down with me.

03-01:08:04

Then I have to stop for a minute and jump back over here to Canterbury House. Canterbury House had hosted a group of people from Pembroke [College] and Brown University in Rhode Island in the fall. And it was now their turn to go up to Pembroke and Brown. And so, the priest at Canterbury House invited me to come. This is my second time I am with the Black students going in to interact with white students. I go up and do that. And on the way home, the way back, we stopped in Philadelphia and picked up this friend who was from Carleton who was on spring break and was considering going to Mississippi—and did. She did, she became another volunteer. So she and I get back to Spelman, and it's spring break, and she knows—she has a classmate who lives in Atlanta. I go to the assistant dean of women, and I tell her a lie about where I'll be, and then I go off with my friend to stay with somebody our own age.

03-01:09:28

And we spend the weekend at the SNCC conference. So this was an incredibly moving experience, where there's actually—I don't know whether it's—it must be possible to get this, but I have—the second Freedom Singers record starts with John Lewis's speech. He was chairman of SNCC at that point. And it's a speech in which he talks about lynchings. This is Friday night, and he has described a couple of lynchings in Mississippi, one of which was by Senator [James Oliver] Eastland's father. Senator Eastland's father chose the way they were going to torture this couple. And he's sharing these couple stories in detail, so that by the time he finishes his talk, I'm again caught up in this kind of loathing for being white and wondering how anybody in this room can possibly care about any of us who are white, because this has just been so ugly, so degraded, so cruel—I mean, incredibly cruel.

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And then the Freedom Singers come up on stage and we start to sing. And for the whole rest of the night, that's what we do: we sing freedom songs. There's no way to understand the Southern freedom movement without understanding the absolute importance of singing. Singing was what brought people together; singing was what made you bigger than who you were, helped you deal with fear. So even if you're singing, "We are not afraid," and you, of course, are afraid—but it is making you bigger. And that's what one of the people I was privileged to know later, Wazir Willie Peacock—he was a singer, and he would say that's what it did: it made you bigger. For me, it also

made me connected to—I experienced it as a connection. We're all singing together. And so at the end of the Friday night, that last song was "We Shall Overcome." And there is a verse, "Black and white together." That was not sung, "Black and white together some day," it was, "Black and white together now." Everybody raises their hands, and they're holding on to each other's hands, and all around the room, there's Black, brown, and white hands. And for me, that was one of those—there I went from the horror of being part of a people that could do such terrible things, to the wonder of being part of what was called the beloved community.

03-01:12:36

And of course, at that point, even before the rest of the conference, I was going to go to Mississippi. You know, it was like, of course that's what I would want to do. I didn't know if I was—I'm wrestling with words—competent, mature, ready—because "ready" is too vague. But I just felt, given that I was learning so much and I was still stumbling around, was I the right person? But there I had Staughton Lynd as my professor, and I could go and I could—and he had me come and talk with him, and he assured me that, yes, yes. I was thinking, Can I do this? Am I good enough to do this, is really what I was asking. And he was saying, "Yes, you can."

03-01:13:31

The rest of the SNCC conference, the one thing I remember is there was one set of workshops that had to do with Northern students, Southern students. And because I was in the South at that point, I went to the Southern students' one. The debate that was going on in the Southern students' one is whether the SNCC people, when they came on the campuses, should wear those overalls that they would wear in identification with the poor or whether they should dress in the middle-class way that the students dressed. Some of the students were saying, "You need to dress the way, essentially, we dress, because otherwise it sets up this division. And here, you want to organize us, organize people on campus." And on the other hand, the SNCC people were saying, "No, we identify with the poor. If you can't identify with the poor, hey. No, we're not going to compromise." Well of course, I totally sided with—identified with the poor, and screw you. But one of the most revered of the older leaders, Miss Ella Baker, supposedly took the position that, no, you don't separate yourself out from the people you're trying to organize. I can't tell you anything more than—I don't *know* more than that. But that was like, *Oh*.

03-01:15:11

But at the time, what I was listening to was really about, Where's your identification? Where's your commitment? And I knew, from being on the campus, that "country" was an insult. When they were insulting each other, one of the words was, "You're too country," or, "You're so country." Well, I came from the country, remember? Now, not the kind of country that it turns out some people came from. [laughs] Really, really far out. I was only thirty-five miles from Philadelphia and sixty miles from New York, so it's not the

same kind of country. But my first thought when I first heard it was, Wait a minute. I'm from the country. What's wrong with country people? It had to do with poverty and lack of education, illiteracy maybe, all defined as ignorant and bad. And SNCC was saying no. And of course, the SNCC workers out there were meeting with phenomenal people with great strength and dignity and intelligence who'd faced horrendous discrimination and oppression. So anyway, that was the other thing I remember from that weekend.

03-01:16:24
Tewes: Well, you mentioned that by this point you had already decided that you were going to participate in the summer.

03-01:16:31
Allen: Well, I decided that I *wanted* to participate.

03-01:16:34
Tewes: Okay.

03-01:16:35
Allen: I can't tell you, I don't know—I don't think yet I had had the discussion with Staughton Lynd that made me feel I was worthy of it or that I could do it. I think that was to come. But I certainly—there was no place else I wanted to be than with these people. It was just incredible to be in a room with people who had already, in four years, done so much. And anybody listening to this, of course, is aware of the caliber of John Lewis. But he's only one of many, many people who had risked their lives, had risked—had really put themselves on the line to try to change, make change for everybody. And there was, with the singing, just this tremendous sense of unity.

03-01:17:34
Tewes: I like the way you describe that, certainly. I think one way to finish out our time today would be to discuss not only your personal decision or the thought process that you've been mentioning about going to Freedom Summer, but also your parents' role and how that came about.

03-01:17:54
Allen: Yeah, well two things. One is I was only twenty, so for girls to go to Mississippi in 1964, we had to have our parents' permission. And this both has to do with—obviously it's sexism, because the guys didn't have to have it. But in terms of that moment in history, if you'd had a girl going down and something happened, the parents might—could have sued SNCC or sued COFO [Council of Federated Organizations] or the National Council of Churches or any of these groupings that were involved. It was necessary to make sure that the parents weren't going to turn around and try to, in some way, undermine the movement, because they were angry that their daughters were there. That much I understood.

03-01:18:40

What's interesting is that in reading my letters—because I did write letters from Spelman; I start very early, long before I think I even knew about the Mississippi Summer Project, writing my parents about the importance of struggling against the evil of racism. And I even say in one letter very early, early February, "If you had to lose a daughter, if you had to give up a daughter to end the evil of racism in this country, it would be worth it." Even before I'm starting to say, "I want to go to Mississippi and I could die," I'm already talking about making that kind of commitment to ending what, to me, has become just—forget in loco parentis and dorm rules, right? [laughs] I've come to understand that there were much more serious issues that I needed to address, and both on that personal level and also politically. So I was already starting to introduce that idea, that I might be involved in the movement.

03-01:19:58

Well, every time I went on a picket line, you never knew if you were going to get hurt. As it turned out, in that spring, the demonstrations we did were not—there was not violence directed at us, but it could have been [at] any given time. I was making a commitment to be nonviolent. So in the case of somebody attacking me, I was not going to be fighting back, I was going to go into what—the position that you go into to try to protect your inner organs if somebody starts to beat you. So they knew that, but they also were good Christians. And I was working all of this out, as you'd asked earlier, but partly as a Christian: God wants me to play a role here, God wants me to participate. I'm being recruited, I'm not a leader—later we'll talk about leadership—I'm a follower. I'm being asked to be part of this. I'm being welcomed and encouraged to be in the demonstrations, and then I'm being recruited to go to Mississippi. So that part had—I'd been pretty—already working on them.

03-01:21:18

I never was part of whatever discussions they had. There was just a piece of paper they had to sign. [laughs] And you know, that summer after—when I went back—before I went to Mississippi, I did go back and visit my parents and to raise money to go to Mississippi. And I went for a walk with my father down the long field in front of our house, and I remember saying—he says to me, he says, "You know, I could have refused to sign." And I say, "No, you couldn't. If you'd refused to sign, everything you taught me to believe you would have shown to be not true." It never dawned on me they wouldn't sign. I've subsequently met two women whose parents would not sign—one Black and one [white] leftist. My parents were not radicals, they were not leftists, but they were good Christians. And I was saying, "This is what God wants me to do. Jesus will be with me. This is *right*. Racism is an evil—" which I, by the way, still believe racism is evil—"and I'm being asked to do this, and I want to."

03-01:22:31

My mother, sometime in the eighties—my father had already passed away—we were visiting my aunt and uncle, and my sister was there, and I think she

had asked the question about, "How did you get [him] to sign this?" And she said that she had to work on my father. Because his workplace, his peers at work did not agree. And so he was dealing with—in a way that my mother wasn't—with people whose respect he wanted, who thought what I was doing was anathema, was wrong. But he did [sign]. What else could he have done? You can't raise your children saying that everyone's equal and that prejudice is wrong, and that we are all children of God, and then turn around and say, "No, you can't do this, because you're more important. Because you're our daughter, and we don't want you to get hurt." That, I would say, is how they talked it through and then they did [sign]. And it was very hard for them that summer, because they didn't know whether I would come back.

03-01:23:59

Tewes: Right, and we will discuss a lot more of those situations as we move forward here. But is there anything you'd like to add to wrap up our time today, Chude?

03-01:24:11

Allen: Oh, let's see. [looks at notes] I don't think so. I think we've pretty much covered everything.

03-01:24:24

Oh yes, there is one more thing. Remember I said that I went to Pembroke and Brown on this exchange with the Canterbury people? So after I was back on the Spelman campus, one day I got a memo from the president, who—let's just say I would never put this president into a category of being a good leader and kind man and who believed in academic freedom. There was a lot of repression on the campus, and the students themselves were starting to try to—especially intellectually, wanted to break out more. And there was a lot of—not only in terms of you had to behave like [makes air quotes] a lady, but you can't—there are certain questions and stuff. That all was happening on the campus anyway. I don't know, in terms of who's going to be listening to this. But in contrast, Benjamin Mays had been president of Morehouse. Now, there's a qualitatively different leader. That's all. I just want to say this was not someone—

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So anyway, I get this note saying that I'm to come to a meeting at such and such a time. No reason for it, what it's about, but that I'm to come. I think is what I was just trying to say. It's not like this is a man that would have told you, "This is what we're going to be talking about." It was just, "Come to this meeting." So I go, and I walk into a room with my friend Joy—she'd gotten one, too. And there are all these Black students there. The seats were already taken, so I'm sitting on the floor, because it was a fairly large group of students in this room. And the president walks in and he looks at me and he says, "Get out." He said, "You don't belong here." I say, "Well, I was invited." [yells] "*Get out!*" And so I have to stand up. And I'm a white girl and I'm light skinned, and of course my face is just, I'm sure, burning red. How could it not

be, right? *Totally* embarrassed. And I have to get out and leave—and walk through all these students and leave. Well, it turns out that the meeting was for Spelman students who'd been on exchange programs. Well, I'd been on an exchange program [to Pembroke and Brown]! He didn't realize that. And of course, the next day I do get a personal letter saying—apologizing, because I, of course, shouldn't have been invited. He told [them to invite] all exchange students, and nobody thought about that. But not a public apology, I just would point out.

03-01:27:12

But it *changed* things. Now, on the campus, all of a sudden, students were saying hello to me who'd never said hello to me. It was a very interesting and profound experience for me. It was like they were letting me know that they had heard what happened, and they were sorry or that they identified—none of this was verbalized, I mean, this is all just—and all of a sudden people are saying—people that I didn't know. And what it did was, it was like it shifted my—I was no longer just a white girl. I was the white girl their president had insulted—or whatever word you want to use—because everybody was hearing about how he threw me out of this meeting. It changed the feel of the—for the rest of the time I was there, the last whatever it was, three weeks, a month, people were just friendlier. It was like in some kind of way—I've always identified it as that they were embarrassed that their president could do that. Cathy Cade has said to me that she would think of it in terms of, Oh, even a white girl can be mistreated. But I didn't feel it that way. I didn't feel it as, Ha ha, you're just like us. I didn't feel it that way. I felt it more as they were really letting me know that they were sorry this happened. And I think much as I bumbled around on how to [talk] about the quality of this president, I think what I want to say is that it was inappropriate what he'd done. It was completely inappropriate. If he'd realized I was there and that he had not meant for me to be there as a white exchange student who'd then gone on exchange, it could have been handled very delicately and tactfully. Instead, he embarrassed me in front of everybody, and I would go even as far as saying he mistreated me. And that is what, I think, people felt. Not just in the room, but as it went around the campus. Now, nobody ever talked to me about it, so I can't tell you whether how I felt is quite what they felt. I don't know. But I can tell you that there was a change, and it was a change for the positive. No question about it. Students treated me much better as—it was like I had stepped over to their side, and he was over there. So I do think that's an important one to end with, yeah.

03-01:30:09

Tewes: Sounds good. Thank you for your time today, Chude, and we'll see you soon!

03-01:30:14

Allen: Yes!

Interview 4: January 13, 2021

04-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a fourth interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. This remote interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on January 13, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thanks for joining again, Chude. We've got a big day ahead of us today.

04-00:00:26

You know, when we left off we were discussing your decision to become involved with the Mississippi Summer Project, which we now know as Freedom Summer, and that was in the summer of 1964. We discussed the role of faith in your decision to go, as well as your discussions with your parents about what this was going to be like, and their support for this. But I'm hoping you would take us from there. What happened next after you decided, Yes, I'm going to go to Mississippi?

04-00:00:57

Allen: Well, while I was still at Spelman [College], those of us in the Atlanta area who had applied and been accepted to go on the project started meeting together: Staughton Lynd and some of the other—Vincent Harding, some of the other people, older—the adults, as it were—pulled us together, and we met some to talk about both nonviolence and the meaning of the summer and stuff, so that one of the things that is true for me is that when I went to the training in Ohio, and then when I went into Mississippi, I did not go alone.

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Years ago, I would have said, if you were interviewing me, that girls or young women wouldn't have gone alone; that was something more of a guy thing. But that's not true. [laughs] I have discovered through various reunions and connections that there were women that went alone. They didn't tend to be the ones that needed their parents' permission, but who knows. I don't know that. I just know that Fran O'Brien, for example, was—from going to school in Oregon and from California, she was twenty-one, so she didn't need her parents' permission. But she was like me, she was a junior in college, and she got on a bus and she went to Ohio, to Oxford, Ohio, without any—knowing anybody. There was someone on my project that got in a car—again, she was just a tiny bit older in this case—but she got in a car and she picked up somebody else that wanted to go, and they came. It's not true that it was just the guys.

04-00:02:52

But from my experience, it was that I was part of a group. I was always part of a group. And that was very—a profound point. We were an interracial group. Some were from Spelman and Morehouse College, and some were from some of the white schools. And we went either into voter registration, of course, or the Freedom Schools community centers, but that spring we were together.

04-00:03:20

Then before I left Spelman, Staughton asked me if I wanted the job of running off some of the—we think it was now the National Council of Churches training materials. So I spent five days at the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] office using one of their mimeograph machines. [laughs] Things were so much more labor intensive back then; going in each day and doing my work and leaving. And my friend Barbara Joy at Spelman, she was graduating, so she was just thrilled that I could stay for the graduation, because that meant I was also there for that.

04-00:03:57

And then I went home to my family and did some fundraising and got myself ready to go to Ohio. I was able to set up a ride with one of my friends from Carleton who was going to—also on the Mississippi Summer Project. She and who she was with, they were coming from New York, so they were going to pick me up at the northeast extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at one of the exits. So this, again, puts us back—this is 1964. There are no cell phones. There is nothing at this extension, there's no restaurants or anything. The Howard Johnson's were at various points along the turnpike, but there's nothing there. And so my parents drove me to the exit and we waited. And we waited all night. The people didn't show up when they were supposed to.

04-00:04:57

I had forgotten this, and when I wrote my mother once, when I was starting to write about these experiences, I asked her what were the most frightening things that she'd ever experienced. And one of them was this night. She reminded me that—and you know, it's like now overwhelming that my parents and I sat on the side of the road in the country all night long waiting for this Volkswagen bug to come. And sometime around, I guess, six or something in the morning, it zips up. [laughs] And of course, something had broken down and it had to get fixed, but that's how we did things back then. There was no cell phone. But I'm still amazed when I think back that they didn't say, "Let's go home and we'll put you on a bus." And so all night long, we just sat there together. I was in the back seat; they were in the front seat. What were you to say to each other? We knew we might never see each other again. They knew I might not come back. So that was a key kind of thing.

04-00:06:02

I do get to Ohio, to Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. And that first morning after we're there is when we're informed that three of the people are already missing: [James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner]. I was in the second training. So the first training had already gone. They'd gone the day before, Saturday, and we'd come in on Sunday, and this was Monday morning. And one of the first things we were then asked to do was to divide up by states, and then contact our parents and relatives to contact their congressmen and ask for safety for the civil rights workers. I did that, and my father did contact his congressmen. And later I learned, because his congressman—at least one of them called him up and said, "Get her out of

there." And my father who, as I've defined, was not what we think of as a political activist, but he said very clearly to his congressman, "This is not about *her* safety. It's about *all* their safety." That kind of shift—and that's just, again, that reference to the fact that when you get involved in something, people around you can also have their own—they grow, too, or they can grow, depending on whether they support you. My grandfather wrote both his senators, and I learned later that the senator who was up for election answered him; the other one didn't even answer him. These [politicians] are the northerners, these are so-called liberals, but they're not going to get that involved anyway. But anyway, that was what we then were supposed to do, is ask them to get help.

04-00:07:53

Tewes: You know, you mentioned this—the three project workers who went missing, quite famously, were found murdered later—and then also coming and knowing that you might not see your parents again. Was the idea of mortality something that these young people talked about openly?

04-00:08:12

Allen: Well you know, it's interesting. I'm a member of the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, and we do have this website, [www.]crmvet.org. One time we did a discussion about this question of, Did we think we would die? And I don't know, maybe there were seven or eight of us in the discussion. Only two of us thought we might. And the others, you know, it's that young people [mentality of], This isn't really going to happen.

04-00:08:38

I was surprised when I read Sally Belfrage's book, *Freedom Summer*, which is the first book with that title and was written in '65 after she came out of the South. I remember being surprised that she said that she was kind of surprised [the three missing] were dead. In fact, I knew that the SNCC workers knew they were dead. I knew that the Mississippi people—you didn't just go missing, you died. So I was surprised, but now I'm not. Now I think that it's hard for people. It's an abstraction until it happens. And the fourth person to die that summer was on my project. And I can guarantee you that I was quite willing to die, and I was quite willing to live for you if you died. But seeing a dead body was a whole 'nother thing. So later we can—remind me to make sure we talk about Wayne Yancey.

04-00:09:42

So that was the first thing, was that we go into our training knowing that three are already missing, and then we go into our training. I'm a Freedom School teacher, so there was training on how to encourage students to think critically and how to encourage dialogue. One of the things I remembered in preparing for this is that Bob Moses, at one point during that week, said to us that some of the students would be slow, but it didn't mean they were stupid. I think that's really an important distinction. You could say it a different way, too. Some people are very—Southerners are much more slow talkers than some of

the Northerners, but—like people from New York City. There's a comment made by Unita Blackwell in her autobiography, that when they came that summer to her little, small town, she becomes the first Black mayor of a city, in this little, small city, the town that she's in. But then she's completely just separated from everything. They recruit her, she gets recruited that summer. She couldn't understand the Black worker who was from New York, you know? He talked too fast. And of course, the Jamaicans have their own accent, too. I think it was a good reminder.

04-00:11:11

Since I'm on the Freedom Schools, I will just finish so that I don't forget this point: that I have both read and heard people talk about the need for the Freedom Schools from the context that these students were undereducated and deprived, because the schools were so bad. All Mississippi schools were bad, and then the Black schools had so much less. But I want to say right up front that it made a big difference what kind of teachers the kids had in those schools. Fran O'Brien, again who I'm mentioning, who was working in Vicksburg, she lodged with a woman named Mrs. Garrett, who was a retired teacher. And I know this from 1989 when we had our first reunion, I know this story. Mrs. Garrett, she said, taught her more about how to teach than her master's degree program in education. She became a teacher. And Mrs. Garrett had made her own textbook, because the books were so bad. Now, the students, of course, the Black students, got the used textbooks from the white schools, and that, of course, meant that they were already damaged. It told the kids how little they were valued. But we also need to also remember that the content of those—some of those books were terrible. And so it means something when a teacher takes that kind of energy.

04-00:12:41

Also, Roy DeBerry, who was in Holly Springs, [Mississippi], not one of my students in terms of the main class, the Black history class, but I worked with him in the afternoons with a play we were doing. Roy is quoted in *Freedom's Children: [Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories]*, another book which has interviews, that the school he went to, they had to walk a number of miles. Remember, the Black students didn't get buses; the white students did. The school was a one-room schoolhouse that he was going to, and that they had to collect the wood and make the fire. They had to walk a mile to get water. All these terrible conditions. And they had this teacher, this wonderful teacher who taught them to think and ask questions. So by the time I meet Roy, he's already been a year of doing voter registration and he's a senior in high school, and he's already an activist and understands the importance of struggle.

04-00:13:46

But it comes from the teachers. To just finish with this point, I've been thinking about how a lot of political struggle for oppressed people is about—is understanding the importance of people. That's the key. If you have to choose between a good teacher with a bad plant or a great setup with a bad teacher, I

would suggest that a child would get more from the good teacher. Now, we're not talking here about, Does that mean that they qualify for some of the standards of the society? But we know now, for example, that a lot of education now is about multiple choice, for example. Multiple choice means you don't get to think outside the box. So again, I would say if—so a teacher working clandestinely in a Black school—because it's still a white school board—teaching the kids to ask questions, is doing more for those kids in terms of that sense of themselves. And just to finish, Claudette Colvin, who was one of the young women who refused to change her seat, to get up on the Montgomery bus before Mrs. [Rosa] Parks. Being a young woman, the community couldn't rally behind her. But she credits her teacher, because her teacher, in class, taught them that they were of value, they were not of lesser value.

04-00:15:19

So that, in essence, is also what the Freedom Schools were about. The Freedom Schools were secondarily about helping students if they needed remedial help. Although, for one summer, there's only so much you could do. Though some people had very—they had more structured classes than others. But what they did, along with Black history, is that many students talk about for the first time being given books and told about—there was such a thing as Black writers, Black artists, Black musicians. So it was also about developing pride. And then, of course, it was about encouraging the students—this is the primary thing—to think critically, to think about their lives, to think about what needs to get changed, and to ideally make a commitment to join the struggle. But it was very much about the critical thinking dialogue. So we were being educated at Oxford on encouraging the students to think and to talk. We were not there to give lectures, we were there to encourage creative critical thinking.

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The one caveat, I would say, is that sometimes the kids wanted something like they wanted to learn French or they wanted to learn about nursing, and it's not like anybody knew that they could do that in the summer. But if you've never been offered the opportunity to hear French and learn some words in French, you could see how that could be very exciting in a school where you've been so confined and your experiences have been—in the educational realm—so narrow, you can see that that would be thrilling. In Holly Springs, it was nursing. Some of the students, they wanted to learn about nursing. And we had a nurse on our project, [Kathleen Aileen Dahl], so that was one of the classes they could take. And again, it would help them know whether that was something they might want to try to be able to go to college to learn how to become a nurse. So—

04-00:17:28

Tewes: Right. And what were you specifically teaching? Did you have specialties?

04-00:17:33

Allen: Well, the key thing was what we called then Negro history, Black history. We were given a stack [indicates several inches] like this of papers, mimeographed papers of the lesson plans. Because again, people today need to know—we didn't know Black history. It's not like all these Northerners coming down from these best colleges in the country knew anything about Black history—at least I didn't. So in that sense, I was just one lesson plan ahead. I would read it the night before, and then I would go in and I would share it, and then we'd talk about it. How do you feel about this? What do you think? All those kinds of things. But I didn't know any more than them. That's something else I want to—maybe a little later you can ask me a bit about the mistakes I made, because one of them was about the lesson plan on Haiti.

04-00:18:27

Tewes: This is a good moment, if you want to talk about that now.

04-00:18:28

Allen: Okay, we can—all right. [laughs] So I would go in with a lesson plan. The lesson plan is about the enslaved people in Haiti rising up, first against the French and defeating the French, and then when the English try to come in and take over, defeating the English. In my letters, I actually write about this class, because it was such a moving class. I mean, it's just like, I worked with teenage girls and young women, so we were an all-women's class, and I came in and I shared this—I knew nothing about Haiti. I was learning it just as they were learning it. It was thrilling, it was just thrilling. People had risen up and they had defeated these powerful countries and claimed their independence. What I only knew many years later was that Haiti was the poorest country in the hemisphere and run by a dictatorship, because that wasn't part of the storyline.

04-00:19:35

Okay. So now, here's an example of what a Freedom School could be like, which happened to me. I used to speak regularly, twice a year, at Kathy Emery's class on the Civil Rights movement at San Francisco State. Over the years, I got to the point where I would start to—at some point I would talk about mistakes. And one of the mistakes was this question of Haiti, of telling them this wonderful story about the victory of the enslaved people, and not giving them any information about what happened, because I didn't know it and it wasn't in my reader. And so this one class I told them that, and then I asked the question, "What should I have done?" Now, this was towards the end of the class, and she had basically a rule that if you've spoken, you don't get to speak again, so that the kids could—so that everybody would speak. So I told them the story. I said about how the enslaved people had freed themselves and that that's where I'd stopped and how thrilled we'd all been, and how now I was carrying this sense of guilt that I hadn't told the whole story—which I didn't know. "What should I have done?" And there was silence. And then somebody finally started to raise their hand and Kathy says, "No, you've already spoken. It has to be somebody who has never spoken."

And so this Filipino student raised his hand and he said, "I think you should have told them what you told them, because until I came to college, I never heard one positive thing about my people struggling against oppression." And then I said, "Oh! And then if I'd known more—" because that was really the question. The question was, If I'd known more, what was I going to do with this new information? I said, "Oh! And then I could have waited until the next class to bring up the question of the way—what happened."

04-00:21:42

Now, that happened to happen at San Francisco State maybe five years ago, but that's what a Freedom School was like at its best: it was the teacher raising a question; students answering; maybe the teacher having a new thought, which is what I had—a new thought—everybody getting somewhere different than where we'd started, because we'd put our minds together. I hope that captures it for people, because it was, at the time, just thrilling for me. I'd always had such a difficult time trying to describe the Freedom Schools, [laughs] and then this happened here and it was like, Yeah, that's what we used to do. Okay.

04-00:22:29

Tewes: That's great. Thank you for that example. I want to ask you about your experiences actually living and working in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Here you are, a white Northern woman coming into this whole new environment. What were your experiences like, and what did you observe there?

04-00:22:52

Allen: Well, we were a large project. Not the largest, but we were like forty volunteers. And by circumstance, there were—Rust College was in Holly Springs, which was a Black college. The Freedom House and the Freedom School were two rented houses right across the street from Rust College. Rust College did have—there was support for the movement. And so that the beginning of the summer, the women volunteers were housed on the Rust College campus, so I did not live with a family. The men slept in the Freedom House and the Freedom School, and we were on the campus. Then, somewhere in the—halfway through the summer, the school, the summer school ended. And so then we rented a house around—it was like a block away—for the women, and then all the women were together. But in that first part, we were divided up amongst—in the dormitory with students from there.

04-00:24:01

The main thing I can tell you from those memories was that it was really, really hot. I mean, really hot. Six a.m. in the morning, you're already sweating beyond belief, and it's not going to get any better. And there is no air-conditioning, none. At that point, I had cut my hair short and would—partly I'd cut my hair short when I was at Spelman, because I'd felt like I'd gone through this big change and I needed to look different. Well of course, people still relate to you the same, but to me it was a symbolic thing. But it did mean I had very short hair, and it was very, very hot. One of things that I was aware

of when I would wake up in the morning and lie there, is that I could go take a cold shower and get my hair all wet—and remember, white girls weren't supposed to have straight hair, so we were supposed to curl them. But of course, at that point, Black girls were supposed to have straight hair, I mean, they were not supposed to have the kinky hair. And I was aware that they could not as easily just go in and take a shower to cool down, but because I had short hair I could. So I would lie there in bed and I would feel that difference, that—which I would say *is* an example of a privilege. Normally I don't like the term—we can talk about that later, the term privilege for—white privilege. I don't like it. I think it's the wrong expression. But that is, to me, to be able to get up in the morning and go take a cold shower on this very hot day was a privilege. And it partly was because I didn't have to worry about curling my hair, so I partly had created it myself. But it was partly because I was a white girl, and I didn't have to worry about my hair being kinky, which was still, at that point, just beginning to be challenged. And so that I remember.

04-00:26:08

I don't remember having many conversations with the students. I was with three girls in a dorm room. Partly they were—I was coming in late, and then I had my lesson to study; they were studying. We were friendly with each other, but I don't remember ever having deep conversations with them. We then ate—we walked down the—Rust College was kind of like up on a hill, and there was a wall all around it, also, with an armed guard at the gate. For the summer, for that part of the summer, those of us that—the women, we were at least sleeping in what was basically a relatively secure place.

04-00:26:51

And there was a, you know, a big lawn walking—going down to the street, and then to the Freedom House and the Freedom School, where we would make breakfast. And here's that question of, What did we eat? [laughs] I mean, if you were living with a family, usually the wife or the mother would cook something for you, I think in many of those situations. But for us, I don't remember what I had for breakfast. I do remember somebody saying once that some doctor had said you could live all summer on peanut butter sandwiches. [laughs] And I think there was a lot of that. And Kathy, our nurse, every now and then she would make something, she'd make a big pot of beans and she would make things. We also would go to the local Black little restaurant, a small, little place and eat usually a meal. So there was a place to get food. But it was one of the issues on our project, that the men, the voter registration guys would go out all day, and when they came home, would there be food? I can remember one time there wasn't, and how upset Ivanhoe [Donaldson] was. Because that was a justified consideration that, No, you don't eat up all the food, and then the people that have been working in the field and have had a long day come home and there's nothing for them to eat.

04-00:28:22

I have no memory of where the food came from. I don't remember. I know we sometimes went down and ate at the restaurant, but I have no memory of shopping. So either somebody was shopping or stuff was being dropped off. Probably it's the latter. And then, of course, there were the days like—especially Sundays, where we would end up at somebody's house for a big Sunday dinner. And then, you know, if you weren't getting too much food during the week, now you had the opposite, of you were being encouraged to have seconds, thirds—[laughs]

04-00:28:53

Tewes: Right.

04-00:28:54

Allen: —of big, big meals. So I certainly did eat in people's homes, but I didn't—I was not living with a family.

04-00:29:04

Tewes: Well, that leads me to ask what kind of interactions you had with the community at large, maybe even particularly the Black community there?

04-00:29:14

Allen: I had less than the people doing voter registration, of course. I was working mainly with the students. When we first got there, when we first got to Holly Springs, we had to go around and recruit people for the Freedom School. So we did go into the—knock on people's doors, and that's when I met Rita Walker. Now, anybody who worked in Holly Springs, Rita Walker is one of the key people, local people, who became involved and eventually brought her husband into the action. After I had left, they actually moved into the Freedom House and eventually were forced out of the community. But very beloved, and she was in my Black history class in the morning, and then she did voter registration work in the afternoon. She was a young mother, so she probably was twenty-four, I think. But anyway, early to mid-twenties with some children, and she would leave the kids with her mother every day and come. She has a statement that she dictated that's on our website about meeting the Freedom Riders—because that's what we were called, the Freedom Riders, right—and how she was so excited that we were coming. And they would go down to the bus station to watch for us, because we were supposed to be Freedom Riders. Actually, as it turned out, both voter registration people and then whoever I was with and myself, we knocked on her door and were invited into her house. And she was recruited. She was one of the key local people that we recruited. As I say, she was in the class in the morning. One of the things I did was encourage the students, also, to write about things. And she did extra writing, because she knew she hadn't had a decent education, and so she worked at it. She was an intelligent woman that was wanting to change things for both her kids and her people.

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I did not do a lot—you didn't loosely walk around. And then, plus, we had the Rust College campus if we wanted to go sit under a tree and that kind of thing. I am not somebody that knew a lot about what was happening in the community. In fact, people sometimes who were in Holly Springs that were involved in the voter registration drives will make a reference, "Do you remember this? Remember when we all went down and they had the big voter registration day?" Well, I wasn't part of that, and I wasn't part of that, because I was a Freedom School teacher. I also wasn't a part of that, because I was a white woman. This whole question of being white in Mississippi is key. We brought danger to the project. Having a white woman around was more volatile. And so there was in the way in which some of us, I think, were more conscious of it than others, to be careful.

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But also, I didn't have my own car. Aviva Futorian, who was a professional teacher that came down, she had her own car. She's one of the key people in starting the Benton County Freedom School. Now, Benton County was right next to Marshall County. And so she was staying in Holly Springs, but she was then driving out to Benton County and working with the people in Benton County. So she *was* more involved. Now, I did go out there. I do remember being out there—I think when we were first starting the school—but it was not where I was placed. Where I was, was in Holly Springs.

04-00:32:59

In the morning I did the Black history class, and then in the afternoon it was more you could do whatever you wanted. Well, one of the professional teachers, Debbie Flynn from New York City, working with kids in New York one of her things was to have them create plays. And what she would do is have them do spontaneous dialogue, and then she'd write it down and she would then type it up. She offered that to the students, and I asked if I could assist her. And so the teenagers did a play called *Seeds of Freedom* about—focused on the killing of Medgar Evers, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] man who had been murdered the year before. It was their kind of their making up what they thought it would be like to have been his family and the people—and I mean, it's quite a moving thing to read. Again, it's on the website. And so then they did it, and so they would come up with people—they would say things to each other, and Debbie would go back to the Freedom School and type it up that night, and bring these little slips of paper, "This is what you said yesterday." And they learned their parts, and they first gave it to their parents and the community.

04-00:34:27

It was so moving that we were asked to come to Meridian at the end of the summer, where they were having a Freedom School convention. So the head of each Freedom School, the volunteer or staff person that headed the school—in our case, Barbara Walker—and two representatives elected from the students were to meet in Meridian. And they did, in fact, do a very—rather

impressive statement of goals and demands. And anyway, they were kind of finishing up the summer with this kind of position of what they demanded for a viable school. We were invited to come to bring the whole cast and do the play *for* the Freedom School student representatives and the Freedom School directors who were there. For that reason, I got to go to Meridian and to be part of that, which was quite—it was quite wonderful to, again, what you're talking about is building something out of nothing. And for it to be so moving and so wonderful—

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And the one thing that happened is that we couldn't find a bus to take us there, because this was a whole group of teenagers, because all of the buses were being used by the Army for the—okay, now I'm going to forget which it was. [laughs] We'll have to put a little parentheses when we—because okay, we are in '64, so it would have been [the] Vietnam [War]. I just had to skip myself out of Cuba and get up to Vietnam. You know, they were mobilizing soldiers for Vietnam. This is '64. Barely knew that Vietnam existed yet, but we knew that—we learned that we couldn't get a bus, so we had to use cars to go to Meridian. So—

04-00:36:34

Tewes: That's very interesting. I wouldn't have thought about that particular challenge in that context. My gosh. I want to go back to the politics of this project. You mentioned being a white Northern woman you brought a certain amount of danger. Could you be a little bit more explicit about what that danger was, and how that comes about?

04-00:36:59

Allen: Well, this is an example of where, yes, there was sexism in the summer of '64. The sexism came from the dominant culture, the dominant white supremacist culture, in which people were just enraged at the idea that white women would be involved with an interracial project with Black men. It incensed the white men. This has partly to do with white women as property, and that's going to have issues, subtle issues all the way around, but especially in terms of danger.

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And the question of whether the white women understood it or not is an interesting one. I heard one story, as an example, of a white woman who did not want to hide on the floor under a blanket when riding in a car with a number of Black people, mostly men. I can remember the worker who then said he wouldn't ride in a car with her anymore, because she insisted on sitting up. She insisted, "I have the right to be *seen*." But of course, in that situation, she wasn't the one that was going to get beaten to a pulp. There was a story—I have no idea if it's a true story, because I don't know the source, but it certainly is a good metaphor—which is that one white volunteer was starting to have a little romance—or maybe a big romance—with one of the Black workers, and he got jailed. And so she came down to the jail to support him,

and of course he got the crap beat out of him. It's like, hello, hello. No, we had to be careful.

04-00:38:44

Now maybe is a good time to talk about Wayne Yancey, also. I have no idea whether or not Wayne's accident and death has anything to do with this, but I do know that Wayne came from at that point—he'd grown up in Tennessee, but he was a working-class man, a welder from Chicago, and he didn't have a sense of caution.

04-00:39:13

So that one story is that—to tell you on the positive side, the quality of this man is that the Benton County school was canceled one day. because of pouring rain, and so the teachers weren't going to go out. But Wayne was concerned that there might be some kids that wouldn't know, because people didn't have phones necessarily. And so he and one of the white teachers drove out. And in fact, two young boys had been dropped off by their, I guess their father—dropped off by someone. They were going to have to walk all the miles home, and so they were able to take them home. So that shows you he was a caring person. But when I heard the story many, many years later, of course I'm like, "You did what?" [laughs] You know, white woman, very, very dark-skinned Black man; no way to pretend that [this wasn't] what this was, they're driving together.

04-00:40:12

At the end of the summer, two of the white women were leaving. And so two Black men, Wayne and one of the local men, drove them up to Memphis—Holly Springs is close to the Tennessee border—so that they could take whatever they were doing, whether it was a bus or a plane, I don't know. But anyway, they were taking them to drop them off for their transportation, and it was on the way home that the accident happened. No one, as far as I know, has ever been clear about what happened. But Wayne was killed, and the other man was the one who was driving. And when he woke up, I guess there was a gun in his face. The thing was, he was very badly injured. And this, again, to tell you about the context of the times, the hospital in Holly Springs would not admit him. It was the funeral director of the Black funeral home who drove this man in his hearse up to Tennessee to get treatment. Now, he did survive. And he was told that if he came back to Holly Springs—and remember, he's a local man; this is where he's from—that he would be arrested and accused of killing Wayne, because he was the one that was driving. So as I say, no one quite knew why—whether or not it was set up, what exactly happened. I've often thought it's amazing, given the amount of driving people did, given the amount of hard work, given the fact you'd work all day and then you'd be at mass meetings sometimes at night, given everything, it's amazing that more people weren't in accidents. But anyway, he died.

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I didn't like Wayne. And the reason I didn't like Wayne was because when—he came later. He was one of the workers that came a little after the project had started. I was in the kitchen of the Freedom House, and he came bopping in and looks at me and says, basically, "Hi, you want to sleep together?" And remember, I was this little goody two-shoes prude at this point, and I mean, I was just insulted, just insulted that the first thing this man could do is ask me did I want to sleep with him. just because I was white, clearly. But I have to say, in retrospect, many years later, as I really worked on this issue, he was—I said, "No," and he said, "Okay," and that was it. You know, that was it. There was no being rude to me or nasty. Nothing, it was just—and he did find somebody, and that was that. But I was so judgmental at that point.

04-00:43:02

So here we are, so it's in the afternoon, we're—it's the group of teenagers doing the play. We're on the large lawn of the Rust College campus doing the play when we hear. And Debbie, who's in her forties to my twenty, doesn't say anything. And I felt I ought to—that somebody had to say something. I can't tell you what I said, but I did my best to say something about losing him, and many of the students were very hurt and sad. I mean, you know, as I say, he was in many ways a very nice man, he was a caring man. I didn't do a very good job, and that was one of the things that I always felt very badly about. And I never knew at the time how much it was because I didn't really like him, so was I being a hypocrite?

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Now I understand. What *do* you say when people die? I didn't have—none of us were trained in that. Whatever training we got on nonviolence, whatever training we got on how to teach in a Freedom School, nobody gave us any advice on what are you going to do if somebody dies on your project—even though we knew it could happen. And [Cleveland] "Cleve" Sellars, who headed the voter registration section of our project, he says in his book, *[The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC]*, that he did afterwards—that they all went out and got drunk. Meaning the Black men, or maybe some of the white men, too, I don't know. But that was not an option for me. I mean, I was not in any way, shape, or form going to be able to go do that.

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There was a viewing before his body was sent to his family, and I decided I should go. And Barbara Walker, who I was closest to and was head of our Freedom School, she wasn't going. [laughs] She said, "No way. I'm not going to go. Period." But I thought I [makes air quotes] should. I think probably part of it was because I hadn't liked him, so I thought I should pay—and it was very hard. It's when I realized that there's such a difference between the abstract—you might die, she might die, he might die—and the actual body right there in front of you, dead. So it was traumatic. If my memory is right, this happened just shortly after the three bodies had been found of the

murdered three. Or it's the other way around—I can't remember which came first. [It was Wayne's death.] But the point is that they happened right on top of each other for us, so it was a very difficult time.

04-00:45:56

Tewes: Did that change how you approached the work or how you thought about your own role in it?

04-00:46:02

Allen: To the extent that we knew that the three who had been killed at the beginning of the summer saved probably a whole lot of our lives. You know, this is one of those moments where it is perhaps relevant to refer to the fact that we're speaking [in 2021] a week after an attempted attack on the Capitol of the United States, right, in Washington. You know, there's these moments when things happen. If they'd happened—the timing was different, the situation would be different. So what I want to say about *then* was that if—they were after James Chaney and Mickey Schwerner. Andrew Goodman was the volunteer who came along and had only been in the state a day. If they had succeeded in killing them before the summer project started, perhaps it would have not had such a profound effect. There would have been—now Mickey was white, so it might still have. But what we are talking about is these folks in Neshoba County killing two white and one Black man in the Civil Rights movement *just* as the Mississippi Summer Project is starting.

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So all these people—we call them Northerners, but also Westerners—all these people from around the States have children or sisters or brothers or grandkids or nieces and nephews down there or about to go *in*. So it was like all of a sudden there is—regardless of how little the congressmen may have responded to my father and grandfather, there still was all this pressure on the United States government to deal with the fact that you had about 1,000 people who'd gone into the state to help with voter registration and Freedom Schools whose lives were in danger.

04-00:48:15

So at the time—and I think it's probably still true that the timing of that was such that it probably—it all of a sudden brought the FBI down in ways that—remember, these are all—a lot of these men are Klansmen anyway—FBI, etcetera, the police—we are not talking about either of them being friends. That's one difference from today in the attack on the Capitol, is that only *some* of those security people were in sympathy with the attackers. Back then, the police were involved. Many times the mobs had been deputized, or in the three who were killed, both the sheriff and the deputy were arrested—and I think it's the deputy that was found guilty later. And so it was a different time, in that sense, that most of the apparatus, the governmental apparatus in Mississippi was for the repression and for terrorism; they were not against it.

04-00:49:15

But that changed things, because it made it so public. And they found at least seven bodies in the river when they were draining the Mississippi River for other Black people who had—men had died, usually people that had been—in some ways stood up against the oppression and been killed, and nobody had done anything. And the fact is, even when they found the bodies, basically nobody cared, in terms of the government. It was because the two white guys had gotten killed, that's what made it so—and there were so many of the rest of us there. If it had just been the two of them, you know, then it's like—was it Ben Linder who was in Nicaragua and killed? And then it's like, Oh, maybe they shouldn't have been there, whatever. But you had all of us going down, and how many of us were going to die? I think it made a big difference that it happened early. I could be wrong. Maybe it didn't. But I mean, we were there because people were being murdered. We weren't there because everything was hunky-dory, you know? Yeah. It was depressing, needless to say. But as I say, I already assumed they were dead, because I knew that that's what the SNCC people thought.

04-00:50:40

And we didn't talk about at the training, so I'll mention this here, that that last night before we went in, we were going in knowing that three were already missing and probably dead. And Bob Moses was up at the front talking to us. He was not a charismatic speaker. He was a very charismatic person—I'm not even sure that's the right word for Bob Moses, but he was very much a very powerful leader—but he was not a dramatic leader like Stokely Carmichael and some of the others. What I remember so much about that was at the end of his talk he said, "I don't know what—" you know, he's looking at his feet. He's not even looking at us, he's looking at his feet. And he says, "All I can say is I'll be there, too." And truthfully, I would have gone anywhere. I trusted him. Part of why I trusted him is he wasn't the general sending us in and not taking any of this seriously or taking any responsibility. He felt the weight of the people who'd been killed *before* we ever had a—before they even came up with the Mississippi Summer Project. And he felt the weight of the three who were already missing, so he was speaking to us out of that.

04-00:52:02

And then someone in the back of the room—she has a name, but I don't remember what it is—started the song "They Say That Freedom Is a [Constant] Struggle." And we all stood up and we had our arms around each other. For me, what was profound is that I was—at that point, I was sitting with some of—with my friend from Carleton [College] and also some of the people from Spelman. And what I can remember—I wrote about this back then to my parents—that as we're singing, I have my arms around these people I know and people that didn't know; my white friend from Carleton have their arms around her, too. You know, it's just like everybody—and we'll talk more about Ralph Featherstone, but he told me later—because he was there and he was just bawling, I mean, he was just crying. It was such a powerful thing.

04-00:53:04

It *was* the singing that partly, throughout the movement, gave you the strength to keep going. As Wazir Willie Peacock used to say, the music—and he was an early Freedom Singer in Mississippi going—using the fact that they were going to be singing hymns in the church, to go into the churches and sing freedom songs. And the Black churches—but the whites wouldn't kind of notice—and use that as a recruiting tool. But he used to say the singing made you bigger, it created a bigger space. So I experienced it partly as, I think I mentioned previously, as a unif[ying]—that sense of unity, of being part of a whole. But I think, also, he's right, in the sense that you're outside yourself in your own fear, you've become something bigger. You're part of this bigger thing. And in that context, what's—you might die. The way I thought about it, I might die, but we were going to do—we were a *we*, I wasn't just an I. So that was the last night before we went in.

04-00:54:25

Tewes: It's always powerful to hear you tell that part of the story. Oh gosh. I think now might be a good moment to speak about the leaders of the project. And you spoke about Bob Moses, but Ivanhoe Donaldson, I believe, was the head of your particular project. Can you say anything about him or others, in terms of their leadership style and the challenges they faced, and maybe what you took from their own experiences and example?

04-00:55:00

Allen: Well, the then and the now are two different things in terms of understanding. Ivanhoe, I think, was a quite brilliant and good leader in many ways, but he didn't have—he had a temper, and he didn't have good social skills vis-à-vis at least the white women. We used to make a crack about how he has trouble with white women. He's the one that would come home, no food, and he would yell at us and that kind of thing. But he also, which I didn't know, had migraines. Now, I had no idea that this is a man that some days was wrestling with a migraine—and no wonder he had a temper, [laughs] no wonder sometimes he was grumpy. But he certainly wasn't interested in being my friend, I can tell you that. It's like he had responsibilities, and he hung out with mostly the Black men. The person who headed the voter registration—oh, I just hate it when my mind goes blank. It'll come back in a minute. But anyway, he was only eighteen. He was even younger than—

04-00:56:09

Tewes: Cleve Sellars?

04-00:56:10

Allen: Cleve Sellars, right. He was only eighteen—or yeah, I don't even think he was nineteen. He was young, and he was very adorable and very sweet. And I gather from later—again, hearing from—he always was a sweet person. I mean, he paid a high price. He was in jail for a while later, but he did his best. And Barbara Walker, who was from Spelman and was about to leave Spelman and transfer to Sarah Lawrence [College] in the North, she was the head of the

Freedom School. And so they would sometimes meet, the three of them. The one thing I was conscious of is that they included her. You know, they were the big boys, but they included her. She was a Black woman from Montgomery, I think, but anyway from the South. They treated her with respect. Now, I don't know, you know, the subtleties about it, but I do know I was very conscious of the fact that they did not shine her on. There were times when the three of them would meet and talk about how things were [g]oing. I have in my letters that I saw myself—that summer, my main job was to support Barbara. That that was what I was—I was not in a leadership position, but I was to be—I could support her in every way I could. She would sometimes talk about problems and issues with me, and stuff like that, because we'd known each other a bit at Spelman before we went to Mississippi. I would say, looking back, that Ivanhoe—again, he'd already been beaten many times and jailed, and so he'd been through a lot already. So that I think it could not have been easy for him to be running a project with forty people, the vast majority of them whites and white Northerners, some of whom did know—some of whom knew better than others what they were doing.

04-00:58:28

What I would say is that when I went to Ole Miss [University of Mississippi] the first time, it was—there were these ministers that came through at various times to kind of—from whatever denomination, I don't remember, and they would contact other white professionals. And so this white minister who was on our project was going to go over to Ole Miss and meet with some of the professors there, the more liberal professors and I think maybe the Episcopal minister. He invited me to go along, so I did. We went over and we met people. One sociology professor asked if I and another of the Northern volunteers would be willing to come back and speak in his class. So I thought that was a *great* idea.

04-00:59:16

And so we go back and George, I think his name was, George McCain, I think, he goes off to wherever he's going next. And so I go to Ivanhoe and I say, "Ivanhoe, you know, I was over at Ole Miss with George, and this sociology professor asked if two of us would come back and talk about why we came to work in the Mississippi Summer Project." Ivanhoe says, "No." I said, "What?" [laughs] He says, "No, if they want to know why we're doing this, they should ask us. They should ask Black people." Right? I'm going, "No, no, no. No, no, no, Ivanhoe. They want—he wants us to come and talk about why *we*, as Northern whites, would be coming down." And Ivanhoe says, "No." Well you know, I'm one of those people that when I think I'm right, I don't stop. So I kept going, "Come on," you know, I kept bugging him. And finally he said, "If you can convince Woody and his partner—" Woody being the Black driver—"to take you—" because that's their area, they would be driving there that day—"If he's willing to take you, go for it." And so I, of course, went to Woody and I convinced him that he should take Alvin Pam

and myself. Alvin was, again, a professional teacher from New York, and that we would go and we would speak at these two sociology classes.

04-01:00:46

You know, well, Ivanhoe, of course, was right. I just wore him down. And you know, I can talk about the naïveté and even arrogance of other white women, but hello! [laughs] Hello! I was not taking seriously what that meant, that we would be riding in a mixed car, we would be going to a school where people would know we were there. You know, it wasn't just like it was neutral territory until I went into the classroom or something, right? So we were dropped off. We did the classes and then had lunch in the cafeteria. And some students came up and spoke to us, and that was considered extremely brave—by them.

04-01:01:36

The two voter registration workers picked us up, and we—as soon as we got to the edge of town, we were stopped by the sheriff, and he took, of course, all our names, our identities. And then he said, "Next time you come, you should tell us so we can protect you." We are talking about people that have no interest in protecting us. And by this time there's a truck that's behind us. You could see the guns in the truck. And so when we take off, the truck takes off after us. So Woody tells me—I'm in the back seat—to get down on the floor. And Woody's racing along at, whatever, 90 [or] 100 miles an hour, and I'm down there. And then I start thinking, Well you know, if they're going to shoot us, they ought to shoot me rather than Woody, so I sit up. And then I think, But Woody told me I should be on the floor, so then I go back down. [laughs] And at some point, anyway, we make a turn right when a cop car is coming the other way, and the truck slows down and we get away. Later Woody says to me, "What were you doing?" [laughs] Of course I said, "Well, I kept thinking I should be the one they shoot." And he goes, "Pam, they come up along your side and shoot straight into the car." So all I was doing was being a distraction, you know, doing my best to do what I thought was right.

04-01:03:09

What I can comment about this, in all of this, is nobody—and we haven't even talked about what happened in the class—nobody has sat down with the two of us and said, "Okay, you're going to go into this situation you've never been in. You need to have—let's walk through what some of the—let's be clear about certain things." You know, Ivanhoe wanted nothing to do with it, so he basically told me no, and then told me I was on my own, right? And Woody was like, "You're asking for a ride. That's all you're asking for." And so that was where—so I'm very aware, in retrospect, that it was very different from riding over there with the white minister and meeting some people quietly in their homes, it was a different situation.

04-01:03:59

And then we might as well speak, at this point, about what happened in the classrooms. I had already, at some point—you know, this is—I'm twenty

years old, and so there are boyfriends around, right? I mean, there's this kind of thing. So before I came into Mississippi, I had a boyfriend, a white boyfriend who'd been at Morehouse. And due to the fact that it was difficult during the training, he couldn't handle the fact that he—the way he put it—that he cared more about me than the other people in the project—and he was heading his Freedom School. I couldn't handle his trying—his coldness, his not being able to deal with me, so I asked Staughton if I could transfer from Madison County to Holly Springs. And I'd asked Barbara, I said, "Barbara, can I come in with you instead?" She said yes, and so then Staughton reassigned me.

04-01:04:51

So in Holly Springs, I meet Ralph Featherstone, who's on our project for a couple weeks, because he's going down to McComb, and that was such a dangerous place. The day before he even got there they bombed the Freedom House before he left. And so there was the beginning of what I'd now call a flirtation. But it was a flirtation in the sense that it was not—that there was a genuineness. That's what I would say. It was not like it was—nobody was putting anybody on. We touched each other, that's what I would say. I know I was extremely touched by him. And so then he went on to McComb. At this point, I'm now—like everybody on my project, because it's a small—you know how people are—so everybody knows that we'd been sweet on each other, might be the right way to put it.

04-01:05:59

And so Alvin and I go to Ole Miss, and in the first introductory sociology class we do our little raps, and then there are questions. And of course, the question is, "Would you marry a Negro?" Which nobody has prepared me for. Duh. [laughs] But you know, nobody has prepared me. And so I say, "Well, you know, I happen to be—" I can't remember now—"be in love with and plan to marry a boy who is—" and the place was like silent, you could have heard a pin drop. And I said a white guy, because I hadn't broken up with him yet and I *had* thought I wanted to marry him. Alvin said later that he was ready to run from the room, because all he knew about was Ralph, right?

04-01:06:49

So when we get back to the project, Ralph is visiting. And so I tell Ralph this, that this happened. And I say, "Isn't that great?" Because I was just really proud of myself, that all these people got to the point where nobody—everybody was holding their breath. And I'd never had that experience before, of owning a—now I would say owning a crowd like that. And Ralph, to his credit—this is the caliber of that man—he just said, "No, that wasn't great." And he left it to me to figure it out, you know, and to go through all of the processes I would go through over the years of feeling guilty and embarrassed that I would say such a thing to him, "Wasn't that great," and thinking that's not what I should have said. I should have told them it wasn't the point, blah, blah, blah, blah.

04-01:07:41

And then Sheila Michaels, who was a bit older than me and had been active in the movement for a while, came through and interviewed me probably in the nineties at some point. It was a wonderful interview, because she wasn't professional—excuse me. But [laughs] not being a professional, she just—it was like a conversation. So when I said, "Oh, I shouldn't have said that. I should have said, 'That's not the point,'" she said, "No, there's nothing else you could have said." *Oh*. And she was very clear: in that moment, the only thing I could do was cool out this group, you know? That was such a help to me while I was still working through all the nuances of that experience.

04-01:08:28

You know, now in retrospect, I also say, nobody prepared me. I ought to have known. We all ought to have known what was going to happen. I mean, Alvin was like in his forties, too. On the way over we could have talked about it, but we didn't talk about, What's going to happen when we get in that class? What kind of questions are they going to ask? You know, the kinds of things we would do now—I would do now. "Oh, you and I are going to go speak such a place, okay. Here are the topics we need to cover. Do you want to take responsibility for a and b? Is there anything else? Oh, this is a volatile group. What are we going to do if they ask or if they say a, b, or c? How are we going to handle that?" There was none of that.

04-01:09:15

Now remember, we're under a lot of pressure. A whole lot of things are happening. I mean, every single day it's like—it's not like we have lots of time, it's not like we can make an appointment for four o'clock in the afternoon over tea and figure this out. I mean, there's all kinds of stuff happening all the time and evening meetings and other pressures, so you know—to give us our due. But also, young people, I think now I'd say we tend to think we know what we're doing. I mean, Debbie Flynn could have said to me, "You know, when you go over there—" but I don't even know how much they all—everybody knew. I mean, we were forty people, but we had two Freedom Schools: one in Holly Springs, one in [Benton County]. There were lots of things happening, so I don't know.

04-01:10:01

I just know that I could have been killed off of that one, and that it made me—when I wrote home, what I said is that I really was upset about the fact that I didn't—I couldn't love liberal whites. I mean, I was like really upset that liberal whites would let us *die*. I come from this little community. I think I'd already mentioned that we had a very progressive local paper, *[New Hope Gazette]*. He was a New York [journalist, Charles Shaw], who'd come down and bought this little paper, and he wrote me a personal letter, which I still have, which says, "Don't give up on white people." Very important, very important moment for me. So that was a key learning experience for me in the summer of '64. The only time I was chased, the only time I was close to losing my own life personally. And I sometimes wonder if—you know, if you were

there a couple years and you were chased twenty times, what kind of post-traumatic stress disorder is that? Because I can tell you that just one time caused me post-traumatic stress, so it's—anyway, what else to say about that, except that it was a time of terrorism.

04-01:11:34

I know a lot of people today are just so shocked at what happened at the Capitol last week [on January 6, 2021]. But compared to what we were facing, yes, it was terrible and terrifying, and a whole lot of people could—more people could have been killed, including leaders, and they weren't—thank goodness. And when we were—some of the vets were talking about it, I said, "We know those people. We knew them in the South." I remember Jean Wiley, a Black woman who worked in Alabama, just saying, "You have no idea how horrible these people were, how—" so what we saw on the news is just an aspect of who these white nationalists/Klanspeople are in their hatred, in their absolute hatred.

04-01:12:39

Tewes: I think it's important to hear that perspective from someone who's been observing the past many years, so I appreciate that commentary there. I think one way to round out today might be to pull that through line from Ralph Featherstone and your project to the Democratic National Convention later that summer in Atlantic City. Can you tell me about why you went to the DNC and what you were doing there?

04-01:13:12

Allen: All of us in the afternoons, as it got closer to the time for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to choose their delegates, we were going around constantly getting people to sign up when we could. We were doing that. But I was not involved myself in the voter registration side, so I was not involved in those committee meetings and all the things they did to eventually choose the delegates who would go to Atlantic City. I went back to my home in Pennsylvania first, and then one of the other workers from the project, [David E.] "Dave" Kendall, came and picked me up and we went down, and we got assigned, when we got there, to the night shift. [laughs] I will never do all-night pickets again. I did this one, did one against the [Vietnam] War in Minnesota in the middle of winter—I mean, they are rough. [laughs] But anyway, there we were on the boardwalk with our signs. But I was not intimately involved in that, and then I went home.

04-01:14:18

And I gather—although I have no memory of it—but Roy DeBerry talks about it. Some of them came by the house, my home, because he talks about having been there. So as they were coming back [to Mississippi], they came through Pennsylvania. I don't know for sure how that all evolved, but I do know that [the challenge] was only marginal for me. It was a very little bit of time, and I was an outsider, basically, and of course totally in support of it.

04-01:14:54

And then when they weren't seated, it just totally blew me away in terms of: this would be my first year to vote. I didn't want to vote for [Lyndon] Johnson. But Johnson said he would not bomb Hanoi, and [Barry] Goldwater said he would bomb Hanoi. So for that reason, I voted for Johnson. And of course, Johnson then bombed—they bombed Hanoi. So then I swore I would never ever again vote for a Democrat, and with minimal exception, I haven't. And I've never been happy I did. [laughs] Although this time I will admit that because of [Donald] Trump, it seemed important to put as many people as possible on the other side rather than my norm, which would be Green Party, or before that it was the Peace and Freedom Party. But basically, it turned me off to the Democratic Party and their cowardice, and I have never really changed my mind on that. I will say that we will look and see how cowardly the Democrats will be in this next four years or how much they will take a stand against this violent right wing.

04-01:16:10

Before we end, I did want to mention books, if I can. Holly Springs was one of the places where books came into—people donated books from all around the country, because these schools, of course—the Freedom Schools needed it, and the children needed books. And that was one of the places they came. There were two workers that spent their entire summer doing nothing but unloading books, sorting them, and then sending them to other projects. I just want to add that, because I think it's so profound. There was this whole place with books. We would go and pick out books, and kids talk about—you read about any Freedom School students, the books and how important they were. So these books were coming into the state as donations from various places. And there's also—whose name I don't remember, [Virginia Steele]—but I read about a woman who spent the time she was there [organizing a library and] driving around delivering books. So it's just like another nice little aspect of—it was a huge, when you think about it, it was a huge undertaking. Just the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge is mammoth, when you consider it. And then you add to it the Freedom Schools and community centers and things like the books, it's just this huge amount of work got done.

04-01:17:39

And then I would say that it makes complete sense when you think about it like that, that there was no energy or time or *anything* for any kind of coming back together again after the summer for people to debrief, as I think we would call it, or to heal. And anyway, there was no way whatsoever that we could understand how to do that. I went back to Carleton, and so did two of the other women, and we organized for all kinds of support for SNCC and for the South. But I have no memory of the three of us ever sitting down and just talking about the nitty-gritty of our project, of what happened to us. One of them was involved—was in a mass meeting where someone was hit by a bullet that came in. Another one was in a situation where when they first got there, they didn't even have housing for people, and she was staying in another town as they worked it out. We never talked about any of that stuff.

04-01:18:50

Oh, and then I guess since we're almost done here, I just want to note that this was the summer of the Harlem Riots, and that really split my project, because the Northern Black members thought it was about time that people started dealing with the fact that this wasn't just in the South, it was in the North, too. It was like, "Right on." Many of the white volunteers were like, "No, no, violence is always wrong." And remember, I'd come out of Spelman in Atlanta, where I'd been so influenced by the pacifists, but I'm also very much aware that the Black activists have a lot more savvy about what's really going on. I mean, I was against violence, but I also respected the people who were saying, "No, it's about time that things blew up in the North."

04-01:19:46

And what I learned there was that there are moments when there is a break like that. There is no neutrality. If you don't say anything, you're assumed—in this case, you're assumed you're white, you're assumed you're with the white folk or whatever. I was just so, so shook up by that. And I talked about that once on a panel at Mississippi State. Dave Dennis was on it, and he then talked about having *been* in Harlem when it happened, and coming out and seeing the police shoot somebody in the back. And I say that partly to say that it's not that anybody was glorifying violence—I just want to make that clear, because the dominant culture is always trying to blame angry Black people for violence—but that it was a moment of saying, "This isn't just a problem in the South. It's not—"

04-01:21:01

Tewes: That, I think is a good way to end. You know, next time I think I want to speak more about these letters you've been discussing that you're writing throughout. [laughs] I think that's an important part of this story.

04-01:21:14

Allen: Oh okay.

04-01:21:15

Tewes: Is there anything else you would like to close up with today, Chude?

04-01:21:20

Allen: Oh, let's see, [looks at notes] did I make any notes of anything else? Oh, I never talked about the religion class. [laughs] My other big mistake of the summer. Do we have a few minutes, or do we need to—

04-01:21:34

Tewes: Sure thing, I've got time.

04-01:21:37

Allen: Okay, so we could choose whatever we wanted to teach, and I was a religion major, right? So I decided I would do—I would offer a workshop on religion, and some of the teenage girls joined. I decided the place to start was with atheism. One of the volunteers from New York, Peter Cummings, was an atheist, so I asked him to come and speak to the group. Well, understand the

group—these kids were either Baptists or Roman Catholics. And in that scenario, if you're not in the chosen group, you're going to hell, number one. But they had never ever heard of an atheist, and it just blew them away. I mean, it was just like, What? And the Roman Catholics, some of those students ran to the nuns. They went to a girls' school that the nuns ran. And one of the nuns insisted on meeting me. [laughs] So I had to go meet the nun, which went, "Who did I think I was to be teaching a religion class?" [laughs] "Oh, I'm a religion major at Carleton College," I said, which did not impress her in the least.

04-01:22:53

But the lesson learned—this is a good one for when I go out and I speak—the lesson learned is in any kind of organizing routine, you start where people are. So if you've got a group of Roman Catholics and Baptists, maybe you start with Christianity and even them talking about their belief systems, you know? Then maybe you move on to Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam, right? And then you *end* with atheism, because that's the furthest out there, right? [laughs] So it was definitely not the best choice of what to do.

04-01:23:34

And then the other thing, I think—because we probably won't go back there, but maybe we will—is that Debbie Flynn did set it up so that the students who did the play *Seeds of Freedom* came to New York in December during the holidays and gave it as a fundraiser for SNCC. And I went with my parents. Now I'm back at college, I'm out of the loop. And that was, to me, the most stunning thing about that experience, was that I was no longer part of it.

04-01:24:09

The other thing is I have read that the students from the Roman Catholic school were kicked out. They were told they couldn't go [to New York], and when they went, they were kicked out when they went back. I have never verified that, but I have read that that's what happened. I have thought a lot about what would that mean to—again, you know, I started this whole thing with talking about the most important thing is people and what you're learning. Rather than whether you get a degree from a good school, it's better that you have had a teacher who really opens you up and teaches you how to think. But here are some students who, it may have been that all of those wonderful things happened to them, but they didn't get to graduate. So it's that whole thing of being involved in struggle to change things doesn't come without a cost. And I think that that's an important thing to remember.

04-01:25:12

Later when we talk about—when we move into the women's movement stuff, that's something I learned from Jean Maddox and Union WAGE [Women's Alliance to Gain Equality], is that you tell people at the beginning what it might cost. You prepare them. You don't just promise them everything will be wonderful, because it may—you know, you may be one of the ones that pay the high price. And certainly, anybody that was in the South suffered some

form of post-traumatic stress. Period. You know, they just did. And some people, afterwards it was very—and we can talk more about that—very hard to reintegrate after they left the South.

04-01:26:05

Tewes: Yes, exactly. I do want to speak about that. Well, thank you, Chude for your time today. It was a big one, and I appreciate—considering the historical and present connections you've made today, I think that was particularly apt. So thank you.

04-01:26:20

Allen: Oh, good, good. And so next week we will move on to—I go back to college—well, the end of the summer—

04-01:26:28

Tewes: I'm going to end right here. Sorry, Chude.

Interview 5: January 20, 2021

05-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a fifth interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on January 20, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thanks for a fifth session, Chude.

05-00:00:25

Allen: Okay.

05-00:00:26

Tewes: When we left off last time, we had a really great discussion about Freedom Summer and your work that summer in Mississippi. One thing I wanted to follow up on was references you made to writing your parents during those months that you were away. Could you just tell us a little bit more about that?

05-00:00:46

Allen: Yes, I think one of the purposes of that summer, of the [Mississippi] Summer Project was, in fact, to have people coming from the North, and then, of course, involving their families and friends. One of the ways to do that was by writing letters. Remember, there is no email. Phone calls are expensive, although once a week I did call my parents just so they would know I'm still alive, and called them collect. But it was the letters. And so I would write a letter to my parents, and my father's secretary would type them up. The church would run them off, and then they would get—and my parents would send them to both my friends, relatives, and people in the church and people in the community, including the small newspaper in New Hope, *[New Hope Gazette]*. They would always get a copy, and then they would print it in the newspaper. You know, that was the idea of that's how you get people from around the country to care about what's happening in the South. You do it partly by showing what's happening on that very personal level. So that's what I did. It's amazing to me, looking back, that there was ever time to do such a thing. [laughs] But it was one of the things we were—I mean, it was one of our jobs, right, to try to do that.

05-00:02:12

And then at the end of the summer, after we got back, I got a letter—we all got letters asking us to contribute copies of these letters for a book to be made, and that's called *Letters from Mississippi: [Reports from Civil Rights Volunteers and Freedom School Poetry of the 1964 Freedom Summer]*. It was edited by Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez. That's the first time I'm ever—other than my letters being in the local newspaper, that's the first time I'm in a published book, which is important only in the sense that later we'll talk some about how I didn't think I could write. But here I am, with the editor having chosen a number of my letters to put in there, either the whole letter or a portion of the letter. So that's just one of those interesting things.

05-00:02:57

So I came out of Mississippi before the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party [challenge at the Democratic] Convention—and I think we talked about that last week—and then I had a couple of weeks before I went back to college. During that time, I went with my parents to visit friends in New Hampshire, where they'd been waiting [to go] the whole time. I did a certain amount of speaking at people's homes, where they'd been following me, and then I came to give a report. I spoke to my—in the church, in the parish hall. My minister wouldn't let me back in the church. He told my parents that I was too good. [laughs] Remember, women weren't allowed to be priests yet. And that was very hard for me. I mean, I thought this was so much—what I was doing was so connected to what God wanted me to do. But I did, in fact, do it in the parish hall, I did report back.

05-00:03:58

I'm not going to go into details—the New Hampshire one was a very traumatic experience, including someone saying something very racist about my SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] button, which I'm wearing today. [points to button on jacket] And I'm wearing it, because when I—I mean, I wore it the whole time I was in the South, of course, but I also wore it when—it was like my grounding, it was just my grounding. That's a story that I've written about, and to save time we won't go into it except to say it was very traumatic. According to a letter I still have in my files, a woman in Princeton, New Jersey, who had hosted a party, wrote me and apologized for someone who had come to the meeting who had been very racist and obnoxious. I have no memory of that.

05-00:04:40

As I was preparing for this, what I've begun to be aware of is how many of us who were white, who came out of the South, one of the things—we were contending with two things. One was that white society no longer felt safe—and it wasn't safe psychically and emotionally. I mean, if you're in a situation where white people all of a sudden are showing—whether it's unconscious racism or overt racism as I experienced, it is like being slapped in the face to anybody who's conscious. And for those of us who I think—we'd just come out of being in a situation where all of our friends and support base was an interracial group. It was very hard then to trust being in a white society.

05-00:05:30

The other thing that connects with that is that I looked this week at the whole question of alienation, of how I was alienated from the dominant culture by then. But even looking back at one of the things at Carleton [College] was that the activists were not spiritual people. And the Episcopalians were conservative, except for the minister who was, in fact, very progressive. Then I go to Philadelphia, and I work in this wonderful Black community. I feel so, so alive there. But every weekend, I'm going back to a white community. Now, they were people I loved, but there's the thing that it's two different things. Then I go back to Carleton, and I never was happy at Carleton. I think,

Well, I'll go south to Spelman [College], because that'll be more like Church of the Advocate—but of course it wasn't. [laughs] It was its own thing. And I had both places I felt totally accepted and part of, and I had places of alienation, people that were—didn't like me or we didn't coalesce.

05-00:06:42

One of the things that I realized by the end of the time that I was at Spelman is that it wouldn't have mattered how much I looked at the question of my own racism, how much I'd changed, there would still be people that didn't like me; that's just who I was. And also, I was an activist. I was active in the movement, and there were people that would not like me for that reason, for whatever their reasons were. And of course, I was very moralistic at that point, too, and self-righteous—we need to add that. So the alienation, that feeling of being separate, was now rather big in my face.

05-00:07:21

And I gather, since most—whites, especially—but I gather even many of the African Americans, when they came out of the South, they had nobody to talk to about it, there was no way to talk about it. We didn't know how to connect our own personal experiences to the political context at that point. And there was, of course, no concept of debriefing, anything like that. Even if the movement could have in any way, shape, or form had the capacity to do it, which of course, they didn't. The whole focus was on the [Freedom] Democratic Party challenge for the Mississippi Democratic Party. And when the Democratic Party refused to stand up for what was right, that demoralized a lot of us. So we had yet another layer of alienation. I was now alienated from my government, I was alienated from white people, I was alienated in so many ways.

05-00:08:16

Then when you add to that, going back to college, was that I was supposed to be, of course, studying and doing something else. And I have now come to—as I think I've mentioned before—come to understand I'm a single-focus person. That's both why there are things that I have weaknesses in and things I have strengths, because I'm a single-focus person. So to go back to college and deal with the whole question of studying was difficult, except for my race relations class, which was the second semester—second term. We did terms, so there were three terms. So this would have been in January. And I was taking the race relations class, and I decided to do my paper on what it meant to be a minority in a majority situation. So I was going to compare my experience of having been at Spelman with the now—if they would speak to me—thirteen Black students on campus.

05-00:09:15

So I approached them, and some of them agreed to meet, and we had a meeting in which they talked about the situation. One of the young men who was a sophomore said he was very sorry he'd come. It was much more painful once he talked about it. Much easier when, you know, when he didn't talk

about it. The freshmen and the one senior male decided that it was good to keep meeting, and so we kept meeting. And so then, again, at Carleton, all of a sudden I have a group I fit into, I'm part of. I was one of the two elders, obviously, [laughs] and even though I couldn't relate to so much else of what was going on. In the spring that group—well, one of the freshmen did not come back after the end of that term. He was the most militant and [an] activist, but it was too much for him to be there. But we had been, while he was there, had been friendly, and I learned a lot from him and that was good.

05-00:10:23

And so then in the spring, they decided to do a campus-wide program, and they put signs up all over the place with the title being "Is Carleton Racist?" And this was a very interesting experience. I think I've over the years estimated there were 60 people that came to it. Who knows? Out of 1,300, I would say there weren't more than 100 at the most. But anyway, these were the Black students, and now they had invited many of the international students to join their little group, too. They were coming together to talk to the white students about racism at Carleton. This is the first time, so I think that's important to know. And it was not an easy discussion.

05-00:11:10

One of the young women who was in the leadership described—she described the ways in which, essentially, white students at Carleton were essentially—what's the right word? Dehumanized, not friendly, not polite to each other. I've already commented about that at Spelman and Morehouse [College], how people cared, they were kind to each other. You didn't *not* say hello. And certainly, when you walked in the community, you did not—Black community—you did not walk by somebody and not say "hello" if they were on the porch, and "how are you?" You just didn't. And so she was describing this. One of the white students said, "Well, we do that to each other." She said, "Case closed." As far as she was concerned, that proved it. I've thought about this over the years, and it's not easy for white people to understand. But I think what she was saying was, "Look, racism dehumanizes everybody. It dehumanizes you white people. You don't treat *us* well, you don't even treat each *other* well. Because if you treated each other—if you actually viewed human beings as being people that should be treated kindly, then you wouldn't be able to not treat other people kindly." I think that's what she was saying. I know that intuitively I understood what she was saying; I know that the white kids did not.

05-00:12:41

The other thing that I experienced is I tried to talk about it from my point of view, and I had no credibility because I was white. So the fact that I had been in the South, the fact that I'd done as much work as I had in trying to understand racism—both its history and personally how it had manifested in me—there was no acceptance or grounding of that. So that was probably, in terms of Carleton, was the major experience that spring. I did organize to bring people to Washington for the first anti-war march in April. I went early

to attend the SNCC—there was a SNCC conference first, and I stayed later to stay with the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] conference that came afterwards. And so of course, did not—was not at Carleton doing my homework.

05-00:13:31

The other thing was that when we first went back to Carleton, we were invited—the three of us who were coming back—for one of us to speak at the first convocation. Whoever was organizing convocations had decided to ask three different students who'd done kind of significant things over the summer to speak, and so I was the one that spoke for the Mississippi volunteers. And there had been seven of us that had gone from Carleton; three of us were coming back. So I was the speaker, and one of the others, especially, was the writer. She wrote an article that was in the local paper, the student paper, [*The Carletonian*].

05-00:14:16

After that, I started getting other invitations to speak. The one that sticks out the most for me is the American Legion in the Twin Cities. This was all men, and I went up and I spoke. And afterwards, the letter, which again, I have, told me that with the exception of Joe Louis the boxer, more people came to hear me than had ever come to a meeting. Now, I remember only sitting up there for lunch with whoever was going to introduce me, but I don't remember the content of the talk itself, except that I was speaking in different places, so I was used to speaking. I also spoke to a nurses association, part of the American Nurses Association, where the vast majority were women, so those are the two I remember the most.

05-00:15:10

This is important, because in two years I will have begun starting the women's movement and I will be watching my then-husband, [Robert L. Allen], speaking about having been to Vietnam, to North Vietnam, as part of an anti-war delegation. And I would be sitting in the back of the room selling *[The] Guardian* newspapers, the radical newspaper, because at that point I was working with it, also. And I'm looking up at Robert speaking, and I'm thinking, I could never do that. Now, two years before, I *had* been doing it. So what is it that happens about isolation, which is what I would say that was with—what happens when all of a sudden you're no longer in a situation where, for whatever reason, the local situation is allowing you and encouraging you to speak, even though the dominant society still is not accepting women as spokespersons for that.

05-00:16:17

It's very hard, I think, for people to understand today what it was like. You did not have female teachers, except sometimes in languages, especially at the college level. I had a female math teacher in the public school, but I don't think that was normal. But mostly, it was men who spoke. I do remember when I spoke at the Carleton convocation that one of the comments afterwards

was that I sounded funny. So then I'm going along dealing with the fact that—not what the content was, but that I sounded funny. When I was in the women's movement early, one of the points that was made was that microphones are modulated for male voices. Hello! But we didn't know that. So it was a simultan[eous instance of]: both the microphone was wrong, and we weren't used to hearing females. Those kinds of things. But anyway, that was what I was doing that summer—I mean, excuse me—that spring, was organizing and speaking about the movement.

05-00:17:23

And then I guess we have to go to getting married. That would be the next—

05-00:17:32

Tewes: Yeah. Really quickly, I do want to ask: you mentioned that you went to the SNCC conference in April and then you followed that up with an SDS conference. Was this your first connection to SDS?

05-00:17:46

Allen: Oh no, no, no. On campus I was an SDS person. When I went to college, this was "ban the bomb," and those were the issues back then. So there was a Student Peace Union, and of course it was the beginning of SDS, so it was all kind of—both things. I was [a] member of both. Action Party was the name of the progressive group on campus. And to just speak back to the alienation question, these were people who, first of all, they tended to be more politically developed than me intellectually, but they also were not spiritual people; they were atheists and agnostics. And so I both fit and didn't fit there. Yes, so I identified—until the next year—identified with SDS.

05-00:18:43

Tewes: Got it, thank you. And then one final question about this moment in your life before we get you married here, is after your graduation in spring of 1965, you were actually interviewed for a local television station, and some really wonderful footage came out of that. I'm wondering if, in brief, you could describe what that was, and looking back, how that makes you feel about who you were as a young woman?

05-00:19:10

Allen: Well, I would say two things right off. I mean, first of all, I didn't see it for like twenty years, and then I saw it once, and then I didn't see it for almost another twenty years. I mean, I could barely cope with seeing this person, partly because, of course, I'd gone through all these changes, but partly because it is rather impressive. She's a rather impressive person, and I think that's because she was single focused. So you can look at this video, and because I'm telling you, you can know I got a D- in astronomy and barely graduated; I don't think those are unrelated things. I do think that there are people that can compartmentalize, and some of them can do excellent work in both forms; I couldn't. But I also think that that particular six-minute little

video that was part of a half-an-hour show shows me at this moment in my life when I'm, for one thing, about to take another step of getting married.

05-00:20:12

There is a way in which I am whole. I am who I am. That will change. I would say I am whole in who I am now, but it's been—in this culture, it's a dehumanizing culture. And so you're constantly having to figure out who you are, both because we grow and we mature. I'm in all these political things, so I'm being challenged all the time. But the culture itself is challenging, to try to stay a human being. And I think that young woman that summer was very much holding on to just that.

05-00:20:54

Now, here are the contradictions—and there are two contradictions. Number one is I spend that entire summer getting ready to get married. Now, I look back at times and it's like, What in the world? I could have gone back to the Church of the Advocate, there's all kinds of things I could have done. And I think there are two reasons why I spent the summer getting ready to get married. One was I was determined that since I was marrying an African American, I was going to make sure that it would be the same kind of wedding that my family would do and my *community* would do if he was a white man. That's number one. I think that's very important.

05-00:21:34

Number two is I think I was exhausted. In the film, which was done in the mid-summer, you see me, basically on top of things. But I think that psychologically and emotionally and even spiritually, it was a very difficult time. I had been alienated from my mother most of the previous year, and it was only that summer that we finally were able to reconnect as well as we could. Because remember, I come back from the South changed. But the problem with anybody—I know this is true of people who came back from the Peace Corps—you have a major experience that changes your life, and you come back to family and friends who knew the old person. And it's very difficult learning how to communicate, how to be who you are and not be resentful of the pull to become, you know, the person you used to be. My brother, for example, as a young adult, used to comment that—we lived up a long lane, a dirt road, basically, dirt driveway, and it was long. It probably took about four minutes to drive it. And he used to say in his early adulthood that driving up the lane, it was like the years would just drop away, so that by the time he got to the top and got to see my parents, he'd become the little kid again. And I think a lot of people have that experience.

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I think that summer I just plain was doing the best I could to reorient myself. And I was choosing to marry an African American. I understood what that meant, and so I think I was preparing myself for the change. Of course, there's a level at which you never prepare yourself for the changes, because you never can anticipate them all. But it was a summer for—I was in the country,

let's just put it that way. There's lots of trees, there's birds, there's deer, there's—I was being nurtured, and I think that was important. And when I married, I moved to New York City.

05-00:23:56

Now, the one thing I want to say about the video, which is online, and which hopefully will always be available to researchers who come and read this transcript, in it I talk about the kind of obsession or fetish that white Southerners had about white women and Black men, and that that wasn't the point of why we were there. Two days before I got married, a local newsletter came out—this is from the little town across the river, Lambertville, which had an art movie theater. They played art films, foreign films, and he had—the person who ran that did a newsletter. He had seen this, and he critiques me, because I did not say that for racism to end it has to be legal and acceptable for people to marry interracially. So this is kind of this irony, because I'm about to do it, and here comes this critique of me because I didn't say that clearly. So I'll just add that to the pot, as it were. [laughs]

05-00:25:15

Tewes: That's pretty good! [laughs]

05-00:25:17

Allen: Well, Robert Allen, who I was marrying, was from Atlanta. His mother was assistant dean of women at Spelman when I was there. My only relationship with her before I was marrying her son was to lie to her about getting out of—that spring break—to get out of Spelman and go to the SNCC conference. [laughs] And years later, I remember us talking one time about the exchange program, and she said it was so hard. She didn't want to talk about it, and I never did find out all the difficulties of being assistant dean of women with this program, but she did say it was a difficult one.

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So anyway, I'd met him once there, because of my best friend, Barbara Joy [Douglas], at Spelman. What happened was that when Barbara Joy was going to Scotland to go to graduate school, she was going to come through—up to New York City to take a ship, and I invited her to come by and spend a week with us. And so she came to Solebury and spent with us—charmed my parents—she was a very vivacious, very alive, very wonderful young woman. And I had said, yes, I would go with her to New York, which, of course, I tried to get out of, because I didn't know anything about New York, and it was very intimidating—and she didn't know anything about New York. But she'd pointed out I promised, so I had to go. And the only person she knew *in* New York was this Robert Allen, and so we were going to spend the night with him. So we go up, and of course we get lost, and of course we take the wrong subway, but eventually we get to him. And that's how we meet [again]. Robert and I, we spent a lot of time talking after Barbara Joy goes to sleep, because of course, you know, we're already interested. And then we go to the ship, and

almost immediately Barbara Joy is gone, right? She's finding her cabin, she's saying goodbye, and we're just standing there talking.

05-00:27:29

Someone I knew from the Church of the Advocate was there seeing someone off, and he says, "Do you want a ride back to Trenton," which is where my father worked, and he was going to Philadelphia. And so in one of those spontaneous moments, I turn to Robert and I say, "You want to come on down?" And this tells you a lot about my family. I don't even ask. I mean, it's not like—first of all, again, you have no cell phone, you're on a ship. But I just do it. I just say, "You want to come?" He says, "Sure." He was kind of curious where this white girl came from. So he comes down, and my friend drops us off at my father's workplace, and then we come home with my father. And of course, my parents are—my mother's very, "You're very welcome," and we're all eating dinner on the porch.

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The next day I'm due to go speak—this is the summer, this is the end of the summer, this is August of '64—I'm due to go to speak at a church conference about my experiences in Mississippi. And my mother says to Bob, she says, "Why don't you go with her?" He says, "Oh, I can't. I have a date tomorrow night." And so Mother gets up, and we—of course, again, you don't have—your phones don't—are connected by cords. But the one in our living room, which was next to the porch, had a long cord. My mother goes in, gets the phone, brings it back out, hands it to Bob and says, "Break it." She's the one that got him to stay. And of course, that's where the connection then—by the end of the next day, we have bonded. He's sitting in this room of—this is in Radnor, Pennsylvania, at this Episcopal Church retreat with these young teenagers. And he realizes at that moment, well, he's getting what Black people never get to do. They get to hear what a white person says to white people. So that was this moment for him. And what he was struck with was how sincere they all were.

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We began at that point to—back then, when you were involved in the movements and these kinds of very intense situations, personal, political, social situations, you made a lot of—you connected very quickly, because you're not wasting time with bullshit, you know, you're talking about meaningful things. Then he went back to New York, I went back to college, but we began to write. And so then at Christmas he came down and had Christmas—he was in New York City going to graduate school at Columbia, and his family was in Atlanta. So he came down and had Christmas with my family. And then, oh, he came out in the fall. At some point he quit school, and he came out to see me, and then he took a job. He had been in math, and it was just not—he was a follower, at that point, of Malcolm X. And again, it was that whole thing of, Where do you want to—where your focus is.

05-00:31:05

So I'd seen him a number of times, and then we met at the anti-war march, which I'd organized [at Carleton], and he'd come down. That was at the point at which we thought maybe it was—we should consider getting married. My memory is that I'm the one that said, "You know, maybe we should get married." Because one thing that was very clear to me is that I was not going to have an affair with him, that the combination of my own parents' belief in, first of all, in waiting for marriage; and secondly, that just the dynamic of being a white woman with a Black man, that was not going to happen. Either we weren't going to have a relationship or we were going to get married. Now, I had changed all my attitudes about sexuality, because of being in the South, and these older white women, so I did not wait until marriage, as my parents hoped. But I was very discreet about that. And the point was that either—that it was because we were going to get married. We were, in fact, making a life commitment to each other, which is how I viewed it, so we did.

05-00:32:19

And so we did have the big wedding with the white dress and the veil and the bridesmaids and the groom and the ushers—or whatever they're called—and all of that. And to me it was like a pageant, which actually insulted my father, because he took these things very seriously. This was a church service. My grandfather married us, he was an Episcopal minister. He was not in his best shape by then, so he actually never asked Bob to do the vows. The male came first, and [my grandfather], he said—and never said a word to Bob. And then he goes, "Repeat after me." And so everybody in the front part of the church knew that I had said my vows, but Bob hadn't. [laughs] Just a little irony there.

05-00:33:14

And everybody came, pretty much. One of the things was, were they all going to fit in the little church chapel? Because given that it was an interracial marriage and the whole community was big into—the church community—of supporting us. Bob's—his friends who were ushers, a couple men, and his family that came up for the wedding, including a sister that was one of my bridesmaids, and he had two other sisters and his mother and his father—they were all put up in the community. There were white members of the community who opened their homes and hosted them. So that tells you something, also, about the community I come from, the church community.

05-00:34:02

Afterwards, the neighbor, who lived a field away, as it were, and had—she said to my mother at some point, "Oh Jean, it was so tasteful." My mother said to me years later, she said, you know—I mean, she was insulted, like, Well, what did she expect? What did she expect? I don't know. I know one of my friends, my parents' friends, and I knew the young woman had been at Church of the Advocate with me, her mother was Southern and she wouldn't come. And I know that two of my father's colleagues at work wouldn't come, because they didn't believe in interracial marriage. I mean, that's the period.

It's illegal in Georgia, where Bob is from; it's illegal in many states. In Pennsylvania it was not illegal, but many people were very opposed to it. I don't know if there's anything else I want to say about the getting married itself, but perhaps if you have a question?

05-00:35:06

Tewes: Yeah, I just wanted to dig a little bit more into this. You said part of your preparations the summer before your marriage was being prepared for what it meant to be in an interracial relationship. Beyond the wedding and immediate acceptance of who did or didn't come, did you end up being prepared for what that kind of relationship meant out in the world?

05-00:35:32

Allen: Ah, let me step back. In the spring of '65 at Carleton, Malcolm Boyd came to speak at Carleton. And if you remember, he'd been very important to me in the spring of '64, that I had gone to a retreat with him in Georgia that the Spelman, Morehouse, Canterbury students—we all went and dialogued with the white Southern students. He'd been helpful to me then. When he came to Carleton, I asked if I could speak with him, and he said, yes, we could meet at—like, it was seven in the morning. He told me later that having—since he did a lot of speaking and speaking at colleges, that he'd learned that students will stay up all night talking to you—and he already was, I think, in his forties—[laughs] but if they were really—if you said basically, "I'm going to bed," if you tell them seven o'clock in the morning, the ones that really want to talk to you come. I thought it was a very nice little clue about: if you're an organizer or speaker, if you're not somebody that's—if you need your sleep, have them talk to you in the morning.

05-00:36:41

So we went for a walk, and basically he said to me that I needed to be willing to accept that it might happen that my husband would not be able to get a job, because of racist discrimination. The way he put it was, "Are you willing to sit at the kitchen table with him with his head in his hands, because he can't support you?" I also wrote my mother—I guess I called my mother and told her, because she was—she knew of him from being Episcopalian. And I said that he had said that the one thing I needed to consider—and she said, "The children?" I said, "No, he didn't mention the children. He mentioned this thing about whether or not—was I going to be able to be supportive? How I was going to be able to handle discrimination that my husband might face."

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Before we got married—I realize I could say this—Bob went down and actually talked, asked, [laughs] essentially told my parents that we were going to get married. Essentially asked for my hand, as it were. I was off at Carleton. That had been their question, "What about the children?" And Bob is very light skinned, and his mother actually, to white people, looked white. And so he was like, "Just look at me." I mean it's like, "What do you mean? They'll be light-skinned kids, and I'm already light skinned, so I can help them. They'll

deal with it." In truth, we had a blond child, just like his mother had been blond, and just like his sister was blond. And so that's a different dynamic. But the question was not really the children, the question was: how are we going to support ourselves? What's going to be the dynamics?

05-00:38:41

Well, of course what happened, because of the timing—this is '65 and we're going up to New York City—is that what we confronted also was opposition from the nationalists, the Black nationalist movement, which was very opposed, at that point, to interracial relationships. There was as much, if not more, hostility from them. Also, things were opening up, so that we never experienced horrendous, overt discrimination in New York. We did [in] housing here in San Francisco, we did experience some of that, but not in New [York]. Partly, in New York, people assumed he was Puerto Rican, because he was light skinned. When we came out here, at one point we went down to LA. We discovered we could feel the discrimination, the feelings of prejudice, and we realized they thought he was Mexican or Latino. There was always that little bit of subtle—but it wasn't major the way Malcolm Boyd had warned me.

05-00:39:46

We were on the left, so that when we first went to New York, Bob went to—now to sociology. I worked full-time, and he was at New School for Social Research. I worked full-time as a—what was called then a case aide in a foster care agency, because I didn't have the magical degree that makes you God. I mean literally, MSW [master of social work] meant G-O-D. I don't know if that's still true, but I still have hostility towards social workers. [laughs] I mean, it was pretty intense. I did two years of working in foster care, which was very painful. It was very painful to see how children are damaged. [sighs] There were two children I still think about. In a different situation, I would have loved to have adopted them. But of course, one, the agency wouldn't have allowed me, but, two, I was in no position to do it. But I was very bonded. I don't mean that I saw more of them than any of the other kids. I didn't. It's just that they both deserved much better than what they got. They were good kids, and they did not deserve the kind of situation—and then there was one foster care family that were very nice, I liked them a lot, but there were also ones that were not really suitable. So it was hard, it was very hard. Also, I wanted to do a Black history class/workshop with the young women. I'd done that in the South, right, and so I applied to do that. Well, I couldn't do it, because I didn't have the MSW in group work. You see, without that training I couldn't *possibly* be trusted.

05-00:41:44

There was no union at this particular private agency. And that is one thing I'd had to wrestle with, was whether I was going to go to a place that was not unionized, rather than, for example, to the Welfare Department that was. But there was a friend of Bob's working there, and she convinced me it would be a good place to work, which in terms of work conditions it was, but there was

no union. And at some point they decided to have one worker represent the workers on some kind of committee thing, and I was elected. And that's when I knew it was time to leave. [laughs] I realized, No, I'm not getting into this where I'm getting sucked into working with the management as an individual not really representing a union. Anyway, by that time I was already interested, found out that women were starting to organize in Chicago, and I was ready to make a change, so I did.

05-00:42:55

And now, what's interesting is that when I was wanting to leave the foster care agency, Bob had said to me, "Well, that's fine, just find another job that you can earn as much." And you do understand, women with college degrees did not have a lot of options at that time. He's a writer for *The Guardian*, I'm still working at the agency. And he goes off first to Czechoslovakia, to this peace conference with Madame Binh, and then he becomes a part of the group that goes to North Vietnam.

05-00:43:31

While he's gone, I go to Chicago, and that's when I meet Sue Munaker. I've gone and had lunch with Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd, and then Staughton says, "I promised I would go by the movement office today. Do you want to come with me?" They were moving from one place to another, and I said sure. So I go with him and we're in this church, and this woman, Sue Munaker, runs up and says, "We had our first women's liberation meeting last night." It was like, What? We can move more into that, but I didn't know there was another woman in the world thinking about it. I just knew that there was something wrong with the whole—that this whole idea had been that once college was over, and I got out of that stupid anarch—what's the, it's not anarchistic, but it's [anachronistic]—anyway, old ancient concept that somehow women had to be taken care of, in loco parentis kind of thing. Once I got out of college, that would be done and I would be able to be an equal, you know? I mean, when I went to Washington, D.C., in the spring of ['65] from Carleton, I'm twenty-one years old; I had to have my parents' permission. None of the guys had to have their parents' permission, but being female, I had to have my parents' permission. So I thought all that was going to change, and of course, it didn't. Quite the contrary, right? [laughs]

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So when Bob was going to Czechoslovakia—and Madame Binh's the head of the Vietnamese delegation and stuff, I'm like, "Ask about women, ask about women." And then when he goes to North Vietnam, he has this—from me, "Please find out more about women." And so he comes back to *The Guardian*, and he writes a two-part series on Vietnamese women. It's this major thing. That puts him in touch with the poor Black women and Pat Robinson from New Rochelle/Mount Vernon [women's group]. And that then eventually puts me in touch with Pat Robinson, who becomes my mentor. That's how the trajectory works with connections in these things. But it starts with my being very dissatisfied with the work I was doing, watching myself hurt children in a

system that hurts children; watching myself be unable to make the kinds of changes that needed to be made; and really recognizing that they were political, structural, economic changes that had to be made, they could not be made just on an individual basis; and being ready for a change.

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So he goes off, and I find out about women's liberation, at which point I come back and I think, I don't have to find another job, so I quit. [laughs] You know, these are important moments, whatever they are, where somebody has defined it, You can do this *if*. And then it's all of a sudden like, Wait a minute. And I think that's a lot what the theme is of what now, as I look at my life as a whole, of how much I have been one of those people that hit the edge of the box and took a step outside—or attempted to take a step outside—I don't think we're always successful. But I think that concept of thinking [outside] the box, the Freedom School was about thinking outside the box. Not what you're given, but what could be. And if you step back and you ask some questions, the whole thing looks different. So that was one of those moments where I stepped outside the box.

05-00:47:32

And then the people at *The Guardian* offered me a part-time job to—down in the depths of the building—to help with promotion. So I have a husband that's a writer upstairs, and I'm down with the workers, the women and the young men. [laughs] And they had this interesting rule. This was a collective, so what were you going to do when you had a couple? With the idea being that a couple—that's two votes, and they probably are going to vote the same way. So they had a rule that the first person hired could vote, but the spouse couldn't. And in the two cases there, both of us were female, the spouses. At that moment, I never asked the question, "Well, wait a minute. If you think there's a reason that the couple might vote as a unit, well then each should have half a vote. Hello!" But again, it takes a while to think outside whatever the context is you were given. I was just happy to have a job and to be learning so much. And I really liked the people. There was a young man that was like eighteen that worked with us and there were a couple women, one of whom is on the—her photograph is on a lot of early women's liberation stuff—Marian Munsell, an older woman, white hair. And Astrid Sengstacke, who was an African American woman volunteer on welfare with two small kids. She would drive, and we'd run around the city delivering papers. So it was a very vital place, and I was very happy to have that experience.

05-00:49:19

I couldn't stand New York. I mean, New York was just too much city for me. I grew up in the country, remember, went to a small college—the small college was in a small town. Atlanta was at that—not like now—Atlanta was a relatively small city. New York was just too much, too much concrete. So Bob went on a speaking tour, of which I went partly, in terms of early women's liberation, through the Midwest and Maryland and stuff. I went around recruiting women, telling them about women's liberation. And then he went

on to the West Coast, and I went back to New York. He came back and said, "San Francisco." And I said, "Okay." I would have gone anywhere, so that's it. [laughs] And so we came out here to be the West Coast office of *The Guardian*. And we did that for a couple of years here. So—

05-00:50:12

Tewes: Well, you threw out a lot of really important moments there, and I just want to fill some in—back up for a moment here. You spoke about this personal dissatisfaction, particularly in your career, in the choices you had there. Had you been aware of *The Feminine Mystique* at all? It was a very important book.

05-00:50:34

Allen: No. My mother gave me—yeah. My mother gave me two books when I got married. I think it's *Bed and Board: [Plain Talk About Marriage]*, by an Episcopal minister, who—I reread it a few years ago—I mean, just an arrogant male supremacist who didn't believe in birth control, and of course believed the man should run the family, but an Episcopalian minister. And the other one was something called *Sixpence in [Her] Shoe*, which some woman writer wrote, which was lightweight, and it was about how she read recipes before she went to sleep at night. [laughs] These are the books my mother gave me. She said later, after I got in the women's movement, that she'd read *The Feminine Mystique*, but that didn't—so no, I didn't know anything about the people thinking about—I didn't know about Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. I didn't know about the SNCC women's paper, which was done anonymously in the fall of '64, and then the article in *Liberation* magazine the following year, "Sex and Caste," by Casey Hayden and Mary King. I didn't know any of that. I knew *none* of it. I just knew that something was wrong, and that it had to do with being a woman.

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You have to understand, also, I no longer could—[laughs] oh, life was so complex back then, because I've completely forgotten Bob's refusing the draft. That all comes on in here. But the point being that SDS was still waffling around the draft, so they were not doing draft resistance. You still had some pacifists, but they didn't have the draft resistance, so I had no relationship with SDS. Bob is refusing the draft, and he's part of a group that they organize called Afro-Americans for Survival. And you either had refused the draft or you were AWOL, so needless to say, the group didn't last long. But it was at this moment in history.

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[laughs] We lived in this little, tiny apartment, and they would all meet there. It was a tiny apartment, and I would just sit there watching this. I thought, Wow, they think I'm really—I'm trustworthy. I felt very good about that. And later I realized, of course, that I belonged to somebody. [laughs] I was simply—I was this female appendage, so I didn't count. And later when I wrote about that, Robert said, "Yeah, you are right. That makes sense." But

you know, at the time I was learning a lot, I will say that. So he did go down and he did re[fuse the draft]. And I thought literally, when he kissed me goodbye that morning that I would not see him for five years. I thought they would plunk him in jail and he'd be in jail for five years. In truth, the person who was in charge of draft resisters was on vacation, so they sent him home.

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And then there was a whole series of things, where Conrad Lynn, a Black lawyer in New York who worked a lot with draft resisters—Bob had been given—had tried to apply for conscientious-objector status, and when he got the application, he realized he wouldn't qualify. Conrad Lynn had said, no, that *you* don't make that decision, you make *them* make that decision. A court case had already happened where someone had been drafted before they got the application back, and the court ruled that the person had the right to do the application. So he does the application and he gets refused, and he appeals and he gets—I mean, we're out here in San Francisco for a couple years, and eventually he gets a letter saying, "You have exhausted all your appeals. You're now too old, and we don't want you." So he never did go to jail, but we thought he was going to, we thought that.

05-00:54:22

This is one of the things I would say there is—something happens to you when you take risks like that. I know it was true for myself going to Mississippi, and I think it was very significant, especially for the people in that second group of training in Oxford, Ohio, knowing that three were already missing. Something happens—in the South, of course, and with even Northern African Americans [outside the South], they knew how bad it was already—so something happens to you when you make that choice. You may not expect to die, but you know it's not going to be—you know the range of what's possible. And it does something to you. It radicalizes you, is the right word. It *radicalizes* you, and most people can't go back, it has changed you in a varied way. I got to see that. All of a sudden, I was the support person; Robert was the one taking that stand, and it changed him. It both changed him personally, that he was willing to make that kind of stand; and it changed him in terms of the opportunities and how people related to him. In other words, you begin to move into finding other people like yourself who are doing a similar thing.

05-00:55:40

SDS, at this period, was still waffling around the question, because remember, African Americans, other men of color, were being drafted more than whites. And so I had no interest then in being around SDSers. I only connected again—I'd married in '65, and it's '67 when I—in fall of '67, two years later, I'm starting to organize women. At that point, I am connecting some with SDS women. And that's when I discover that SDS people are referring to women as "chicks." Now, that is not okay, but that's what they—and some of the women were referring to themselves as "chicks"—but certainly that was the term. This something that students at—some of the women students at Carleton had

commented to me that when I came back in the fall of '65, after being at Spelman and in Mississippi, I referred to myself as a "woman." I wasn't conscious of doing this, but I did. I no longer called myself a "girl." The whole question of "girls" is an interesting one around class, and how working-class women would refer to themselves as girls, and all that stuff. It's a slightly different question, but "chick" definitely doesn't qualify as a legitimate reference for females. What's the right word I want—it makes you littler. I mean, a chick is little, it's not even a hen! [laughs] You know what I mean? You're being made less than who you are.

05-00:57:28

So did we—did I answer whatever—

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Tewes: I think so. Just really quickly: were you personally participating in any anti-war activism at this time, besides attending these meetings?

05-00:57:44

Allen: When we moved to New York we were involved in the anti-war movement, so '65/'66 I was already involved in whatever was going on. I mean, there were some big demonstrations. Once we started organizing the women's movement in the spring of—it would have been '68—there was a huge anti-war march down, I guess, Fifth Avenue or something. I don't remember names anymore. But anyway, it was a big, big street. And the small group I was with then, we dressed—we made costumes to look like Vietnamese peasants. Two of us went into Chinatown and got hats—the best we could get, anyway. Anyway, we dressed to project ourselves as Vietnamese peasant women, and we walked single file in this huge march. It was one of those creative, almost guerrilla theater kinds of things that we did. But we were identifying with the Vietnamese, we were not identifying as, Oh, this war should end. But you know, rather, we support—this is the side we support. We support the people fighting for self-determination, not the invader, who was the United States.

05-00:59:14

Tewes: Sort of like the, what is it called, the Third World Liberation Front at this point? With—

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Allen: Well, there it would have been the [US term] Vietcong, and the [South] Vietnamese would have been the National Liberation Front, is what you're thinking. It's the actual official name of the South Vietnamese—the National Liberation Front, and they would have been—that's who we were saying we identify with.

05-00:59:40

Tewes: Got it. I think what's fascinating about that story, though, is that you're already doing activist moments with your small group in the women's movement. [laughs] So maybe we should back up to that moment, when you're back in Chicago, and this is your first exposure to someone else wondering what to do

about this problem. Did you speak to any of the women there about the work they were doing and how they were organizing?

05-01:00:08

Allen: I spoke to Sue Munaker and said, "I'm interested." She said that Shulamith—here I go—but Shulie Firestone, but she—actually her name was Shulamith. I'm not saying it right at the moment. Anyway, Shulie was what we called her back then. She was about to move to New York. And by circumstance, she was living in the same part of Chicago as the friend I was staying with. So she and her sister, Laya [Firestone Seghi], came over to my friend's house and we talked, and the agreement was that when she came to New York we would organize a group. So when she came, she was the one that had the SDS contacts, and we did some connecting with them. But she found out there was to be a Thanksgiving conference of SDS in Princeton over the Thanksgiving weekend. And for some reason that I don't remember, she couldn't come. So I was going to go down to Princeton to the conference and see what I could do about recruiting women.

05-01:01:23

And prior to going, an old classmate, George Brosi, was in New York, and he called to say how was I, and I said, well, I was trying to organize women. He said, "Oh, I know somebody that's been involved in a women's group in New Orleans." One of those first groups was in New [Orleans], and these were women that had been in the Southern freedom movement. And so I had her name, and Kathy Barrett was—she was in guerrilla theater at that point. So I go down to this conference that was on, I think, a Saturday. Anyway, it was that Thanksgiving weekend, and there is a women's caucus at lunchtime. So I go to the caucus, and at some point during the caucus I raise my hand and I say, "I want an independent women's movement," at which point, the rest of the meeting is spent telling me and the group why it's wrong to be independent. Nobody supports me.

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After the meeting, I think it's six women come up to me, five of whom are from New York. Shulie and I have already agreed on a date, and that it's going to be at my apartment, so I give everybody the information. And so we have our first meeting. At that first meeting—these are all white women—one white woman comes and spends the whole meeting telling us why we shouldn't be meeting. This is how it all starts. And then she never comes back, and we start to have our meetings. And very quickly the—Carol Hanisch, Kathie—at that point still Amatniek, who became Kathie Sarachild—they'd been talking about women. And Carol Hanisch worked for SCEF, the Southern Conference Educational Fund. They have an office, and they've said you can meet there. So then we start meeting in this big room, and more and more women start coming. Then it starts becoming a bigger group. So that's the fall of '67. That's when it starts, that's when we start it there.

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And then in the beginning of '68, I—Robert and I do another—I think that's when we do the—I can't remember whether it's the fall or the early part of the winter. He does his tour around, talking about North Vietnam. And so then I'm organizing, telling women about women's liberation and encouraging them to organize. Down in the Maryland area, Baltimore area, of course, we've met with these SDS and New Left people, and we're in somebody's house and we've all had dinner. And of course, the women are all in the kitchen cleaning up, right, and the men are all in the living room talking politics. So I'm in the kitchen telling all these women about what we're doing in New York. And one of them—Dee Ann Pappas is her name, if my memory's right—she says, "I've always wanted to start a journal." They end up making *Women: A Journal of Liberation*. So that's kind of a neat thing.

05-01:04:43

And then he and I go—yeah, that had to have been January, because he and I then go to the Midwest, and then he flies to the West Coast. I come back to Washington, because there's going to be the Jeannette Rankin Brigade. That's an anti-war march organized by older women—Women Strike for Peace, I believe. I'm there, because I've come in early before the New York people. The New York people have been organizing to come to this with a whole, again, kind of street theater kind of thing. They're going to bury traditional womanhood. They have a coffin, they have all this stuff. And the police have told the organizers that they can't carry any signs or anything on the march, and the organizers have agreed. So this is like the night before. And the New York people are coming down in the morning on a train, bringing this whole traditional womanhood.

05-01:05:42

I'm in a meeting, and these are primarily—my memory is, anyway, Chicago SDS women's liberation people. Of which, who I remember, is Naomi Weinstein just being eloquent. And the whole question is: what is women's liberation going to do? Are we going to respect the decision of the organizers to agree? Are we going to challenge it? What are we going to do? This group decides that it's not our job to challenge it. So I have to tell—meet the New Yorkers and tell them that they can't carry this whole coffin thing in the parade itself. You know, this is one of the things, again, researchers have to [research] more than what I'm saying. But more than once I've been interviewed about this. [laughs] This was not easy, not good. And so they, in fact, brought it to—there was, after the march, there was at a hotel, there was a big gathering, and so they did the [burial of] traditional womanhood there.

05-01:06:48

Some of us ended up upstairs in somebody's room at the hotel, working out how to stay in touch with each other, and that's what I did at the end of that one. I do believe that—and I could be wrong—but I do believe they took the burial of traditional womanhood to Arlington Cemetery, if my memory's right. But anyway, other things were happening. But I was involved in what became

the beginnings of the mailing list for Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement that Joreen [Jo Freeman] would put out via—and she was in Chicago at that point. So it was a time of meeting and connecting up with women that were beginning to organize these women's liberation groups all over the country.

05-01:07:41
Tewes: And what did organizing mean for you at this early stage?

05-01:07:48
Allen: At this stage, the first thing was—I mean, the first controversy was: should women even be meeting alone? And the second was: should we be meeting alone, independent of a connection with the New Left? These were the biggies. But of course, the whole point was if you came, the question is: why *are* we meeting alone? And that was what would be later called—we began to do what we later called consciousness raising. That was that thing of beginning to talk with each other.

05-01:08:20
I was just telling my daughter-in-law the other day that one of the ones that I still remember is going around—I don't know what the topic was. At the beginning, we had topics, and we would go around and people would talk, you know, share. I don't remember what the overall topic was, but somebody talking about their struggles with their either husband or boyfriend. And he had said, whatever, something along the lines of, "You are so oversensitive. You are just always getting hysterical about stuff." Whatever it was, the way it was said, somebody else said, "Well, that's exactly what so-and-so said to me." And somebody else says, "Wait a minute—" and we all start laughing, because the men are saying the exact same words, put-downs. So all of us dealing—now we're talking about an interpersonal thing, male/female, are dealing with being told you are inadequate in this way. "This is why you have a problem with my not doing the dishes," or whatever the heck it was, right? [laughs] "You oversensitive, so you think I put you down, because I told you to shut up." Who knows what it was. But the point is, they were *all* using the same concepts. Now, this is how you begin to, at this level, think about "the personal is political." Oh, oh, it's not just personal to me; I am not in some way personally inadequate. Now, this is fifty-plus years ago. There's very little understanding of interpersonal relationships and any kind of analysis that anybody has, right? And we are talking about not trusting the therapists, because their job has been to make you, the unhappy female, adapt to your role and be happy as the wife of/the mother of—whatever. So we don't have the kind of sophistication that there is now.

05-01:10:25
So when I'm telling my daughter-in-law, she's going, "Oh yes!" She recognizes the male put-downs. [laughs] You know, it doesn't matter if you raised—you're a feminist and you raise a son, there's still a culture out there. But she says what we couldn't have said yet, which is that she understands—

she has come to understand, from learning, that she still has her role in it, how we responded to this. Now, we *did* respond hysterically sometimes, we did get upset and supersensitive. What else are we to—we didn't have any perspective.

05-01:11:04

So to step back and to understand that you have the right to have boundaries, you have the right to be treated in certain ways, and that you—now politically, what I would say, is you learn not to do the things that are going to be able then [use it against you, without knowing there may be consequences].

05-01:11:21

And you see this in the dominant society, too: "Oh yes, but they were so loud and they shouldn't have done it *that way*." The racism is not the issue anymore, it's *that way*. Colin Kaepernick should not have [taken a knee during the National Anthem], right? He was disrespecting. And so the fact that he's talking about racism gets lost. That's what the dominant group does. The truth of the matter is, if you want to be effective, you learn to step back and figure out what are appropriate ways of responding. [I believe Kaepernick's protest was very effective, but he paid a high price.]

05-01:11:56

And one of the things—to step back a whole lot now, in 1994—the first SNCC reunion, COFO [Council of Federated Organizations] reunion of people from '64 in Mississippi was in '94, thirty years later. And Saturday morning, a lot of the people had—if they lived near Jackson, which is where the retreat was, they went out to their projects and they were hosted by local people, and they got to meet people that they had—usually at that point had been kids in the Freedom Schools. Holly Springs was too far away, so I'm still at the conference itself. And they had a session, a plenary that morning, and Tom Hayden spoke. Julian Bond was the moderator. People were commenting from the audience, and it was a fairly large audience. Julian Bond, who had many positive qualities, was not calling on the women. Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez had her hand up, and finally people in the audience were shouting, "Call on Betita! Call on Betita!" So finally she gets called on. Well, she's semi-hysterical by this time. And then Jeannine Herron—again, an older woman, we're talking older than me; they were already adults when I was there—she speaks, and again, there's this kind of hyperness about her talking. I'm sitting there being very passive, just watching all this. [laughs] And later I'm saying to myself like, In the women's movement I led a walkout one time. I'm perfectly capable of standing up and stopping something. Period. I've done that. I've done it at a conference on the Southern freedom movement, where I felt a white person, a male was dominating, and I just interrupted and said, "You know, it's time—" basically, "It's time to stop and let the people—the Black people talk." But I didn't.

05-01:14:23

A friend of mine said she'd learned from going back to a high school reunion that there's a way in which you go back to who you were. And then, if there's more reunions, you begin to, as it were, grow up. It's like going up the drive, the long driveway to home. So I realized, Well, yeah, when I was twenty in a room like that, I would not have challenged the men. And I would have seen the older women being slightly—you know, women get hysterical, women get—their voices [makes a high-pitched sound and gestures with hands]. You know, I mean, they were upset. Well of course, they were upset. Absolutely, of course, right? Yeah, that was a really good lesson for me. Oh, back in '64, I would not have thought to—I would not have seen it that way. I would not have seen that the women were being ignored—if they were—in a situation.

05-01:15:27

Many of the people in the Southern freedom movement—I felt very much respected, and I didn't feel like I was second class. I should say that. I didn't feel that. But I am saying it was a dynamic then, when I got into the women's movement and you started to see, Oh, oh yeah! And that's called consciousness raising. The advantage today for women is that they also have all the therapeutic understandings of how dynamics work that we didn't have, in terms of how you would approach dealing with this on a one-to-one level.

05-01:16:09

Tewes: Which, if I understand correctly, is part of the dynamics of the small groups is that the personal/political, you're able to talk through some of these issues? Or was that your intent?

05-01:16:24

Allen: I wrote a pamphlet called *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. And it includes four stages, because I'm an inductive thinker. And so for me to start with the concrete, the nitty-gritty, what's going on around you—it works. And then you take that to the next step, and you start to understand it in more general terms. And then you do your political analysis and ultimately your theory about like, How this all—in other words, how it fits in with economics and capitalism. Although we didn't have words like the intersection of class and race and sex then, that "intersectionality" didn't exist at the beginning yet. But that whole question, as you move from your own personal experience and you begin to develop a political analysis, the thing that happened is not everybody understood: you have to go past your own experience, you have to go past your class experience, you have to go past your racial experience, you have to eventually have a world perspective. And so it's not enough just that, Oh, we in this room share this; now we know A. We need to then find out: how does it manifest in other situations? How do other women from different life experiences experience the same thing?

05-01:17:53

A key one that's so clear is the whole question of what was then called illegitimate children, children born out of wedlock. White middle-class people

hid it. They put their kids in—their daughters in homes sometimes, and I think working-class white—I know *of* some—and then the baby is given away. And I remember once a woman telling me that her mother talks about her four grandchildren, and never mentions that first one, that fifth one that was given away; they don't exist. That's how married white—you know, where I come from. It was not quite that extreme where I was, because I think I mentioned my mother actually took care of a child that had been born out of wedlock. But was kind of the way it was done. Most of the time you either had what was called a shotgun wedding, or the child was given up. In Black families, that wasn't necessarily what happened. In families where, historically, children had been taken away from their families and sold, the whole value of the child and that whole question can be handled—be addressed differently. So that was a dialogue that we were going to need to have before we fully understood a concept like the family.

05-01:19:23

And it's one of the things that early women's liberation, some of the people in the white women's liberation movement were even—there's even an article about test tube babies. [laughs] I just love it. You know, this idea that somehow children oppress women. And then there's that other side of people for whom the childbearing, family is the most human and life-giving source of their experiences in a racist, classist society—if you understood that caveat, that it's not enough just to build a politics on your own experience. And I would say that's even true when you come from a poor Black or brown or whatever experience. It doesn't mean you know everything just because you know what it's like to be at the bottom. Because there's forms of oppression that happen to women who come from class—what we would call class privilege—that is still there, that was there. And it all needed to be in there.

05-01:20:46

There was a wonderful poem that we used to—remember at the beginning, we didn't rely on publishers. It was never a question of, at the beginning, of, Let's try to get this published. It was just, Let's mimeograph it off and pass it around, or let's—we didn't xerox as much, because it was a funny kind of xerox back then; we either typed a carbon or we mimeographed. Beulah Richardson, who as the actor was Beah Richards, and she wrote this great poem, which talked—"A Black Woman Speaks [of White Womanhood, of White Supremacy, of Peace]", I believe, is the name of it. It was talking about reaching, as a Black woman, reaching across to white women. She uses expressions like, "Your chains may have been made of gold, but they were still chains." It was a poem, so it was a little bit more poetic than that. But it was one of the things that we passed around at the early [meetings]. And again, it's like, It may not be exactly the same, but let's look at this, because in the overall thing, where does this all fit? What we now use, the word systemic. What is systemic racism? What is systemic sexism? What is systemic class exploitation and oppression, and how do these intersect? So this was just at the beginning, and what we were doing at the beginning—at

our best—was beginning to identify certain similarities and dynamics that we could then say, "This is not just an individual thing."

05-01:22:33

What I find I want to say there is also it's like, it's so easy in this culture for people who are poor to blame themselves. The culture blames you. You're poor because you couldn't do it. And, Look at this person over here. She actually rose out of poverty and got her PhD, so therefore it's *your* problem. *You* didn't do it, because you were lazy or because you were stupid or whatever, right? This kind of thing, what is that systemic thing that a few are going to be able to be helped out? But if there's a need in a class society for there to be poor, there will be poor people. And it's not necessarily your fault that you landed there, you know? That's one side of it. The other side is, yes, it does make a difference how you respond. Sometimes, you know, some of us give up and some of us don't give up.

05-01:23:30

I can't remember if I mentioned that when I took chemistry in my private school in eleventh grade, the teacher looked at the three girls in the room and said, "Get out. There shouldn't be any girls here." I stayed, but I did not come from a scientific family. I shouldn't have stayed. [laughs] If I was smart, I would have left and gone to Mr. Steven-Hubbard's anthropology class, which my sister had enough sense to do, which was quite wonderful and he was quite wonderful. Instead, I stayed in something that I couldn't relate to, needed help with, with a teacher that I absolutely hated. So then when I tell you that I got my D- in astronomy in college; this is partly from that heritage. I avoided the science classes; I had not had a good experience. Well, I think about that. I think about how for somebody else, maybe, you know, they have—they're interested. Maybe Daddy was a scientist. They want to do it, and so they're going to prove that he's wrong. I don't know. I just know that it's not all personal and it's not all systemic and it is constantly a dialectic.

05-01:24:50

In terms of consciousness-raising groups, part of the question, for me, was that there was no way white women, as white women, could understand the totality of what it meant to be a woman in this culture, in this society. And so from very early, what I wanted was for us to identify with and learn about and learn from, especially, poor Black woman.

05-01:25:25

Tewes: And that's definitely something we want to dig into more in our next session, and speak about all the tensions in the movement itself.

05-01:25:33

Allen: Good.

05-01:25:34

Tewes: I do want to, just for the record, note that this first group that you helped found in 1967 was—or became—New York Radical Women.

05-01:25:45

Allen: Basically, yes, although I'd gone—I'd long since left that. And then the group I went into, the group of us that split off, they became WITCH [Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell], but WITCH—I'd already come out here to San Francisco and gotten involved here, in which the group's name was Sudsofloppen. [laughs] So yes.

05-01:26:06

Tewes: Yes, there's a lot of wonderful names in the movement. I think that's a good place for us to stop this time, since next time we'll speak more in depth about what the women's movement looks like in San Francisco. But is there anything you'd like to follow up with as we wrap up today?

05-01:26:25

Allen: Well, yes, one thing, as I look at my notes. It never dawned on me until the women's movement, of course, that the role models that I had in that period, they were men. And I'm talking about Paul Washington and Christine Washington. He was the one I identified with, the minister, right? Even though he was in a church that wouldn't even allow me to be a minister at that point. Within a few years, of course, he was involved in help[ing]—and his church being where the women were originally ordained before they were allowed to be ordained. And but it wasn't Christine. I loved Christine, and I am, to this day, grateful to her, but she was not my role model. She was a wife and mother, and the wife of a minister. The same with Staughton Lynd, Staughton and Alice Lynd. Staughton was the person that I was looking to for leadership. I actually had quite a bit of respect for Alice then and have even more now, for Alice, as I've gotten to know her and of her work. But at the time, I was not identifying as, Oh, I'm going to be an Alice Lynd and be married to—I did have a boyfriend at the end of—when I was at Spelman that last part, and there was some illusion that he might become a minister and I could be a minister's wife, but I still didn't think of myself as being home with the kids. [laughs] I hadn't even begun to address that question of, Yeah, they hire you [with him] and they pay him, but they expect you to do all these things. You know, that didn't exist yet. And then Malcolm Boyd, of course, was male. It turns out he was gay, but I didn't know that then. But he was male. So I think this is significant.

05-01:28:23

And then, of course, when I went back to college, already the idea was—I mean, I had pretty much internalized the idea of Black leadership, the importance of Black leadership in the movement. And I, of course, had been raised to be a wife of a man. And so I married an African American, so the idea was, of course, that I would be the support of the African American leader in the movement, right? So there was, again, that contradiction that I did not—I never quite saw myself/understood.

05-01:29:02

This is true of many of the early New Orleans group, especially, the early one. Many of them had become mothers. And so they were the ones that were less active now than some of the others. But for many of us who were young, this was one of the crises, is, Well, wait a minute, wait a minute. Especially in the movement, you want to make change in the world, but you're the one that's going to stay home with the kids? And it lent itself towards—and we can talk a bit more about this—as I said, already that thing about: were children a problem for women, or were children a source of nurturance and meaning in life? Because some of us hadn't quite figured out where kids fit in.

05-01:29:48

And just so I never forget to say it: having my son was one of the best choices I ever made in my life. [laughs] It's like, you know, when I *had* him. But I was ten years married before I had him, you know, that's—

05-01:30:02

Tewes: I think that's a great way to finish up today. Thank you, Chude.

05-01:30:08

Allen: Okay.

Interview 6: January 27, 2021

06-00:00:00
Tewes: This is a sixth interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on January 27, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So welcome back, Chude.

06-00:00:23
Allen: Thank you.

06-00:00:23
Tewes: You know, I think we should start off today, as you mentioned, by talking about the memo to your white sisters, which I think is an important piece of your thinking in this moment.

06-00:00:34
Allen: Okay.

06-00:00:35
Tewes: The late sixties.

06-00:00:36
Allen: Well, yeah, so this is January of 1968. The group in New York started in the fall of '67, so this is just like a couple months into it. And prevalent in the women's movement at that period was some people using this analogy between the condition of what we would then say was Negroes—African Americans—and the condition of women. I had never, as I think I mentioned, read the women's paper from SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], where they used that analogy, nor had I read the "Sex and Caste" article that Casey Hayden and Mary King had written that was in *Liberation*. I hadn't read those. So it was a new thing when I would hear people saying this, "Like the Negro, so woman." It made me uneasy. And what made me uneasy was that if a white woman is saying, "We women are in a condition somewhat like those of people who are African American," the question for me was on one hand—one question was: what happens to Black women? It's very easy to start thinking in terms of—because you're saying you're not really talking about "as white women, so Black women." As soon as you say that, you become aware immediately of issues. So when you say woman/Negro, you're really thinking male. One of the similarities or analogies is, remember, this is a white supremacist, male supremacist culture. So the norm is always, in this case, either woman—if you're talking about women—and that's white women, but you don't say white. And if you're talking like Negro, you're really talking about male, and the subgroup is female. So it was that complicated thing—and I hope that's clear. One of my questions was: what happens to the Black women when we use this analogy?

06-00:02:47

What I'm clear about is that when a Black woman chooses to use that analogy, she knows full well where Black women are. She's right there. And [Florynce] "Flo" Kennedy, one of the Black women who was involved with women's liberation and the women's movement almost from the beginning—I think from the beginning—she was a lawyer, and she did, supposedly, a paper—I think it was in the fifties when she was in college, where she did that. I know that Shirley Chisholm could talk about both being female and being Black. So there's that question of what would happen. That was a key question for me. And my conclusion of that was that—and in the second question, was that why was it, in making this analogy, there was partly this reference to what had become the Black Power movement, which was explicitly male supremacist? I couldn't understand why we would want to ally, even with Black women that were part of a—if they were affirming male supremacy, if they were affirming the idea that women should step back behind men. So my point was that we need to be identifying the needs of and the concerns of poor Black women, women who are not part of this Black Power movement.

06-00:04:13

Now, I think I mentioned last week—if I didn't, I will mention it now—the birth control statement that was made by the women from Mount Vernon and New Rochelle. They were Black women, poor Black women primarily, and also Pat Robinson, who I'd been privileged to meet. Their point was class. Their point was, You Black nationalists are middle class, and now *you* want to be telling us what to do. And I, of course, was very influenced by Pat Robinson already. So part of what I was saying was, We have to look to the people at the bottom, the women at the bottom, if we're going to understand the conditions of women and we're going to ally with them.

06-00:04:58

The purpose of questioning that statement then was in part, because I already understood—and we will talk a bit more about it—that from my point of view, to have a multiracial women's movement, which is what I wanted, white women *had* to address the question of white supremacy and racism in themselves and in society. Otherwise—which, in fact, happened a lot—they would be fighting for the privileges of white women to have the same privileges of white men, and not necessarily be addressing the question of women of color. That was my concern. I was, at that point, verbal, I was not a writer. So I'd written this paper, because it had—it was so difficult for me to figure out how to say it. And so I read it at a meeting—I have no memory of anybody even commenting—and then I put it away.

06-00:05:58

Because we're talking fifty-plus years later, I have had to take a look at the question of: was my responsibility to try to get that statement further out? I did *not* try, I did not mimeograph it off, I didn't try to get it published in the early publications. And because I was embarrassed about the writing. So this is the writing question. I did not consider myself a writer. From what I can

remember and friends have said, is I really had a sense of organizing [that] is that you put out ideas, and then people either take them or they don't take them, and you go on and you put out ideas elsewhere. You don't try to make people agree with you, quite. Now, that's only a—

06-00:06:55

Because at the same time, in the early women's liberation meetings, in what became New York Radical Women, we *were* debating some ideas. I definitely came down on the side of the fact that it was not—that women's liberation could not be limited just to the question of male supremacy and what we would come to call sexism—remember, we didn't have that word at the beginning. I think from what I can remember and those of us can remember, that was the—one of the major splits when that small group of us split off is because we did not feel—and agree—with people who felt that these meetings should *only* focus on sexism and male supremacy, that women are affected in all of the various ways. But the truth of the matter was that in that period, I wasn't sure you could organize women just as women either, because so many women were opposed to women getting together. It was not a time when women were saying, "Oh yes, you're right!" It was more, "No, you're wrong and you shouldn't be doing it." There was that aspect, too. So that I just wanted to share, because, of course, when I come to San Francisco, I will, in fact, develop a workshop on racism, and I will teach that as a part of Breakaway.

06-00:08:24

But first when I get here, the question, I think, would be more appropriate to talk first about leadership. You know, the women's liberation movement was historically very anti-leadership, which caused all kinds of issues. In some ways, of course, we were responding to not—it had been men—but having people tell us what to do and what to think. So part of it just was coming from there. And part of it was this idea that so many women had been kept from sharing their point of view that we needed to keep it very broad and open so that everyone could share. On the other hand, before I had left New York, I had moved from that large group of New York women [that became New York Radical Women] into the smaller group that eventually became WITCH [Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell]. In the larger group we could have thirty-five, forty people in a meeting. And the next meeting there'd be—some of them would be new. It always felt like we're repeating the new stuff over and over. And ultimately, New York would work out ways to deal with that.

06-00:09:36

When I came west, I really did not want to be in a situation where the group was constantly bringing in new people and never being able to take whatever that next step was in understanding our condition. I came out here with only the name of Mimi [Real]—then Mimi Feingold—as someone to contact about women's liberation. Someone at *The Guardian*, where I'd been working, knew her and knew that she'd been in the South. And so when I got out here, we did

get in touch with, at that point, our husbands first, and I talked to her. I encouraged her to, since they were in the Resistance, to see if the other Resistance women would be interested in women's liberation.

06-00:10:25

I did not go to the first meeting intentionally, because I did not want to influence their decision. I wanted them to either say, Yes, we want to do this, or, No, we don't want to do it. And you know, I probably brought out the paper that Mimi passed out either before or at that meeting. I don't remember the specifics. I just remember being so clear that I wasn't going to go until they'd made the decision. Now, you know, this whole question of leadership was such an interesting question, but it includes a question that you can*not* want to be a leader, but if that's where you're heading, you're going to do it anyway. So of course, I became one of the leaders of both Sudsofloppen and the movement in San Francisco. This was not the first group in San Francisco, but it's the first group I knew about.

06-00:11:18

There had been a group at San Francisco State [University]. What I do know of at least one group there is that when the San Francisco strike happened around getting Black studies/ethnic studies, the leadership told the women to disband and support the strike. It's one of the classic issues. You're a women's group. Do you turn your attention onto another struggle, or do you keep your attention there? And that split that group. But I didn't know about all that then. I didn't know that then, but it is one of the key questions: how much of a women's organization are the questions that need to—if you're partly organizing to change the condition of women, the status of women, the opportunities for women, ending discrimination against women, changing people's views and the laws around women's bodies, if that's your focus, what does it mean then when there are these other issues which can appear to be outside issues, such as the Vietnam War? You know, now that's a perfect example. On the one hand, it's ludicrous to think that the Vietnam War didn't affect women. But it was not, of course, a specific women's issue. So that kind of question, again, with the [San Francisco] State strike, would have been there.

06-00:12:53

So Sudsofloppen was—we didn't have a name for about six months. By that time, Mimi had left, and the people that were there, we decided it was time to define ourselves. I should step back a moment to say that, because I didn't—partly because I didn't want to be involved in a group that kept getting bigger and bigger, I encouraged us to think, in San Francisco, about small groups, so we organized around small groups. GLIDE [Memorial United Methodist] Church was very helpful in giving us space, so we would have Friday night meetings there where new women could come. And the idea was—again, this is so much the you-don't-need-leaders thing—is that the new women would come, they should organize their own group. There were some writings they could read, but they should do their own thing. And so it had both its

strengths—because it really did allow women coming in to not be in that situation that some people had already been there for six months and had an idea, that kind [of thing]. But it also set up its own quality of competitiveness or us/them, because there were different groups, and sometimes groups had different opinions and different thoughts. It had its strengths and its weaknesses. But that's true all over the country, in terms of how women were trying to organize and, What you do with new people and what you do with differences?

06-00:14:32

Probably I should say here that in addition to the fact that none of us quite understood how to handle the question of leadership and non-leadership, there was also the question of contradictions. You know, I say a lot now, especially when I'm with activists, that I would have loved it if somebody had told me that it was a given that as soon as you have those points of unity, you're going to have points of difference, that struggle is the name of the game and you didn't need to get upset about it, and it's nobody's fault. It's not like somebody's wrong, because they have a different point of view. It means that whenever there is that coming together, there also, at some point, is going to be manifest differences. And the question, again, is how you work that out in an organization.

06-00:15:27

Nowadays, with so much not being focused on movements—well, no, I should correct myself. Because, of course, 2020, there is a good focus again on movements, with Black Lives Matter and the other kinds of issues. But prior to that, so much of the emphasis went the other way, towards the therapeutic approach: everybody's point of view is of equal value—which I don't believe, I'm sorry. You know, I just don't believe that's true. Experience makes a difference, it really does. And some points of view are not correct.

06-00:16:04

One of the people in the early movement here, then-Judy Syfers and then she became Judy Brady, she's the writer of "Why I Want a Wife." We were in the same group when she did come into the women's movement. One of the quotes—I found it recently—from her is, "It's all very well to *feel* you're doing the right thing, but you need to understand *why*." And I think that's an extremely good point, that feelings are not enough. We talked a bit about that last time, that in the small group you can start with feelings and then you can start with experience. But if you want to change the country, if you want to make change that's going to contribute to the liberation of all women, you have got to get your perspective broader. You have to start learning the history, you have to have first a national and then an international perspective. You can't just say, This is what's happening to me, and therefore I know what's best for women, because it's too narrow a—too narrow.

06-00:17:15

So in that sense, to just refer again to the contradictions—this was definitely true in New York and it was definitely true here—that in any group situation—in New York it might have been the large group; here it could have been—we had these coming-togethers of the groups, we had large citywide meetings. There could be moments of phenomenal unity and just the thrill of it, just the thrill: we're all on the same page, we all know what we're talking about. And that having never happened before around being a woman, that you actually were venturing outside the box—because we were using that image of the box last time of we're talking about moving outside the norm—and all of a sudden to find you're not alone and that some of the women sharing are taking you even further than you've been before, and you're saying things that everybody is embracing. I mean, it's heady, it's wonderful. And then the next meeting or two meetings down the road, something comes up where you're not in agreement.

06-00:18:23

It was really hard, because we didn't [laughs]—as I say, nobody told me this was normal, that this was what was going to happen and that we should learn how to handle it. In the same way that no one back there really knew how to say [that if] there's something going on between me and somebody else, I should talk to her personally. Maybe this is a misunderstanding. You get into the she heard/I heard/you said/she told me, this kind of stuff, which, of course, is gossip and shouldn't happen. There's even a reference to that in Alice Echols's book, *Daring to Be Bad: [Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975]*, about New York, where one woman says about me, "Well, I heard blippety-blip." [laughs] I read that and I thought, Well, she didn't even call me up and ask me if it was true!

06-00:19:24

Now, this had to do with a woman trying to find our meeting and my not answering. Now, of course, I would not have been able to say—I didn't remember then, I don't remember now—but I would have said to her and I would say now, I was *overwhelmed*. It's quite possible, with so much happening so fast, it is quite possible I got a letter or a phone call from someone and I never got back to them. That is totally true. It is also true, because this is what the reference was, that I thought it was important with groups that had differences that there was some kind of balance. And I think the reference was to the fact that I thought she would be on the other side. Who knows.

06-00:20:08

All I know is that nobody asked me. A reference which says, "Somebody told me that she said," should not be allowed. First of all, it should not be allowed in terms of a history book. But second of all, in terms of a movement, an organization that has integrity, those are the kinds of things you go and you talk to the person personally, and you find out what really was said. And if I said it and I messed up, ideally I say, "I'm sorry. You know, I didn't do it

intentionally." And if I did something intentionally, then I say, "I'm doubly sorry, and that was not appropriate, and I hope that—and I promise I won't do it again." Because with any kind of mistakes we make, the real issue is: are we going to repeat them? And if we get defensive and if we aren't talking to each other about these things, most likely we are going to repeat ways of distrusting each other.

06-00:21:16

So when Sudsofloppen was formed, as I say, it was about six months in, and a number of us—I believe it was more than our group—were going to define ourselves. And so the group I was in was about six women, seven women, I can't remember. We all went home and we wrote something about what we thought our group was and what we thought the movement—where we were going. And one of the women wrote down that she didn't think we should take ourselves too seriously, so she thought we should name ourselves Sudsofloppen or Rinky-dink. And we thought, Yeah, that's—I mean, we really like Sudsofloppen, that whole idea of suds flopping around, right, [laughs] maybe from the dishwater, right? But you know, it was like, Ha, ha, yes, you're right. We don't want to take ourselves seriously, we're not trying to be the leaders. Well of course, it didn't work. I mean, Sudsofloppen got—people talk about it like it's a respectful name, you know? [laughs] Originally the intent was to not take ourselves too seriously. And of course, that's always a good guideline: don't take yourself too seriously, because then you get caught up in not listening to others, which is important. So Sudso[floppen]—anyway, we took the name, and we encouraged other groups to form.

06-00:22:49

In 1970, we did a couple different things. I may have to check this, because it could have been '69, we did an International Women's Day event at GLIDE—and I think I already may have mentioned that—where we went out and we collected photography and art from all these women and we set it up for just a weekend, and it was such a killer. [laughs] You know, to collect it all, set it all up, have two days, which were thrilling, at GLIDE, just thrilling. All these people came. And then we had to take it all down and deliver it all back. It was *so* exhausting for such a short amount of time. But we were new at this, and we were just thrilled, we were just thrilled at the idea.

06-00:23:33

I'm not sure if people that aren't our age or older—my age or older—can grasp what it meant to hear people say—when you'd say something about you wanted to be an artist—"Well, have you ever heard of a good—a woman artist?" There were no women artists that were of any—were good. And of course, we didn't know about the Italian artist, [Artemisia Gentileschi], who had her hands broken, because she was not supposed to be—I don't know her name right now. But anyway, she's somebody that was supposed to be very comparable, in whatever period that was, but she wasn't supposed to do it, so her hands were broken. Well, hello. That's about it, you know? And Mary

Cassatt, who was only allowed to do domestic portraits. Well, that didn't count.

06-00:24:27

You know, until the women's movement, domesticity was not considered even a relevant or valid issue, as far as I know. I certainly didn't study it in college. Nobody offered me a class where I could have learned about how women's roles had changed over the years and what women thought of it, and how it intersected with the rest of society, you know, those kinds of questions. Much less that there was that severe division in our culture, that this was women's work and this—women's role and this was men. It really was seen that the man's—that only men had the vote, of course, and that *he* was voting for the family. This is a patriarchal model that we're talking about. So these are all things that we're starting to learn.

06-00:25:17

So in the context of there is no good women artists, hard as it was and how much work it was, to have two days in which there was nothing but women's art and women's photography was just thrilling! It was actually quite radical. It's a kind of radicalism that you don't even think about now, because that would not be a question in anybody's mind, that women can't be artists or that women can't create beautiful poetry. Hello. Given what just happened at the inauguration, right? An incredible poem by a young Black, female poet, [Amanda Gorman]. That would not have been recognized at the point at which we're starting to discover ourselves and female culture, historically, that there'd been all these women who could do things, so that was good.

06-00:26:23

That was the year that we organized Breakaway, [1970]. Now, Breakaway—again, there are these concepts, right? Breakaway comes from the concept that when an astronaut went up into space, he broke away from the gravity. It basically put him in the concept essentially of like free space in some ways, right? But it was the idea of you break away into something new. And it started with some—with a group of us. Some of the women were older. They were already professors or whatever, but they were older than me and my peer group. So let's see, if I'm here in '70, that makes me twenty-seven, so these women were probably in their thirties already. And they include a couple that were already out lesbians, which there were already lesbians in New York, but they weren't being out in the meetings when I was there. So that was going on.

06-00:27:27

There was a little small group of us, and we would meet on Friday nights at one of the older women's houses, [Gretchen Milne, later Forest], which means that she was a single mother with kids that were already starting to grow up. And she lived over in the Fillmore area, in one of those great, old Victorian houses with the high ceilings. We would meet and have potlucks on Friday night, and then we would have what we called salons. And salons were when we would come together and we would talk ideas. We would just talk about

whatever the topic was. It was all about our views as women, raising questions about the male supremacy, white supremacy of our society. We would talk about these ideas, and it was very alive. And then seven of us decided to start a school in the—when we decided to start the school—this is so California, this is so San Francisco Bay area—the seven of us went camping together to plan how to do it, right? We went up to Mount Diablo, and we discovered not one of us had ever been camping without a man—just as a little aside again, 1970. And so we planned Breakaway.

06-00:28:54

One of the people had been Judy Syfers, who then became Judy Brady, and she passed away a couple years ago. One of the other founders, Tanis Walters, and myself were talking about Breakaway. Tanis was remembering how when we first organized and put out the notice that there was going to be this women's school, we invited everybody to come to a dinner, we organized a dinner for everybody. I mean, now if you think about these things, and especially now, now you'd think about all going out to eat or catering or something. We're not people with a lot of money. But we organized to have a dinner together. And we had come up with a brochure, and there were, I guess, about six classes you could take. I was doing the one on racism, and there was an introductory one, and there was one on the family. So there was a whole series and people could sign up, which they did. That was like an eight-week thing, which we did. And then we organized another one. Breakaway had, I think, two sessions in San Francisco, and then it moved to the East Bay, because those were the people that were picking it up and taking it forward.

06-00:30:16

I know that there were seminars on racism for about four different sessions: two in San Francisco and two in the East Bay. I did not do another one of them. According to my friend Tanis Walters, I had this point of view that you set something up, you give people the idea, you train them, and then you go off and you do whatever is the next thing you're going to be doing, and *they* pick it up and take it on—which they did for four sessions. Breakaway eventually became more a hands-on kind of thing: how to tune up your car and those kinds of things, and less the more political questions like racism and other things like that. But family was a very interesting one. They ended up going for two sessions, and they wrote a little booklet about—each one of them, I think—again, there were six or seven in the group; we're talking small numbers here. I am still a big fan of small numbers. There's good things about major events that you amass—you get as many people as you can, but you don't keep people coming back and moving forward if you just have mass events. There has to be internal education, there has to be that way in which people begin to work through their ideas and why they're part of this group, if that made sense.

06-00:31:46

Tewes: It does, but it makes me wonder how you thought of Breakaway in comparison to small groups like Sudsofloppen. Was there a role for both?

06-00:31:54

Allen: Oh, absolutely! Yeah. For one thing, your small group was where you would go and you would talk about different issues. Because remember, in your Breakaway class you're talking about one issue—whatever it is. So that's part of it. And part of it could be that if you're having trouble—if you were one of the leaders of a class and you were having difficulty, you might go back to your small group and talk about it, and get some help on figuring out what to do. It does raise the contradiction that, of course, manifested over and over, is that as the people in small groups also began to do projects, we could look upon Breakaway as a project. But other things like childcare and different other issues, you begin to have this question of: how much time do people have? How much can they do, and is there a point at which the small group has ceased to be a vital energetic thing and could actually be a way of not moving forward? If that makes sense to you. You keep coming—it's gotten comfortable, for example. That becomes a question.

06-00:33:04

And again, nobody was in a position to tell me or advise me that a lot of small groupings, a lot of organizations, anything, they have lifetimes; they don't go on forever. If you've organized a small group, for example, and you're meeting around this question of being a woman and women's liberation, it might be good to think about every year or so, Is this time for this group to end? Is it time? So I came here in '68, and certainly by '72 Sudsofloppen had ended. Things were going in different directions.

06-00:33:52

Before we move on, I want to just mention that one of the groups that we related to came from Palo Alto, many of whom were—a couple of whom were quite, again, Marxist and further left than some of us. It was a very interesting, interesting relationship, because it was very—there was a lot of mutual respect between these two groups. And it wasn't just Sudsofloppen, but it was those of us like—who were starting to have a—we had a women's liberation office for a while, so there was this kind of, what would you say, cross-fertilization. And a couple of the women in that group were intellectuals and contributed papers when we would have meetings to think about what we are thinking about, in terms of theory.

06-00:34:47

But the moment I want to share is there was a time when some of us were meeting, and I was telling that story about how I had gone with my husband, Bob [Robert L. Allen], to the Midwest after he came back from North Vietnam, and he's up there speaking and I'm sitting in the back of the room selling *The Guardian* newspaper. And I'm looking at him talking and I'm thinking, I could never do that. I'm telling this story and I'm saying, "And two years before, I *was* doing it." Like, think about it. And this one woman—and she was from the Palo Alto group—says to me, she said, "Yes, but *you* could think back to a time when you *did* do it." She was saying she had never had in her life a time where she could see what her capabilities were. She was just

saying to me, "I'm coming in from a different place." She had grown up in San Francisco, and she was saying, "I can't look back and say, 'Oh, I have done this. I can do it again.' " She was starting like at—what she considered like zero, and it was going to be her first attempt at speaking. And her first attempt at—even in a group, articulating what she thought. And that was—I've never forgotten it, because it's easy to start thinking that everybody's had the same experience you've had, you know? And unless we're very clear, we don't know it, you know?

06-00:36:22

So anyway, after Breakaway, which was a tremendously vital and exciting time and very positive—this is one of the things Tanis Walters keeps pointing out: it was such a positive time. Not everything, of course. [laughs] Again, we had our struggles, right? But somehow, Breakaway was just—it was just this wonderful time of all of us giving—the seven of us, and then the people we recruited—really giving everything we could give. And then I began to teach, also, the workshops about racism to some YWCA classes, both in San Francisco—and then Bob and I moved to Santa Cruz for about half a year, and so I did it down in Santa Cruz, as well. I did it up in San Rafael. So I kept doing the antiracism workshops, but I didn't do them, at that point, within women's liberation.

06-00:37:23

Tewes: Yeah, how did you get connected to the YWCA, and how were they interested in this antiracism part?

06-00:37:30

Allen: Well, they were very much in a period of wanting to do work on racism. That's what's happening today with everybody saying, Oh wow, there's racism. Oh wow, there's white supremacy. It's not the first time this is—it's just this time the corporations are involved. This time the big guys, in at least the NBA, are involved. But it is like, it's not the first time progressive groups have tried to address this question. So that was very positive.

06-00:38:06

What I do want to mention before we go on is that within the white women's liberation movement, it was a difficult question to talk about—and key—around the question of rape. Now, to step back, there are, especially in the history books, a lot of criticism that women's liberation was all white. So we should go on record as: it never was *all* white. There were always some individuals.

06-00:38:33

There's also at least one book a woman named Benita Roth wrote about—I even have it right here, because I thought it was important. Okay, [it's called] *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. Now, I'm not advocating all of her politics, because I think she misunderstands—you know, if you're not in something, it's

so hard to understand what it was like. You see it from the outside. But she makes the point that there were already independent groups of both Chicanas and African American women meeting at the same time white women's liberation—what we call white women's liberation—was meeting, which never, of course, was all white. So that there were already—it's not like they came later. They were these small pockets doing separate things. She then questions the whole concept of the separatism, but I think that's where we just have to be clear about the history. This is a period when people of color were finding how important and vital it was to meet together, in the same way that for us women, those of us that were meeting, were finding it so vital and exciting to meet without men in the room.

06-00:39:59

People sometimes talk about the white women's liberation movement, to talk about the dominant group, were anti-men. Well, what was clear to me is that of course there were some that were very angry—very, very angry—at men for a number of reasons, including Orthodox Jews. I remember a woman saying that, you know, the prayers were, "Thank God I was not made a woman." Well, I can understand being angry. I could be real angry about it, you know, if that was how I was raised. [laughs] But some people were raised really with the idea that as a female, you did not count, except as a servant of the important ones: the men. That did happen, and there were people that were very angry about that as they came into the movement. So there was, of course, anger.

06-00:40:52

But there was also just wanting to not have men interrupt and think that they knew better. This is a male/female problem. It can be a white/non-white problem. It can be a heterosexual/gay/lesbian problem, where the dominant group thinks they know everything. But it's also a class problem, and I think that's probably even *more* the important thing. It's so that it was mostly middle class and upper middle-class college-educated men were the ones that were dominating, in the North especially, in the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and other white Left. They were the ones that knew what you should be doing, and it was not based on your life experience, it was based a lot on books. But who cares what it was based on? We wanted a chance to talk about what do *we* think, without having to deal with either dominant male ideas or bruised egos. I think that's important, too, you know? All of a sudden, men getting all upset, because they're not being treated as the gods that Mommy had taught them they were. And so we wanted to meet separately.

06-00:42:10

And so I completely understood that Black women would want to meet separately and Chicanas would want to meet separately. And of course, as my mentor, Pat Robinson, had told me, she had said, "Keep meeting. We need to be separate right now, and don't forget class." That is what she said. She didn't say, "You're wrong to meet until we can be there to tell you what to do." She just said—and she knew that I already was concerned about racism—but you

know, "Go ahead, keep meeting, keep learning, but we need to be separate right now."

06-00:42:48

And I think I did speak a bit last week, also, about how the difficulty with consciousness raising, which was the only thing we could do at the beginning, because we didn't have enough information, was to start with our own lives. And if everybody in the room is of the same—is all white, then you're only going to be talking about white women. If everybody is middle class or college educated, that's what—what you tended to have sometimes, also, though, was you'd have a couple working-class women in the room, but they might not choose to speak, because the dominant grouping was saying, "This is reality." And it takes a lot of strength to stand up and say, "No, it's not my reality. That's not how I experienced it."

06-00:43:34

And so at the beginning, we were just learning how to express our own reality, and we—it was easy sometimes to get into that situation of defining all women that way, especially because white supremacy makes whites central. I'm central, I'm human, I'm a human female—and every other group of people who are not white is *other*. You have to become conscious of that, and until you're conscious of it, you don't realize that you're just manifesting the white supremacy when you say, "This is my experience, therefore this is universal." The same with class. If you come from a relatively affluent background, you think, Well, women, housewives in the home wanting the—college educated, wanting and needing the right to work and work at professions where their minds could be used, that becomes the dominant thought. But there's a whole lot of women that were not—did not go to college, that are still in the workforce—or are in the workforce—and need equal pay with equal work. [In 1970, only 8 percent of US women had at least four years of college.] You know, the professionals are not the only ones. They're a small percentage.

06-00:44:53

So this is an interesting question, and it happens amongst the historians, that they—that again, you have that this is the norm. And then they'll have a chapter maybe about Black women or whatever I'm saying or working-class women. No! We are not the norm. We are *part* of it, and I think that's especially true with college education. I don't know what the percentage is now, but you know, when I was going to college, not every girl went to college. That's important to remember. I mean, a whole lot of people who wonder what's going on with our politics: well, a lot of those people that voted for Trump, they are the people that did not get to go to college and have access to good jobs. Not all of them, of course. A lot of the leadership, those people are educated people that just, in my opinion, don't care about other people. But for us as building a movement, it was hard to make that switch from, This is my reality and these are what I see as important, and what is best for everybody.

06-00:46:08

And then you get into the dilemmas of things like abortion. You know, I think it's a very interesting and difficult question that the movement—I think we did the best we could in the beginning to allow—at least [to say publicly] that women were having abortions. There were especially speak outs. I never was involved in a speak out, but I know in New York they had abortion speak outs, where women stood up and actually said, "I had an abortion." That was illegal back then, and it was shameful, you know, and not everybody agreed. It was like having sex before marriage. There are people that would never do it. But the question is: did other people have the right to do it? Could we end this law that said it was illegal? At the same time, this was a period—and we're talking late sixties, early seventies—where there'd been a lot of sterilization of women of color, especially in Puerto Rico. And so one of the questions was about taking a stand against forced sterilization. The [Black] nationalist movement, of course, was taking the stand, to some degree, that birth control itself was genocide to kill off potential warriors for the struggle, right?

06-00:47:22

So this whole question of women's ability to control our bodies was a crucial question. There are criticisms now that the white women only went after abortion, they didn't take stands around no forced sterilization. Well first of all, historically, that's not true. Many of us *did*. But I'm not sure any longer that it's wrong to sometimes move on a single issue, because that issue—the time is right. I think it's a totally legitimate question for a women's organization to have a stance against forced sterilization and even have some people working on that. But if that's a moment in history where it was possible to get the law changed on abortion, that's an important thing, I think, that not all of us who thought—I mean, I was for free abortion on demand, no forced sterilization. That was my politics, right? You don't build a campaign on that. There's nothing wrong with us politically *saying* that, but the campaign at that moment historically around abortion was, if people pushed for it, it was possible that it could be decriminalized.

06-00:48:53

I think equally it's true that the more people organized around no forced sterilization, the better that was. But how to do it and those kinds of questions are not ones that I can answer today. I just know that it's not true that all white women didn't care, and I also think now that there can be an argument made for moments where a mass movement can be built around a particular single issue that you could win—and that that was that moment. And of course, with abortion, to also say it wasn't just white people dying from abortions. It's not like this was just a white women's issue. All kinds of women, especially poor women, are the ones who would die. And isn't it Argentina that just passed [a law to end the criminalization of abortion], and they did it on a health issue, which I think is fascinating, because women were dying. This was to save women's lives. Make it legal or decriminalize it so that women can get it in a way that is safe and healthy. For the women's movement—

06-00:50:04
Tewes: So—

06-00:50:04
Allen: Go ahead. Did you have a question? Okay.

06-00:50:09
Tewes: Well, yeah, I'm thinking about—you're doing such a marvelous job analyzing the way historians are thinking about these things and without the perspective of that. But I wonder now, years later, if you're able to step back and say, Is there something we could have/should have done differently that maybe would have changed the outcome at that moment?

06-00:50:38
Allen: Two things. I don't think I, certainly, understood—and I don't think most of us understood—the power and the danger of the reaction to women's liberation. So that the kind of attack from the moment that the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion, which I'm under the impression was not even what Supreme Court Justice [Ruth] Bader Ginsburg even believed was the right way to do it, it's not like we understood that, Oh my goodness, this puts the question right in the laps of the Right Wing, and we need to be constantly organizing to address this question.

06-00:51:34
When I was in Union WAGE [Women's Alliance to Gain Equality], we ran an article once in our paper. Our paper went to like 2,000 people, right, that's probably what it went to. And of course, more people read it than that. I knew a woman that worked as a nurse in a hospital where people had abortions, and not everybody that had an abortion wanted one. It was very easy for—when you're young and you're militant and it's like, [raises voice and gestures with hands] I have the right to have an abortion. Every woman has the right to choose. Blah, blah, blah, blah. But nobody was talking about how *hard* it was for a lot of women. And we did an article in Union WAGE where she took three women that she had helped at the hospital—changed their names, of course—and told their stories. And not one of them wanted to have an abortion, but the situation was such that she needed to.

06-00:52:35
So the Right, when it begins to attack the right of women to have abortion, one of the things that they've done—amongst other things—is they take the women who are sorry they had the abortion. And you know, the human element, [or] if you do this you're going to go to hell. Those kinds of questions. But there's also just the human question of: it was hard, it was a hard decision to make. And when you're militant, you tend to forget that. You tend to gloss over that [with], We have the *right* to this! [raises fist] You know?

06-00:53:12

The other key issue of women's rights to control our own bodies was around the right to love women—physically as well as emotionally. And again, for a while it's like it's a strident right to—instead of, you know, you have the same problems you have in a relationship with men sometimes. [laughs] Relationships are relationships, and maybe these are some of the differences. I mean, I remember reading once about a woman who had been in a lesbian relationship; she was actually some kind of leader, and then she ended up with a man, a man of color. And she was just saying it was hard all the time being "on." It was like you never went home and put your movement work aside, because you were both in the movement together. I remember reading that she found it easier to all of a sudden be with somebody who was not part of the same movement. You know, I can't answer any—since I've been married to two men that were not part of the same movement, so I mean, I know that side of it; I don't know the other side, as such. But in relationships, I know that there was in that period a—it wasn't a clear line between personal and political, of course. I remember thinking that there would be no domination/submission in a lesbian relationship; that was something that was heterosexual. [laughs] And I remember some woman telling me, "No, Chude, that's not true." You know, I mean, it's human being stuff, right?

06-00:54:55

And sometime recently, having to comment to one of my male friends from the Civil Rights movement about the whole abortion issue and the women's right to choose, and him saying, "I think that's too narrow. It's *people's* rights to choose." And I thought, Yeah, you know, we couldn't have said that back then, because we were asserting the right of women to have the right to choose. But it's true; everybody has the right to control their own bodies, in my opinion, as long as they're not hurting anybody else. Now, whether you consider then the embryo, and anybody else [makes air quotes] gets to be part of the question—but I still come down on the fact that an adult human being has the right to make her own decisions, or his own decisions, about who to love. I'm not for rape, I'm not for coercion, and personally, I'm not much for impersonal sex. I don't see those as healthy things. But it's not a question of gay or straight, it's a question of human being and how human beings relate. So we were in the early stages. The early women's movement was in an early stage of wrestling with these questions. And they're *real* questions.

06-00:56:16

And one of the key ones, I think, out here was the whole issue of public space for lesbians. That's very big. Judy Grahn's memoir *[A Simple Revolution: The Making of an Activist Poet]* is excellent on this point about the right of and the need for public space. And so out here it became big dances that started—they first started with the poetry readings, and then there would be the dances and [women] coming together. And how important that was, and how if you hadn't—if you'd lived in a heterosexual kind of cocoon all your life, you didn't know how police harassment affected men and women who were not heterosexual. You just didn't know it. You certainly didn't know that

sometimes the women who dressed "as men" would be raped by the police. You didn't know this. How would you possibly have known this until we began to communicate? And again, people began writing about it. [I] certainly didn't know at the beginning—and people probably don't know today—that it used to be illegal to be completely dressed in gender clothing of the other gender. You had to have, I think it was, three pieces of your—if you were female, you had to have at least three pieces of clothing on you that was designated female. Remember, we even have buttons that are different. We button in different ways and, you know, all that weird stuff. Because it was so important in a society in which women were considered inferior, lesser than, discriminated against, you had to know who were the women. You had to *know* that, you know?

06-00:58:11

I don't want to get into everything today, but I can tell you that back then, we—these were important questions we were working out: what does it *mean* to be female? I can only say today still, is that I am opposed to identifying gender by clothing, by hairdo, by outward appearance. To me, that has nothing to do with your gender—whether you're male or female. I am perfectly happy with people with penises to wear dresses and high heels if they want to, and for young people to experiment, but I myself do not see that needing to change a body part in order to wear high heels or a dress—I cannot agree with that. I simply—because that is a superficial labeling.

06-00:59:13

And I don't wear dresses, you know? I stopped wearing dresses a long time ago. Occasionally, very occasionally, I'll wear a long skirt somewhere—but very occasionally. You know, I remember saying to somebody once [that] I wasn't going to wear a dress again until men could wear—this is back in the seventies—until men could wear them. She was an African American woman, and she pauses and she looks at me and she says, "Well, what about the robes men wear in other cultures?" [laughs] And like, Ah, yes, good point. But you understand what I'm saying. These were literally questions we were wrestling with, and they go back to the nineteenth-century women's rights movement, too: the whole question of dress, the whole question of how you present yourself. And sometimes that is, of course, exactly how when we're coming out with ideas that have to do with women's equality. People would refer to how we looked, what we were wearing, that somehow that was the point, that since we all looked like whatever—

06-01:00:23

I have one friend—she was actually in the Southern freedom movement, a white Southerner in SSOC [Southern Student Organizing Committee]—and she went somewhere to give a talk, and some student criticized her for what she was wearing. She told him that the night before the house she was in had burned, and she was wearing borrowed clothing. I always thought it was such a good—I mean, hello. You don't know beans about why this person's wearing

what they're wearing. Does it make any difference in terms of the content of what they're saying?

06-01:01:03

So I have some more to say about the work I did in San Francisco, but do you have any question before I go on?

06-01:01:14

Tewes: Yes, Chude. [laughs] You've brought up so many great things we could go off on ten million roads here. I do want to just hop back for a moment and acknowledge that, again, you came to San Francisco in around August of 1968—

06-01:01:30

Allen: Correct.

06-01:01:31

Tewes: —to help set up *The Guardian* office on the West Coast.

06-01:01:34

Allen: Yes.

06-01:01:34

Tewes: But I'm curious what your initial impressions were of San Francisco and the community you were encountering here in the late sixties.

06-01:01:44

Allen: Well, we came in August, and there was a big Peace and Freedom convention, so that was like the first thing we did. The person that we'd been told to contact, and who we stayed with until we found a place, was a Vietnamese man who was working—he was from Vietnam originally, and he was an anti-war person. We basically got to know right away some of the movement people in San Francisco. And of course, Mimi Feingold [Real] was, at that point, married still to Carl Wittman. They were involved in both the Resistance, and he was involved in gay liberation. So there was all this stuff happening all at the same time.

06-01:02:26

The other thing I'd say is, going to that first convention, the Peace and Freedom convention, it was in August and, of course, we were coming—we were staying in the Avenues, so it was cold, it was just *cold*. We were not used to this, what San Francisco's like. [laughs] Come here in August and discover that it is a whole different world from anyplace else in the summertime. But the Peace and Freedom convention was in the Mission District, which was hot, right? If you asked me what my first real impression of San Francisco [was], it is that people were wearing a total range, from sleeveless dresses and t-shirts to down jackets. We were all there in the same room together. [laughs] Because it is a microclimate city, and that was like the—it's a funny thing to say, but it really was the first thing I learned about San Francisco.

06-01:03:28

We did experience some housing discrimination when we were looking for housing. And what else would I say about San Francisco? I think that would be about—oh, and that there's that bridge. There's that [Bay] Bridge to the East Bay, and that bridge is a very interesting thing. It can be almost like a different world. So sometimes you're real connected to the East Bay people, and sometimes it's like you're in a different world. And then, of course, there's the [Golden Gate] Bridge up to Marin County, too. So it's like there are these different worlds. And of course, even the group we related to from Palo Alto—Palo Alto's, you know, forty minutes, fifty minutes down the peninsula. But somehow, the bridges have a different metaphor. That's a different place. It's across a river—I mean, it's across, excuse me, a bay, it's across—but it's a bridge.

06-01:04:30

So and how that manifested in early women's liberation is that the East Bay people organized somewhat differently than we did. It's not like we were all one group. This was San Francisco women's liberation, and then there was the East Bay. And it's not that there wasn't any cross-fertilization, but there was a sense of difference. So that's there. And—

06-01:05:02

Tewes: That's a good point. And I do want to ask you more about these networks of groups that are happening. But really quickly, you mentioned you experienced housing segregation. Was this individual landlords, or were there districts you were supposed to stay clear of? How did this manifest for you?

06-01:05:23

Allen: Individual, the indiv[idual]. The rental place [would say], "My husband will be back, come later." [And we would come back and hear], "Oh, we've already rented it," you know, where you knew that wasn't what had happened. My husband was light skinned—ending up [with] somebody saying yes to us, and then realizing that he wasn't supposed to have rented to an African American, but he'd already said yes. That kind of thing. But having somebody else in the building be refused to have her partner come in, because he was dark skinned. Those kinds of things happened. I'm not sure we knew as much as some people—I mean, experienced it as badly as others, because, as I say, he was light skinned. And when we were in the LA area visiting, then he was—we could feel it around people thinking he was Mexican or Central American or something. We were aware of it in a way.

06-01:06:27

On the other hand—and I think this is important when you ask what was it like when I came to San Francisco—is that when we arrived here, I'd never been here until I moved here. Bob had come out and spoken here, and came back and said, "San Francisco." And I said, "Great." I didn't care where we went. It was just New York was too big a city for me. It was too much city, and I needed something that had a little bit more access to nature and stuff. So

when we came out and we went to the Peace and Freedom meeting and other things, I realized we could have a child here. This is a multiracial city. This is not a city where it's going to be as difficult for a child with mixed-race parents. And we also were invited fairly early to some kind of gathering of older leftists, Black leftists. Bob called them up and said that I was white, and was that all right. Because we had come out of New York, where there was hostility to interracial relationships on the part of the Black movement, as well as the dominant society. And yes, in fact that was quite fine with them, but he did feel he needed to ask. So it was in that sense, I think, it felt like a place where we could settle.

06-01:08:01

Tewes: Thank you for sharing that. You've mentioned this Palo Alto group, as well as the Berkeley folks. I'm wondering what kind of connections you had with them? How were you communicating? Were you meeting through other means, or was it very intentionally looking for other women doing this work?

06-01:08:26

Allen: You know, relatively soon we started having these bigger gatherings. I can't remember whether—how much the East Bay people came to GLIDE or not. I can't remember that. Sometimes I ask myself how come I didn't know more about a, b, or c, because all this stuff was happening. I mean, so much was happening, and that's all I can say, is so much was happening and you did the best you could. We could not do an email that got sent to everybody, like now. People might or might not read it, but you know, you can write one thing and it can go out to hundreds of thousands of people, right? We didn't have that. We had mimeograph machines, and then you either hand-delivered it or you put it in the post box with a stamp on it. It was a different time. So on the one hand, you didn't reach as many people. On the other hand, the people you did reach, it was with much more one-to-one contact. I would say it was sometimes like individuals from some of the groupings would be in contact with each other, is one way to stay in touch; and other times we had these larger meetings.

06-01:09:53

And then there started to be—well, let's do *Free Space*: *[A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation]* before I go on to other lectures.

06-01:09:58

Tewes: [laughs] That's fair.

06-01:10:01

Allen: At some point Sudsofloppen, around a year—remember in six months we wrote our paper and we took the name. And in about a year, it was time to kind of put out what we had been thinking about in terms of: what would happen in a small group/why a small group? And I decided to write up my ideas and the group supported me. Now again, it's a combination of the timings and the fact that I had a husband, is that I spent—it was basically like

having a half-time job for a year to write the thing, *Free Space*. But *Free Space* was not my—originally, I didn't come up with that ti[tle]. Again, it was one of the people in the group when we were defining ourselves, and so free space. And because of that sense that nobody had the single way to do things, the rest of that title is: *A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. There were people that never agreed with my point of view—even here, much less from the East Coast—so it was one point of view.

06-01:11:13

This is when I learned to write, or when I discovered that I could write—maybe that's the way to put it, since we've already commented that if I look back to my letters from Spelman and Mississippi, clearly I could write when I wasn't worried about whether I could write or not. But this was my attempt at trying to explain what I thought the small group was, and how it would—what happened in it. And that's where it was. You start with your feelings; and then you share experience; and then you begin to do an analysis, studying other things; and then you ultimately have theory. You keep moving out and seeing it as broader.

06-01:11:59

That was originally published by It Ain't Me, Babe Press in the East Bay. See, again, our connections. East Bay was doing it. And it's not the—as the woman—I bumped into her one time years later, and she's so embarrassed about the quality of the work. But you've got to remember, we were learning things. And that's what's important is that we were learning and we were *doing*. We weren't waiting around and begging somebody else to do for us. So anyway, it got published and it got passed around that way. And then Times Change Press, which at least used a professional printer, wanted to reprint it, and I had to cut the pages some. I had to edit it again, because—so that the original is longer than—and the original includes these photographs of the kids, because two of our members had children, and those didn't get in. The other photographs did; there's a photograph of each of us. And so I edited that over a summer, went back to visit my mother—my parents; my father was still alive then, my parents—and I worked on it there. And then I took it up to New York, and then they reprinted it. So then it got, of course, a much larger distribution, although we're still talking movement stuff. But every now and then I have—and I still meet people who read it, and for whom it *was* the pamphlet that brought them into the movement. And so I was happy for that.

06-01:13:47

It was also kind of humbling. I remember saying to a wonderful woman, Jean Pauline, who worked with Modern Times Bookstore here and only passed away a couple of years ago in her nineties, and she—I was saying one day something about *Free Space*, because I'd already decided certain things were either naïve or too whatever. You know how anything that gets printed, it gets in stone, and then you keep growing, right? I was like, Oh. And she just called me on the carpet, because that had been the pamphlet that had helped her make the decisions she needed to make to move forward. And so that humbled

me, that made me realize. And I've had people from other parts of the country say things [that are] similar. And then when I went to Cuba, which we will talk about later, I took it with me. I shared it with some of the white women on the [Venceremos] Brigade, and they were saying that—a couple of them—that if this is what women's liberation was, they could relate to it. Although for the most part, the Brigade people were hostile to women's liberation.

06-01:15:03

So you know, it was important for me personally in that I learned how—I really learned how to articulate my ideas. It is an idea book, and we are—as you've noticed, I talk ideas a lot. [laughs] And that was what that was. This is how we see ourselves organizing. And as I say, it started me—that was one of the key things in helping me learn how to write.

06-01:15:38

Then the next thing that happened was that Robert had already written *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, and was now thinking about a second book, *Reluctant Reformers: [Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States]*, to study the impact of racism and social reform movements in the United States. And he asked me if I would be interested in writing the chapter on the woman suffrage movement. So in '71, when we started that, there was very, very little. I mean, I can count the number of books there were on the woman suffrage movement or on any kind of issues about the racism in the woman suffrage movement, so most of that book was done on secondary sources. I had to learn things from primary sources, the history of the woman suffrage movement being one of the big, fat books of the history of the suffrage movement. Again, it was an experience. I was not a researcher. I did not st[udy]—other than one or two classes in history in college that I didn't understand, because it had no relationship to me in my life, I had never done any history. But the reason I took it on, in part, was because I *did* know that it would be really helpful to see how the issues of racism and white supremacy manifested essentially 100 years before, or 150 years before.

06-01:17:09

So we started with the abolition movement, and I learned so much from learning—because I did a lot of the research and some of the writing for that, too. I mean, just learned all these things, and then I started learning about the suffrage movement. And I could see how issues that were just too close to me in 1971, I could see it clearly in 18—whatever we're talking about—'60 or something. So, an example, is Sojourner Truth, who—here are these woman's rights people like Elizabeth Cady Stanton raising the question of those huge, huge horrible dresses they had to wear with all those petticoats, and they wanted to figure out a different way to dress. I mean, they actually came up with this weird thing that didn't go anywhere. For a while, women—there were a few women trying this new costume that they were trying to make with shorter skirts and bloomers. Kids would throw stones at them and dogs would try to bite them. I mean, it was so out of the times. But they were saying, "Look, you have no idea what it's like to walk—" I mean, the way Elizabeth

Cady Stanton said [it] was, "Try to walk up stairs carrying a child and something else, and with these big skirts. How do you go up the stairs?" You should try going up stairs just in your bathrobe sometimes, and it's a good thing you have an extra hand so you don't trip over it, right? And these are long dresses. So you could look and say, Okay, absolutely 100 percent. I am right there. Get rid of those long dresses. So Sojourner Truth, who was enslaved in New York State—not in the South, she was an enslaved person in New York State—she was six feet tall, and I gather that once a year the enslaved people were given a piece of cloth to make a new outfit. Because she was so tall, there was never enough cloth for her dress to go all the way down. So for her, liberation and freedom included the ability to wear a long skirt. Now, you know, that's just like a metaphor for all these other things, but you can see what I mean right off the bat. Wow, yeah.

06-01:19:36

Many women in women's liberation were raising the question of children, in particular, and having children, and marriage being confining for women. That marriage was oppressive, that child-rearing was oppressive. Well, when you begin to think about enslaved people who could not even *have* families, who, the owner could take those children and sell them away, you realize historically there's a whole different approach to the importance of family, of keeping family together. I don't mean to imply that all white women didn't want to have families. But you know, I certainly, for a while, bought the idea that monogamy was oppressive to women and all—I mean, we're *experimenting* with all these ideas!

06-01:20:26

And even more important probably is the whole question of illegitimacy. I can't remember if we talked about that before. But coming from a middle-class white, upper-middle-class white background, that so many of the families where there was a daughter who became pregnant, that baby was—she was sent away. The baby was born somewhere else and given away, and there was shame, and there was never the acknowledgement that that was your child. And that, in other situations where people have come from a background where they weren't always able to have their children, there sometimes has been the opposite approach. Not always. But the opposite approach is, of course: of course, you will have the child and of course we will help you raise it. Different reasons for those things.

06-01:21:22

So part of my doing the suffrage chapter was literally to learn from history about the question of racism, and especially white women organizing for their own rights and for the rights of all women. And one of the key things there, of course, were the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments get the vote coming first to Black men, and then in the Fifteenth Amendment putting the word "male" in the Constitution for the first time. And some of the suffragists, in particular Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, even allying themselves with a racist, when they were trying to build support for woman

suffrage. That's enough distance away to be able to look at it and go, Ah. Oh. And the one thing I learned really clearly is that it was a moment in history, for very particular opportunistic reasons on the part of Northern white politicians, to give Black men the vote. Not only was there no—within the culture as a whole—was there no idea at that point of women's equality, but it wasn't even something that was practical for politicians. So that's a question that I hadn't had enough perspective of before.

06-01:22:52

Then, you know, we're going to go on a little bit later to Union WAGE, but I will bring this up here. It comes up very much around the question of the Equal Rights Amendment. So the National Organization for Women and many women's liberationists came out for the—you know, this long, this Equal Rights Amendment that had come up, originally, after women got suffrage, and it had been—never been able to be passed. And all of sudden, you have this out there at the same time as working-class women, women in the workforce who are not in professional jobs but in factories and in other places, have certain things called protective laws. Child labor had it, also. They got it on the idea that women and children were weaker than the men, and therefore needed special help. So there were protections for women and children that men didn't have. Now, some of these protections were then used to keep women out of higher-level jobs. You could have it in a situation where a manager—I think this was telephone industry—the manager had to be able to lift fifty pounds, because that's one thing women couldn't do, were not—the protective laws said that's too much for women to lift. Well, no manager lifted fifty pounds; it didn't exist as far as this job, but because it was there, it kept women out of it. So many women were against the protective laws. They said women were weaker, and they kept women out of jobs.

06-01:24:26

Well, Union WAGE, Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality, that I would eventually join—this is before I joined—they took the position that protective laws needed to be extended to men, that the Equal Rights Amendment could only be supported *if* it was going to protect the labor laws that protected workers. And if it had only been for women and children, now it should be for men, too. Of course, making the point that even a man shouldn't lift fifty pounds. Hello, there were machines for that. So that became—and we'll get into that more—but that whole class difference, that whole class perspective was there. And I learned about that more from Union WAGE than I had in, of course, in women's liberation, because we tended to be more the college-educated women, and so we didn't quite understand fully, and might or might not have agreed anyway. I don't know where everybody fell on that. I never had to make a decision, because this had all happened before I came into the organization. And now, of course, it's like either those laws got extended or they didn't get extended.

06-01:25:45

But the fact that today in 2021 you still do not have an Equal Rights Amendment that guarantees women equality is significant. This means something, you know, that this is still a country that does not guarantee equality on the basis of gender.

06-01:26:07

Tewes: Yes, and you are correct that we will be delving into Union WAGE more as our sessions continue. But you started this conversation asking—or sorry, speaking about writing *Reluctant Reformers* with Bob. And I guess as just a way to close up today, I'm wondering what your work on that project meant for how you felt or thought about the women's movement.

06-01:26:36

Allen: Well, I'll answer it in two ways. One is that's what I began to do. I began to speak at conferences and workshops on the history of the woman suffrage movement and the question of racism within the movement. I did a lot of study around Black women. In fact, when we passed in the original manuscript, my chapter was twice the length of the others, because I had all this information about Black women, that then the editor, who was Paula Giddings, told me I had to take out, because it wasn't—the focus wasn't the suffrage movement. But I would talk about in my talks the whole question of how the suffrage movement did and did not deal with racism. So it became my work, it became—once I had learned it, then I was sharing it.

06-01:27:28

*Reluctant Reformers* is about to be republished, and I just had to add some things about the women's liberation movement. In particular, that question around the analogy of Negro/woman. And we didn't get into it here, but what I say there is that it got degraded down to white women talking about woman as the n-word. That kind of racism.

06-01:27:55

And so what might be a good place to end for this one, this session, is that I know myself, and I don't think any of the white women who'd been involved in the Southern freedom movement and then came into women's liberation, I don't think any of us understood how difficult it was going to be, as new women came into the movement who'd had no experience either with people of color or in any antiracism movement. I, in my own little way, was trying to address that question. But I can guarantee you that I did not have a grasp of how serious that was, even though intellectually, in my brain, I knew that to have a multiracial women's movement at some point in the future, to work with—as reliable allies—with women of color, we had to deal with this question. But I still had no grasp of just the—I'm not sure what the right word is—the political organizing responsibility that meant.

06-01:29:04

I would say, too, that there were women in New York who were for limiting women's liberation to *only* the question of sexism, who had been just as

involved in the Southern freedom movement as myself and to this day are still as committed to ending racism, but they believe that the women's liberation movement should be focused on just the question of gender discrimination, which of course I did not agree with. But I don't think any of us understood how serious that was, that white supremacy—it took me a long time. And again, this is Patricia Robinson, who was a Marxist, [laughs] but she would say things like, "Bourgeois social relations reproduce themselves daily." And I would go like, Oh my God, what is she talking about? Well, it's great! I mean, if you accept that this is a bourgeois culture, but you can just say, "The dominant culture reproduces its values *daily*." So the fact that you say you're against something today doesn't mean that you're never again going to have to wrestle with ways in which it has integrated into your own thinking and behavior, because the culture is constantly giving it to you, and to everybody else. *Everybody.* That's one of the things that I just really respect her for, is that that became one of the things that I had to then keep being—reminding myself.

06-01:30:38

The other thing, of course, is that becoming antiracist, trying to eradicate white supremacy from oneself, as well as in the culture, is not just about correct behavior. It's about understanding how it works; where it comes from; when deeply embedded things come up, to acknowledge them and choose to let go of them rather than feel embarrassed. And let me give you the best example there. For most white women, even today and certainly when we were raised, if you said "rapist," the image that came into a white woman's mind was a Black man. Now, that's racism. You are not a bad person, because it just popped into your brain, because that's how—what got inculcated into your brain—Pat Robinson used to say with your mother's milk, I mean, that's how—in your mother's womb—that's how deep racism is. So in this sense, though, it comes up, *then* you can deal with it. Ah! This is when the long-time racist arguments for why Black men should be discriminated against, shot in their backs by the police, whatever, is because these are evil, bad people because they rape, blah, blah, blah, blah. What I say a lot when I speak is I say—I don't do this to the little kids, but I do this to college students—I say, "Who were the rapists? Who *were* the rapists? White men. When Africans were enslaved and brought here, who raped whom? White men." But that's not the cultural message that you get, so you have to pull it out, take a look at it, understand it, and not try to pretend it never happened. Because then if we do that, then we don't allow ourselves to grow, and we also don't let other people know that they can grow and change.

06-01:32:48

Is that a good place to end?

06-01:32:54

Tewes: I think that's the perfect way to end this, Chude. [laughs] Thank you so much for your time today.

Interview 7: February 10, 2021

07-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a seventh interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on February 10, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you, Chude, for meeting with me again today.

07-00:00:24

I know that you have some updates to give about work you've been working on recently, and how you're feeling in this particular moment, as well, so let's start with that.

07-00:00:34

Allen: Yes. Great, thanks. Two things. When we finished two weeks ago, it struck me that I ought to see whether or not Robert [L.] Allen, my first husband, had done an interview with the Oral History Center—and he had. And then it struck me that maybe I should take a look at it and see at least what he said about the time we were married, since it was, for us, a very fertile time of cross-fertilization: of him being involved in the Black movement, and me in the white women's liberation movement. And what I found was, of course, that I basically don't exist.

07-00:01:13

And I comment [on] this in two ways: I have no problem that Robert didn't want to talk personally. I do think that men have a much harder time figuring out how the personal fits in with the political, and he certainly did not want to say anything that would be—that I would find, or that subsequent women in his life would find offensive. But I find it *very* offensive that the interviewer and Robert, secondarily, did not mention that I helped to write *Reluctant Reformers: [Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States]*. That interview is essentially an interview about his books, the books that he wrote. I'm in *[Reluctant Reformers]*, I'm on the cover. I helped to write that book. I do not exist. And I want to suggest that that is one of the early complaints about the women that came out, especially of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], was that they did not exist. And most women will point out: in the early histories women basically did not exist, even in the Southern freedom movement in the histories. So much of the time, the writers and the speakers were male.

07-00:02:24

And here we are—this was done in 2019, and it's 2021 now—here we are in 2019 with an interviewer asking someone about the book they wrote, and ignoring the fact that a woman helped to write it. So that is an example of sexism, you know? Robert and I have talked about it. And as I say, I respect the fact that he didn't want to speak about the details of our marriage. But I did point out to him, not only did I write that book—but whereas he says that his

family did not support him when he refused the draft—his wife did. That's *huge!* But remember, we women don't exist when men are thinking about the public political situation, you know? So anyway, that's a little political comment about that.

07-00:03:18

The other thing is that I'm speaking in a class by Zoom on Friday at a college where the title of the class is "Race and Second-Wave Feminism," so I've been reading the two readings that the students were assigned before I come. And one is a short—is an article about how the early historians basically focus only on white women, but already a lot of women of color were meeting at the same time, parallel time. And the second one is what I gather is a bible in the academic world: *Personal Politics: [The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left]*. Does that come across as backwards to you? [laughs] Anyway, *Personal Politics* by Sara Evans.

07-00:04:06

Now, the first article does basically say it's time to put the old histories to bed, and I totally agree. And the reason I'm bringing it up here is because mostly it's going to be researchers, probably, who ever read this thing, this interview with me. And I want to say, number one: *[Personal Politics]* is not an accurate history. It was done with interviews in 1973; it was printed in 1979. We know so much more about what was going on in the Southern freedom movement, the Left, etcetera, and all the women's organizing since then. It belongs on a shelf, to be studied in terms of what people were thinking *then*.

07-00:04:47

I want to make that comment then also about myself. I was interviewed by Sara Evans. [laughs] I already know some of the things, without even going back, that I said then I wouldn't say now. I've been involved in interviews, I've been involved in discussions, I have heard all kinds of people speak. I know so much more, and I know some of what I thought wasn't quite accurate. So she's interviewing people in '73 who are caught in the particular dilemmas of having been involved in an extremely intense movement in the Southern freedom movement and have now moved on to other things, and are being asked to think about it and apply it—if they joined the women's liberation movement—to that. But that's *all*. It tells you what people were thinking on that day. That's true of any oral history. It's true of me today. I'm seventy-seven years old. There are things I don't quite remember, which is also, by the way, what Robert said. We were laughing about that. You know, it's a long time ago, it's a long time. So I think that's very important, to just add here that—all of that.

07-00:05:59

And then the other thing I would comment, which I understood from reading this book and then from being at a panel, is that sometimes what we share in these oral histories are more our subjective reality than objective reality. It's important, it's super important, but it is only that. And so sometimes we get

things confused. The only example I think that's important here is that in personal politics, Sara Evans put some emphasis on white women going into the South and being sexually active and indiscreet, basically. She quotes a Black man as saying that in his project they threw out all the women in three weeks, because they were like screwing men all across town. This is *not* true. I mean, I don't know if there was a place where that happened, but I happen to know the man she's quoting, and he says he didn't [say] it—and the project he was on definitely had white women on it.

07-00:07:00

What happened is in 2004, I went to a conference at Miami University, which was the first kind of time that I was involved in one of the reunion conferences, because it was both a reunion and academics were invited, too. I was on a panel on women in the movement. And two things. One is that before I went, I asked my civil rights group, the Bay Area [Veterans of the] Civil Rights Movement group, to talk about women in the movement, which is on our website and which is incredible. One of the most incredible things is that it's the *men* who talk a whole lot about the focus of—how they were dealing with the question of women and sex, right? [laughs] And that's when I realized, Hey, when you say women, then you talk about sex and personal relationships; otherwise, you don't talk about it, which is why we titled that, "Women and *Men* in the Movement." It's not just women, it's women and men. They had that same experience, whether I ever opened my mouth or not, you know?

07-00:08:15

The second thing is at the conference, one of the other speakers, [Gwendolyn] Zohara Simmons, who was Gwen Robinson in '64, she gives a paper. It is the first long article in the SNCC anthology, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*: *[Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC]*. And she basically says there weren't any white people on her project. Now, this is the same project where Jimmy Garrett is quoted as saying that the white women were kicked off. Well, one of the women from my college—the other woman who went to Spelman [College]—was on that project. So interestingly enough, she's in the audience that day, and she stands up during the Q&A and she says, "But Zohara, *I* was there." And Zohara goes, "Oh yeah!" And they spend the whole rest of the conference together.

07-00:09:03

What I figured out was that when they first went—and this is Zohara's story—only the Black members went in, because it was not an area that yet had the support to be able to bring in white volunteers. They had to find housing for everybody. They had to decide that it was worth it. Now, she went in to be the director of the Freedom School. But almost immediately, the director of the project was arrested, and so she had to take on more responsibility. Now, I'm not going to go into everything about what Zohara did and had happen to her—that's *her* story—but I can tell you that from everything I understand, it was an extremely woman-friendly project. And I think what happened was

that because of this early traumatic thing of going in alone, just a couple of them—I think there were three of them—to be faced with having to figure out what to do and how to do it—she was probably nineteen years old—I think that's what stayed with her. And then, of course, after the summer's over, the white volunteers leave. But if you read that article carefully, she did add to it that the white volunteers come in or that volunteers come in, some of whom are white. And I've met others now, through Marcia [Moore], who I already knew. At one of the reunions, I met some of the other workers on that project.

07-00:10:36

So all I'm saying is—in a very long way—that [if] one book says something, [that] doesn't make it right. Hello, historians, hello, researchers—it does not make it right. Because it's in a book, it's not right. Because it's been quoted 43 million times by other people—which the thing about the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] women statement has been from that—it doesn't make it true. It was the best Sara Evans could do.

07-00:11:04

The second thing I want to say about the Sara Evans book is that a young academic male, white, interviewed me about Freedom Schools, and he was good enough to send me what he had written. Well, he had written about this focus on—about how we all went—the white women went down there, and the problem was we were all sexually active. And he quotes or cites Evans. And then he quotes something I wrote. [laughs] And I wrote him back, and I said, "You make this sound like I slept with every man on the project." Or we could say every person in the town, right? I mean, it was horrible, and I had to correct it. And I will say, since I'm on my soapbox on this, that I put a lot of effort into helping him talk about that issue correctly. He did not thank me in the book and he did not send me a book. Hello, oral historians, hello, researchers. When you talk to people, do them the kindness of sending them a book, even if you have to pay for it yourself, you know?

07-00:12:22

And a total aside is that one time I was interviewed by a young Latina college student, and when she came to the house she brought me flowers. It was so sweet! It was so nice, you know? And I mentioned that to Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, who we call Betita, and she said, oh yes, that is the kind of thing that Latinas do—and did. So she used to, when she was teaching people, the young women would bring her things. It was so kind, it was so sweet—in contrast to somebody not even thanking me.

07-00:13:02

On the other hand, just before we end with this, [holds up *Personal Politics*] it quotes Staughton Lynd. And in this whole thing about sex, it quotes Staughton Lynd as saying that the Blacks—men, SNCC workers, it was like they put a notch on their belt every time they screwed a new white woman, right? Well, she didn't check with him. She didn't ask him, "Is this okay?" He didn't get to either say, "I don't want you to use that," or, "Wait a minute, let me put this in

a better context." And so he was blindsided at one of the early 19—in the late eighties conferences, where somebody read this out loud at a panel and wanted to know why he said it. And he didn't even—[laughs] and he *had* said something, he had said it. I believe Jimmy—Jimmy Garrett tells me he didn't say the thing about kicking the women off the project, but I think if you went and checked in the oral history archives at North Carolina, you'd find he might have. When you're verbal, you say things that you would never say in print, in the way you say them. You say them partly with inflection. That's part of it. You make a kind of semi-joke, "Oh, I threw everybody off the project." And you didn't really mean it literally, you meant it in a different way.

07-00:14:28

So I just want to comment about that, also, that—with myself. We've been doing these interviews, and I've been loving doing these interviews. I'm thinking it's letting me relive my life in a new way. But every now and then, I get nervous about what some of it's going to look like in print, because it's different in print than it is—and when you write, you get to rethink, you get to look at the nuances, and you get to correct. So I just wanted to—that's what I've been doing this week. I've been critiquing this book and looking forward, and the teacher is totally looking forward to me coming and saying this is not a bible. [laughs] Now we can begin with what you want.

07-00:15:16

Tewes: Thank you, Chude, for that. I think you made a lot of good points about the fallibility of the work that we are doing around these movements. I think certainly the subjectivity is important to remember, and that we are here trying to record your memories of your experience—as you can remember them now. [laughs]

07-00:15:37

Allen: Yes, and, you know, I'm realizing two other things. Within the dissertations at UC Berkeley, there are two that are very relevant. One is Deborah [A.] Gerson's one about the history of and her study of San Francisco women's liberation. And I've seen some of the—she gave me some of the notes that she took about my interview. One of the things she pondered was the subjective, was that side of it. I don't mean to, in any way, negate the subjective, I just say the subjective is not objective; it is subjective. So I think that's important.

07-00:16:15

The other one that's there is [M.] Rivka Polatnick's study of the two groups in New York: the New York Radical Women, and the poor Black women of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle, where Pat Robinson, my mentor, was one of the workers. And again, what I want to comment is in the two pieces that this academic gave me to read [for the "Race and Second-Wave Feminism" class], the article, which is about all this organizing by women of color at the same time the white women were organizing, and Sara Evans, *neither* of them reference Pat Robinson and these women—especially the poor Black women in Mount Vernon and New Rochelle, New York, who have a statement about

birth control attacking the men in the nationalist movement and saying, "No, you do not get to tell us, tell poor Black women what to do. *We* get to decide what to do." Neither of these feminist things mention it. So I'm just mentioning it again. [laughs] It's there. Read it. Do not begin to *think* about talking about women of color in the late sixties and early seventies organizing and not include these women.

07-00:17:39

They write in a different thing—and then I will end, and we *can* go on—[laughs] pardon me—which is that they were not writing for middle-class people. They were not necessarily college educated, except, I know Pat Robinson was; I don't know if any of the others were. But that's not who they were writing for, that's not who they were speaking to. So the best example is that coming out of the women's liberation movement is this concept of male-identified women. Did I tell you this all before? Probably. But anyway, these women call them dick-happy women. Hello. It's great, but it's certainly not academic. And I think that's another issue that I just wanted to raise. This is class-issue stuff. Are academics only going to talk to each other? And are they only going to quote people who, yes, may have been organizing, but for whatever reason speak the way they do? I don't think you can, not if you're going to cover everybody.

07-00:18:45

You know, I read somewhere recently, because I've been trying to read up on what we used to say in the early women's movement—no, I'm sorry, it's the PBS film on *9to5*: *[The Story of a Movement]*, which has just been shown. Anyway, one of the rules for speaking is that you don't use your hands. I saw that and I thought, I use my hands all the time. Oh dear. [laughs] But anyway, I'm just commenting that I do know I use my hands, and I hope it's not distracting. Okay. Forward.

07-00:19:22

Tewes: No, I enjoy the emphasis we're having here [with your hand movements]. [laughs] Okay. Well, picking up from our conversation last time, we spent a good amount of time speaking about *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*, which by the way, we know you wrote, and the first edition was published in May 1970, I believe. But you spoke a bit about that, but I wanted to go back and fill in something about the four group processes that you lay out. And just for reference, they're: opening up, sharing, analyzing, and abstracting. Could you speak a little bit more about what that process was like, and coming up with these processes? That was meta. [laughs]

07-00:20:10

Allen: Well, you know, it was the idea that came out of early women's liberation groups, of starting with your own experience. And of course, a lot of times when women came, when they finally decided that maybe there was some legitimacy to the issue that women were not full citizens and were not treated

equally with men, there was a lot of anger. So there was a lot of feelings at the beginning. You know, like I have feelings about the fact that my first husband Robert didn't even give me credit for supporting him when he was resisting the draft. I have feelings about that. So that's where we start. And then we would go to what your experience is. Now, this is fifty-plus years later. I can't quite tell you why those two things were separate, because it seems to me most of the time we discuss—we express our feelings as we express our experiences. But I think what we were trying to do then was actually give ourselves permission to express the feelings. "I'm angry, I'm whatever," to describe the feelings, if we knew what they were. And then, to kind of go into why? You know, some of the people—this was especially in New York—a lot of anger scared me back then, and so they were very angry. But one thing I've never forgotten is Shulamith Firestone saying that she grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family, and one of the prayers was, "Thank you, God, you didn't make me a woman." Well, that helps me understand the anger. If you want to make a distinction between the feeling—[screen freezes]

07-00:21:55
Tewes: Oh, it looks like Chude has cut out here for a second. Let's—

07-00:21:57
Allen: All of a sudden I could understand. Oh okay, if you grew up with that—

07-00:22:01
Tewes: [break in audio] Okay, we're back from a quick break. And, Chude, can you repeat some of what you just said?

07-00:22:06
Allen: I think what I was using as one example of the different—of feelings and the importance, then, of experience, but them not being the same, is when I was in New York, some of the anger was a little frightening to me. Some of the women were very angry. But it helped me to hear Shulamith Firestone say that she was raised in an Orthodox Jewish family, and that one of the prayers was, "Thank you, God, I was not made a woman." That helped me to understand what that could do to you and how you could be pretty angry if you decided not to accept male supremacy as a given and as God's will. Or, I suppose, even if you believed it was God's will, you could still be angry about that. [laughs] But you understand what I'm saying.

07-00:22:52

It was more, yes, let's have our feelings and let's talk about our feelings of *being* here. Remember, at the beginning this was hard. You know, most women, if they were involved with a man, they were getting a certain amount of pressure from that man, one way or another, to not go to these meetings—or put-downs. So there were feelings, you know, there were feelings. And there was also the feelings of just the thrill of being together. But there was also the experiences. So these were not cut and dried. But I think that we might have spent—if we took a topic—let's say sexuality. That's a good hot

one. And people have lots of feelings about it, right? The feelings partly come from experiences, but the feelings are feelings, too. So you know, you would have—whatever the range was in our little group or something, there would have been just a lot of feeling.

07-00:23:59

And now I have to give an aside there, because I can't remember if I did it already, that we went to GLIDE [Memorial] Church once, two of our groups. Did I say that already? And we sat and did a whole thing on sexuality. We saw a film that included anal sex, [laughs] and we listened to Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin talk about their long-time relationship. I remember one of our members was asking how long they'd been together. I can't remember how many years—a long time. And her comment afterwards, "Well, that's a lot longer than a lot of heterosexual relationships." You know? Well, on the feeling question, if we went back, is part of the feelings would be, you know, just that whole thing of: how do you feel about lesbianism and homosexuality? How do you feel about that? And then, oh, experience. We've been sitting in a room with two totally intelligent people who clearly love each other dearly. Oh. You know what I'm saying? It's like there's experience, there's difference.

07-00:25:03

And then after the experience comes analyze. There has to be some way of understanding. Even if you're just talking about feelings of inferiority, for example, where do they come from? Where did they come from in the society at that time? And that's when we can get into the whole question of: we didn't have strong women teachers. We certainly didn't have strong women athletes, for the most part. There were some, but they were very minor. As I think I've mentioned, in basketball, you could play on half the court only, and you were allowed three bounces, because after all, you're a girl and you couldn't possibly really play. [laughs] I mean, whatever it was, right? You know, [uses a deep voice] "Who ever heard of a good woman artist? Who ever heard of a good woman this?" Even though there were women, "Who ever heard of them?" The put-downs were there.

07-00:25:56

So women many times had accepted the valuation. I have a friend who went to UC Berkeley, lovely UC Berkeley, who goes to her counselor and says, "I want to be a professor." And he says, "Oh no. Women aren't professors. Women are high school teachers." You know. And in women's liberation groups, you have a lot of anger, [laughs] because she accep[ted]—she didn't know how to *not* accept that then. I mean, the fact that you have a few people every time along the way—whether you're talking racism, sexism, anything else—who are able to somehow squeeze through, rise above the discrimination, have opportunities that most people don't have—poor whites, whatever it is. The few that [succeed] is not the rule; that's the exception that proves the rule. Most people are pushed down, most people do not have the opportunities. And I've been thinking, because we—oh, we have an unstable

[connection]. Are we okay? Yes? Okay. I've been thinking about how those people—and since we're focused on women—women have been able to overcome such huge barriers sometimes to be able to [do] anything—get a PhD, for example—how much support and help they've needed. But I've also been thinking about how much they probably didn't need a lot of sleep. [laughs] I can't come up with—you know what I mean? I mean, a person like myself, who needs a lot of sleep, is not going to be able to raise a child, do a full-time job, and somehow get a PhD. You know, I mean, I just needed sleep. But if you only needed—and there are human beings that don't need a lot of sleep. But you think about these things.

07-00:27:57

It doesn't mean *any* person—stop for a minute. I do not agree with the premise that you can be anything you want. I do not think that is fair to people. No! If you weren't born with the type of brain that allows you to memorize things, there's a very, very good chance you're not going to go to med school. If you were born with the kind of brain that *can* memorize good things, but for whatever reasons you aren't able to think creatively, you're going to be limited in what you could do. You're not going to become a medical researcher—if you understand what I mean. In any of them, no. You can be the brightest girl in your class, but you come from a poor family and you're white, and you're not going to have the support to be able to go to graduate school. Not if, somewhere along the way, you also had three children. And the man, for whatever reason—let's make him a good man—let's say he just died of a heart attack and you're on your own. It's not that you don't want to, it's that circumstances are not supporting you. I just think that's important. I don't think that needs to take away from saying to any young woman or man or person of color, "Try to be the best of who you can be."

07-00:29:24

But [laughs] for example, when I was twelve, in seventh grade, I wanted to be a cheerleader. I [could not] even touch my toes, you know? [laughs] I mean, the mother of my first grandchild informed me that neither can my son. I mean, it's physiological, right? I couldn't do the cartwheels, you know? But I desperately wanted to be [a cheerleader]. So, you understand what I'm saying. Other things, like writing, I could learn. And that's one of the gifts of *Free Space*, is that it taught—that's where I taught myself, *really* taught myself how to write, and that was important.

07-00:30:07

So I've now digressed—let's go back to analyzing. Analyzing being—

07-00:30:10

Tewes: Let's go back to—

07-00:30:12

Allen: Let's understand where these ideas came from. These are ideas, ideology, about who women are, who people—Black people are, who other people of

color are. This is ideology. These are ideas that didn't come out of nowhere. Where did they come from? What are they based on? And what of the old ideas are still valid, and what are not? What are being used to exploit people? What are being used as an excuse to still pay women less money than men? One of the women I met in the early women's liberation [movement], Joan Jordan, she had this story about how in the union she was in—she was a single mom. The union went on strike, and the union suggested, right, that the women shouldn't take strike pay, so that the men could have it, because they needed it to support their families. She agreed! She had no husband; she agreed. She lost her house. That's how *strong* ideas are. And so it was our job not just to feel something's wrong and then begin to identify the experiences that *were* so wrong, but to start and understand where it came from, and then to put it in the larger picture, the theory, the larger picture.

07-00:31:39

Now, I reread that chapter this week, and I'm struck by the fact that I don't say explicitly, "The larger picture includes the world. The larger picture includes understanding capitalism and understanding imperialism, the role of the United States in oppressing and exploiting peoples all over the world." And Pat Robinson, my mentor, was very important to me, because she kept pushing me to see things in that broader way. But you know, she was never a—she wasn't somebody who said, "No, you're wrong. Go jump in a lake," right? She wasn't that kind of person. So when I sent her *Free Space*, she writes back and she says, "I hope you're right, but I don't think you are." She didn't think—and she is correct—that white women could start with their own experience and end up having a world view that put the needs of the poorest people in the world, women and children, first, you know? She didn't believe that that would happen.

07-00:32:49

Unfortunately, you can look at the women's movement today and see how much it got focused on individual advancement, to the point that some people think that having some women on the corporation boards and breaking through that glass ceiling means women's liberation—when what it means is that some women are being allowed to be at the top and help to exploit other people. That's what it means. And so I'm not sure that *Free Space* was as clear about that as it could have been, that our view had to be broader. But at least what I was saying—and it's not explicit in *Free Space*—that I am saying you have to stop looking at the world just as a white person. You have to be able to learn about racism and, of course, class and, of course, then homophobia. You have to learn about all these things. You can't just understand women's liberation from your own experience if you are heterosexual, white, middle class. It's not broad enough. So I think that answers your question about *Free Space*, yes?

07-00:34:09

Tewes: And is that the abstracting part of it, the end?

07-00:34:13

Allen: Yeah, the abstracting would be moving into the broader theory, the understanding of where our lives fit in the total whole. I don't think the implication was then—and I certainly wouldn't say today—that that means everybody has to run out and only focus on the biggest question. I do believe that there's real value in working on specifics. But let's take a look, for example, at the issue of abortion, which is critiqued by women of color because the white women did not equate no forced sterilization and abortion. And I, of course, I think I've already said, was for bringing them both in, being both. But if you're looking at it from that bigger picture, the bigger picture of how change is made, how change is made in a society—and there is this moment when you could decriminalize abortion—the political question is: do you attach other demands to it, or do you win that one and then also organize for these other demands?

07-00:35:33

I'm not saying—because we're going to go on to Union WAGE [Women's Alliance to Gain Equality], and we can talk about protective laws. I don't always have the answer. I'm just saying these questions are big questions. And so analysis, and then moving to abstracting, allows us to see it—maybe I think the right way to put it, with the abstracting, is that the emotion is no longer there; you're not operating out of your own emotions. This is what *I* want, this is what *I* need. You're looking at the bigger picture, and you have some detachment. You haven't denied your emotions—you, in fact, allowed yourself to express them, and you've understood where they came from. You've understood the experiences in your life that have hurt you and have contributed to making you the way you are, and how you've had to fight internalized sexism or internalized white supremacy. You understand that. But there are moments when you step back from that and you say, "What can be won now? What is important now?"

07-00:36:39

In terms of the woman suffrage movement of the nineteenth century, the big questions were: was the Fifteenth Amendment, which put the word male in the Constitution for the first time, but was essential for getting Black men the vote, and was therefore at that moment politically expedient for the Northern politicians, who were then Republicans—[laughs] they were the so-called good guys back then. So it's that stepping back and allowing yourself to have your feelings, but not necessarily at any given moment saying your needs are the most important. I think that's how I would sum it up today.

07-00:37:28

Tewes: Thank you, that is helpful. I want to move on to another moment in your journey here in the women's movement, in particular a women's liberation conference at San José State [University], which I believe was March 10, 1970. Can you tell me about that conference itself and your experience there that day?

07-00:37:53

Allen: I had suggested that you ask me about this in part because I do not see myself as being one of the dramatic people, most of the [time]. I look back on my work, in particular in the women's movement, and I was more on the administrative organizer side. I mean, that's just who I was. And of course, I was a speaker and became a writer, but I was not one of the dramatic ones. And if you see a film like *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* and you see some of the great, especially WITCH [Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell] actions in New York and stuff, like hexing Wall Street—which I probably would have been involved in, because I'd been in that group when I was there, but I was already out here. I wasn't one of the ones that thought in those kind of dramatic, theatrical ways. That wasn't me.

07-00:38:49

But there was a conference at San José State. It was their first women's liberation conference, and they'd asked a couple of us to come down. And my husband, Robert Allen, was working down there. He was a professor down there at the time, so we drove down. And the morning that we left, we had a SNCC person staying with us who'd come out for a visit and came with us, as did one of the other people in women's liberation, so there were four of us in the car. That morning we had found out that one of the people I had known and cared about in the South, Ralph Featherstone, had been killed. He'd been blown up in a car, he and one other SNCC person. So on the way down, Robert mentioned to the man who was with us, Phil Hutchings, that I had known Ralph.

07-00:39:39

All I could do was turn around and look at [Phil], and we both nodded yes, and what else were we to say? We were young people. You say whatever you want about, "I'm willing to die," but it was a hell of a hard thing when somebody did die. I had no way to talk to Phil at that point. Now, I understand. One of the things you do is you go off in the corner and say, "How did you know so-and-so, and what do you remember about him?" But that wouldn't have happened at this conference, because we were going to a conference anyway. But it could have happened later, that kind of healing was not something that I knew how to do then.

07-00:40:20

So anyway, we go to this conference, and in the morning I'm one of the speakers. And we are women's liberation speakers telling this audience about women's liberation and what women's liberation is, and what we believed in, what we were doing. And then there was lunch. And then there was an afternoon panel of three white men who were to talk about women's liberation. [laughs] So here we go again! Guess what? So anyway, the first man speaks, and he tells us about women's liberation and what we're about. And then the second man starts to speak, and by this time it's like these people—this has nothing to do with what we said in the morning. So I turned around to Robert, who was sitting behind me, and I said, "Were they there in

the morning?" And he said no. So I stood up and I said, "Excuse me, but were you here this morning? Did you hear the women's liberation speakers speak?" "No." Three white men up on a panel to talk about women's liberation—not one of whom had come to hear us. So I sat down, because obviously we were not going to go on, right? I mean, obviously these men had nothing to tell us, right? *No*, of course not. The guy keeps right on speaking. Nobody does anything. So I stand up again and I say, "Hello," or whatever, right? [laughs] "I am not willing to be in this room and hear these men talk about women's liberation when they did not even have the respect to come and hear us speak. I am leaving." And I didn't know what would happen. I didn't know if anybody would walk out with me. I can't remember if I said, "I hope others will come with me." I can't remember that. I just know I was leaving, and as far as I'm concerned, every woman in that room should leave. I can tell you two things. One is as I'm leaving, there are a few Black men—male students in the back of the room, and they are laughing. They are just totally into this, right? Now, I can't tell you for sure if they were just happy that the white men were getting up yours or whether they were totally identifying. All I know is that they were laughing. It was clear that this was not a new situation for them. And so about half the women in the room left, including the organizers. [laughs] Including the organizers! They found us a room, and we start to talk. One of the things that the organizers said is, "I can't understand why we thought we needed a panel of men." This is 1970, this is still early, right? And, "Thank you so much." I don't normally do things like that, but there was no way, I couldn't sit in that room.

07-00:43:25
Tewes: Do you think—

07-00:43:25
Allen: And I, you know—go ahead.

07-00:43:27
Tewes: Oh, sorry. I was just thinking that because this felt so out of character for you, if it was part of recently learning about your friend passing that just snapped something for you, the emotional resonance there.

07-00:43:41
Allen: I do think so. I do think that it was, in many ways, I was walking out for Ralph Featherstone, too. That this kind of arrogance on the part of white men was not limited to women's liberation people. But I think also—and I had said that, and I think I've even written that—but I think that there was something—I mean, I say I don't do those things, but occasionally I do do those things. I mean, I was standing in a line in the bank once. I'm the next person and these two bank tellers are talking. And finally I go, "Hello. Hello!" You know? It's like, occasionally I do do those things. [laughs] But it was not my political—it was not how I organized. It happened to be that day. I was much more a rational—I was a charismatic speaker, and so in speaking at a conference, I would share whatever it was that I was talking about and encourage women to

organize. But then what concerned me was how you organize and what you think and how you build a movement. I was very interested, of course, in this question of how you build a movement, and in particular how white women organizing could reach a point where we'd be responsible allies to women of color. That was always behind what I was thinking about.

07-00:45:29

Tewes: You know, related to that—I was going to ask you about this later, but this is a perfect segue—you come out of the Civil Rights movement. You're working in a very structured organizing system there, and the women's movement is a different organizing principle. How did you think about the relationship of those movements, and was there anything from the Civil Rights movement you wanted to apply to the women's movement?

07-00:45:59

Allen: That's a good question, and I've read lots of things about how we learned to take ourselves seriously and how we learned skills in the South, and we learned to—that how people are treated is important. The thing about the Southern freedom movement, in contrast to calling it the Civil Rights movement, is it was also about dignity, it was also about people treating people in human ways and with respect. That was very important. And that, of course, becomes very important in the women's movement and in organizing women workers. One of the things they wanted was to be treated with respect, so that aspect was there. And of course, there was also—in early SNCC, in particular, it was a very, in many ways, a loosely knit, [more] anarchistic type movement, in that people more or less went out and worked without a lot of control. And then they came back, and they could spend a day and a night talking together trying to figure out things. But there was a lot of personal freedom on those projects, so I think that that would have been one of the things.

07-00:47:21

The women's liberation movement has a strong anti-leadership quality to it, and a belief in what we might call consensus—both of which had strengths and weaknesses. By the time which I go into Union WAGE, I am so sick of consensus decision making, I am so sick of anti-leadership, I am so happy that Union WAGE uses Robert's Rules of Order—[laughs] something I never would have been able to handle in the early part of the women's movement. I mean, it got to the point where I saw the limitations of [Robert's Rules of Order], but at first it was so wonderful to have kind of a structure that you worked under. And the assumption that people—women would have positions, and then there would be dialogue, and then there would be a vote and you would move on, and not that you would just go on ad infinitum and certainly not—and here's an example of sharing feelings, back into our process. This is a feeling; it's also an experience, but it's coming through as a feeling. [uses a high voice] "I feel like you're trying to tell me what to do, because you brought in this piece of paper that's a proposal. I feel like you're oppressing me." This happened in women's liberation sometimes.

07-00:48:44

What I didn't understand back then is that it would have been really helpful to begin to dig into what was going on that did not sometimes allow us to move forward around ideas. Sometimes, of course, everybody agreed and they went off and did something. But other times, what was it, that sometimes you would agree, "Next week we're going to talk about how to structure our meetings, our inter-group meetings, when people from the various small groups in San Francisco come together. Let's talk about what kind of way—and how we're going to organize that." So some of us, being the kind of people we are—and possibly because we had the time—come in with proposals. And other people feel overwhelmed and do the, "I feel like you're oppressing me," da, da, da. You know, damn you for having thought things through.

07-00:49:48

One of my friends in the movement used to say to me that, "Your problem—" I was Pam back then—"Your problem, Pam, is that you take things seriously." So if I said in a meeting, "Yes, let's come next week with ideas," I was going to go home and think about ideas to bring in; I wasn't just going to go home and do other things. Now, I do believe that there were—that it's quite possible that for some of the women, the baby was sick, the boss in the job was horrendously obnoxious that week, the demands of the job, the husband got drunk, whatever it was, and they didn't have time to do it. I didn't know enough at that point to say, "Let's talk about why not all—what was going on that not all of us have come in with ideas?" Or, "Let's have some breakout groups and do ideas *now*, if that's what we're going to have to do." I didn't understand that then. [laughs] You learn. You learn over time. And it was one of the thrills in being in Union WAGE, is that these women were in the next generation. These were my mother's generation of union organizers, the leaders. And they were competent women, you know? [laughs] They weren't learning how to write for the first time. But—

07-00:51:11

Tewes: So let's get closer to Union WAGE then, because it's something—we've already got great stories going from that one. But before we get there, I do know we want to talk about your brief trip to Cuba.

07-00:51:24

Allen: Ah, the Venceremos Brigade.

07-00:51:26

Tewes: Yes.

07-00:51:27

Allen: Well, the Venceremos Brigade, it started in '69. I was on the fifth contingent, which was 1972. I applied to go, because I wanted to work in a multiracial situation, and the brigades were multiracial. And I was accepted, not because of my women's liberation work—these folks, male and female, were not pro-women's liberation—but because I'd done the antiracism work. One would

assume also because my husband was going, and he was already a highly respected Black leader, right? But I didn't know, by the way, that I hadn't been accepted for my women's liberation work. I thought I was accepted for who I was. Going to Cuba, we built houses, and we were in—there were eight. I think there were eight groups of us, so that our group, because we were San Francisco/Northern California, we were a large contingent, and we had the three people from New Hampshire in our contingent, and we were responsible for building a house.

07-00:52:35

I want to digress a bit just to say that in '69, Kathy Barrett, who was in early women's liberation first in New York with me, and then out here came and joined Sudsofloppen, she went in '69 and they were cutting sugar cane. And back then, men cut the cane, and women gathered the cane, because of course women couldn't do the work of men. At some point, the women on that one, having—women's liberation's already started—said, "We want to cut cane." So finally the Cubans said yes. According to the story, they discovered that gathering the cane was harder than cutting the cane. [laughs] This happens a lot, you know, the male work is actually easier—but it's the important work, [more so] than the female work. I mean, I didn't cut cane, but that was the story I heard.

07-00:53:32

So I helped build a house. There was a range of jobs, and we got assigned different jobs. Now of course, when I was on the wheelbarrow, they could only fill the wheelbarrow halfway; I couldn't do a whole one. But we had one woman in that contingent who could use a jackhammer. She was big enough and strong enough to do the jackhammer. Anyway, we were doing physical labor, and then the last two weeks, we went on a trip of the island.

07-00:54:03

So before we went on the trip, every night we did—we had some kind of educational program. So we worked all day, we got up real early—it was still dark—and took cold showers. [laughs] And then we worked all day, and then we came home and took a cold shower and ate our dinners, and then we went to education meetings. You know, it just staggers me that we could do it all, but there's something about—it was collective energy. You had all this energy. So one of the programs designated was the women's panel. And the women's panel was to be a white woman, and then I think it was two women of color. What I remember, of course, is my side of it.

07-00:54:52

So I had already done the study of the woman suffrage, racism in the woman suffrage movement. And so after working all day, after that evening's political program, I would sit in the cafeteria and write out my portion of giving this talk, which was one of the best things I'd ever written up to that time, because it was based on a lot of work. But it was like, you know, focused. We had a women's panel. Margaret Randall was living in Cuba at that time, so she

came. And she took my handwritten little talk and she typed it up for me, so I actually have a copy of that talk, because of—thanks to Margaret Randall. You know, this is nice. That was one thing that happened.

07-00:55:44

And then we went on this trip of the island, visiting schools and hospitals and those kinds of things. I mean, you know, they have a wonderful health system—in contrast to our capitalistic profit-mongering one. And the schools with—meeting the kids was wonderful. We ended up in Oriente Province climbing El Pico Turquino, the highest mountain. I don't know if any of the other contingents did this, but this was quite an experience, partly because we all did it together, and we were number seven of eight, which means that six contingents were ahead of us. And so every time somebody would—they decided up there it was time to stop, it didn't necessarily mean that we down lower were in a good place to stop. I mean, I do remember this! [laughs] You know, you'd be on the side of this steep thing, and it's time to stop and take a rest. Anyway, it was very difficult, it was very difficult.

07-00:56:45

Some people had stayed up the whole night the night before to make banners, so each of our contingent[s] had a banner. So we get up to what is—I guess it was one mountain—anyway, one last push to go to get to the top, and a friend of mine, who was in a different contingent, she couldn't do it. She'd stayed up all night to sew these banners, and she just could not do any more, so she didn't get to the top. But I did. And so we're starting up, and at various times in the walk, people on my contingent would sing. We would sing songs, 1950s and 60s songs and things like that for morale. So all of a sudden, I start shouting these slogans, *"¡Viva la revolución! ¡Hasta la victoria siempre!"* I mean, I just got going on it. And there was a young Asian guy who was carrying the flag at that point, so he gives it to me. He says, "Here, you should carry this." So I'm carrying the flag and I'm just totally into this, and we're almost up the mountain.

07-00:57:51

And I say this, because when I came back, I did write a poem about it at one point, about how that, like the Southern freedom movement, was one of those moments where I was 100 percent there and I was 100 percent in what we were doing, with no holding back and no worry about what I looked like. My husband thought I was nuts. You know, the other people on my contingent, most of whom were people of color, were like, What's going on with her? But the Cubans on my contingent, they were shouting with me, right? We were in the revolution, right? It was just a personal experience of what had—I learned so much there.

07-00:58:38

But that is one of the things I learned about passion, again, that passion is important for people trying to create change. We're going back to the feeling thing again, right? That's the passion. But what I came to understand, partly

from Cuba, was the importance of reuniting passion and knowledge. It was both things. You have to have that fervor and belief and vision of what you're doing, but you also have to have understanding. As one of the women that I worked with in women's liberation—then-Judy Syfers; later changed her name back to Brady—I found a quote from her recently that I'd written down, which was that, you know, it's all very good to *feel* what you're doing is right, but you also have to *know* why it is right, you know? Which I think is very much a good way to sum that one up.

07-00:59:44

So then I came back from Cuba to work for a year. That was the commitment that I would—that those of us that went would then help organize the next year. That was probably the single most difficult political experience I've ever had, because just remember, they didn't accept me because I was a feminist, and I didn't stop being who I was, so it was hard at times, it was very hard. And yet I worked on the successful projects we did.

07-01:00:18

I had taken my camera and I'd taken lots of slides, and we did a slideshow. And when we first did the slideshow, the first time we did it, I got the feedback from my husband that I read my part of the script in a total monotone. [laughs] I didn't learn to read with feeling until I had a child. Because all of a sudden, I'm reading stories to my son and I'm starting to learn how to put—I mean, especially when they're real little, you're putting lots of emphasis in. I took him to a parent-child observation class where [Mariannina] "Nina" Mogar, a highly, highly respected educator of early childhood education was the teacher, and I would watch her. "The little rabbit walked down the street. Hop, hop," whatever it was, you know? And so I learned. And I hear my son now do it with his kids, and it's so sweet. But it was, again, one of those things you learn by doing, you learn by getting feedback—hopefully feedback that allows you to still feel good about yourself.

07-01:01:36

You know, I learned a lot that year. But as I say, it was difficult, because I was not—I think it's fair to say I was not respected for who I was. And yet, I had wanted to work with women of color and people of color, and there were women in that Venceremos Brigade that were members of Third World Women's Alliance, so it was important and I did learn a lot.

07-01:02:05

I would say the key thing is that I learned that I had what I would now call a mechanistic work style. This is partly what I was referring to, that if we had agreed that we would all bring in an idea for how we were going to do something in women's liberation, and then people didn't bring it in, [pounds palm with fist] "You said, you'd agreed, we have to do this," would have been my [response] and, "What is wrong with *you*?" with judgment. Rather than

asking the question, "Oh, this hasn't worked. Let's figure out why." So that is one of the gifts of that year.

07-01:02:45

The other thing that was interesting that I never quite solved, was that I'm slightly hypoglycemic, so I would always carry food. And so I would come to these meetings and pull out my food, and everybody would want some. Now, I was older than most of them, but I was not their mother and I was not particularly interested in feeding everybody, but I never quite figured out how to handle that question. I would be open about it now. I mean, now I would say in a group, "Hey, we're meeting at six o'clock. At least half of you in this room haven't eaten. I didn't get to eat, but I brought food. I'm not bringing food for everybody. How do you want to deal with this? You don't make good decisions when you're hungry, when you have low blood sugar. That's the other thing. You need to eat. Do we want to start ordering out and having food? Yes and no. Yes, because it's not good for us to try to make good decisions when we're low on blood sugar. No, because every time—" like in the women's movement, women's liberation movement, we discovered if you eat, you waste a whole lot of time. So unless that's part of what you're doing, is having fellowship together, it can take away from the meeting. You have to figure it out. I don't have an answer for any group, but it needs to be addressed, in my opinion, because that was, on a very personal level, that was hard for me.

07-01:04:21

Tewes: Well, and that's also the brass tacks of how you organize people, back to thinking about when you were in Mississippi making sure the workers had food at the end of the day.

07-01:04:29

Allen: That's right, that's right. And how in Mississippi, some of the women who never—would not go down and try to register to vote, were willing to have us in their homes and feed us. And we needed that, you know?

07-01:04:49

Tewes: No, I think that's a great example. Is there anything more you want to say about your time with the Venceremos Brigade?

07-01:05:02

Allen: I think it's important to make the point that because something's hard, doesn't mean that it was bad. I mean, I have feelings. I'm not going to here, but I could tell you fifteen things that I thought were *bad* about what happened. [laughs] The truth of the matter is what's important is that you learn from your mistakes, and you learn from situations that are hard. And that's why I think that was one of the most—I learned so much from that. I'm very grateful that I went to Cuba, very grateful that I had that experience of, again, touching that deep passion in myself.

07-01:05:49

And the other thing I would say is that at the end, the last thing I did in the Venceremos Brigade here in the San Francisco Bay area was to help the next contingent, the sixth contingent who'd come back, to organize a July twenty-sixth celebration. That's the attack on the Moncada [Barracks]. It's a big, big historical moment in Cuba. And that was wonderful. They gave me a lot of respect, the people I worked with, and we had a wonderful celebration. It was a nice way to end my—the work on the project, to have worked with people. Just as an aside, because I'm thinking of it, that contingent, the men's dormitory burned down. And my friend who went, Judy Syfers, said that of course, you know, their thought was, Well, that does that. I guess that's the end. Well no, they built it back in like a day. [laughs] I mean, no! You rebuild the thing, you keep going, you keep working, you don't give up. *Very* important for us from North America.

07-01:07:06

Oh, and the other thing to point out: we all go down there with all that thing of in the United States of, I'm Black, I'm Asian, I'm Chicana, I'm white—we're all different. We go down there, and we're all considered North Americans. And you know what? To a large degree, we were all the same. [laughs] Of course with some differences. But really, it did teach us that within the context of the world, we're still all from the United States and we have a lot in common, including that arrogance of being from the United States.

07-01:07:48

Tewes: Yeah, that's a good thing to note. I also just want to point out for future researchers that this is during a moment in which the United States has an embargo against Cuba, so this was actually a bit of a challenge to get there. So—

07-01:08:02

Allen: Oh yes, yes. And when we came back, we came back through Canada, and they never stamped our passports, because that would have been the illegal—but when we came back through Canada, they went through everything and they took anything that was Cuban. [laughs] Well, guess what they took from me, guess what the United States took from me when I came back from Cuba? Seashells. I mean, I was bringing back—I'd found some seashells. I found them in the sand we used for making cement, and I collected them and I brought them back, and that's what they took, because it was Cuban. [laughs] Don't you love it?

07-01:08:41

Tewes: So important. You know, I'm wondering, since we're getting close to the end of our time today, if we want to save Union WAGE for next time, but instead skip a few years right now to speak about the birth of your son, Casey, in 1975. Does that seem like the moment to do—or what would you prefer?

07-01:09:02

Allen: So we did talk about *Reluctant Reformers*, right? We talked about that before.

07-01:09:09
Tewes: Yes, but do you have anything [to add]?

07-01:09:10
Allen: And we did talk about the fact that I continued to teach and speak about the racism in the woman suffrage movement. So from coming back in '72 to '73, I worked for the Venceremos Brigade, but from then through until I joined Union WAGE—and even after—I was speaking in both women's liberation and New Left groups around racism and around racism in the woman suffrage movement.

07-01:09:38
Yes, we thought when we came here in 1968 and saw what a diverse city it was, that this was a place we could have a child, where it wouldn't just be the Black/white paradigm. He's light skinned, and so this has been interesting, because I would never have—I don't call my child—I don't say I had a Black child, and I don't say I have a Black child, because he is, in fact, mixed race. Now, many people—and I've been criticized for this—who've never seen my son, who would have said that, "No, any child of an interracial marriage is—if it's a Black parent—Black." Well, if you look Black, I think that is easy to understand. If you don't look Black or if only Black people understand that you're mixed, which is the case—white people do not notice that my son is not white; people of color tend to be aware of it.

07-01:10:45
But what *I* know is that my son is not white. He does not think like a white person, and when I first realized that was back when he was about three. He says to me, "Mama, play the record with the white woman with the big face." And he's talking about a Holly Near record. We had records back then, right? So they're big, so it's a big face she has on it. And I thought, Oh, no white person would have ever said the white woman, they would have said the woman with the big face. It was like, Oh. And he is aware, when we would go back to visit my mother and it's a white community, he was aware he was in a white community. So the consciousness is of a mixed person, but he was never brought up in a Black/white situation.

07-01:11:45
Because of the way in which they were attempting to do integration in San Francisco in the schools, because I'd been in the South, I did know that it was important that he be registered as Black rather than white. But the problem was because he was registered Black, he couldn't go to one of the schools that were predominantly Black, because they didn't need more Black kids; [laughs] they needed people who were of *other* colors, right? And I do remember the very nice administrative person saying, "Well, you know, most of the people who have children like yours call them mixed." [laughs] And of course, you know, that is what he is.

07-01:12:25

But in terms of that one, I was still operating out of that kind of Southern awareness that—I mean, my mother-in-law, again, for white people, looked white and was raised Black. My sister-in-law of my first marriage and my son look very much alike. I have a photograph of the two of them; you'd think she was his mother. But she was blonde. When she was younger, my mother-in-law had blonde ringlets. So it's that whole thing in the segregated South, people were this wide range of color. And in the segregated South, Casey would be Black, but in San Francisco, he essentially was mixed.

07-01:13:13

Having a child was one of the best things I've ever done. I was ambivalent for a number of years about having a child, both because of the being mixed race, but also because I bought into the idea that children—raising children can be oppressive, which I think it had been a lot for women isolated in homes. But when I had him, I was at a point in my life where I was thrilled with the idea of being able to do something other than save the world, and focus on one little person. You know, we didn't have a dryer that first year, so although I washed all his clothes in a washing machine, I had to hang up all these little thingies. [laughs] And for a while, I was perfectly happy doing it, because I wasn't having to figure out: what was the important position paper to write about how to get white women to understand racism or whatever it was. I just had to hang up these little clothes, and I needed that break, I needed that. Then after a year I said, "Hey, enough with this." [laughs]

07-01:14:26

At that point, I was working with Union WAGE. And at first it was, for the first six months, I had a baby. And I do have photographs of us being on a picket line with the little person. But mostly then, Robert was working at *The Black Scholar: [Journal of Black Studies and Research]*, at a regular job. A lot of Union WAGE activities were on the weekend, and he'd be home on the weekend. And so he would have the baby, and I would be—or the small child—and I would be at Union WAGE. I can remember more than once, we used to have a—we had a newspaper at Union WAGE. We used to lay it out on Saturday and Sunday every two months. Once every two months, we would put the paper together. This was not done on a computer, no computers. Everything was typed on a Selectric typewriter, and then we laid it out, cut and pasted, and laid it out on these big things that then went to the printer. And so we would do that on Saturday and Sunday.

07-01:15:32

I would come home, tired, and I would find—let's see, so Casey was already able to sit up, so my memory is the one of—the one I remember is: so he's already a little person and he's sitting at the top of the stairs happy to see me, the house is clean, and the dinner is ready. [laughs] I could never figure out how Robert could take care of the kid all day, clean the house, and have a good meal on. I never was good at this kind of stuff. But then I also realized that he was only doing it twice every two months, you know? [laughs] But I

did not come from a good homemaker. My mother was not a good homemaker. Her mother was, but my mother was not. And I was not—am not. That's not my thing. I do the best I can.

07-01:16:19

It was a period where I appreciated the positive aspects of being focused on a small child and a small child's needs, and the rhythm it did. And I did take him to a parent-child observation class starting at six months on, so I had, along with working with Union WAGE women, I had, twice a week, access down the street, down the hill, to a place where there were other mothers with small children. I was lucky enough to have this wonderful teacher, who was brilliant. That was just amazing. So I was not isolated. Also, some of the younger women in Union WAGE were interested in babysitting, so I also had people babysitting.

07-01:17:13

One of them continued for a number of years, so she would even call up when he was—he was probably about three then—she would call up and say, "Can he come spend the night?" And he would go spend the night with her. I remember he was still in diapers at night, and I had said to him—you know, because the thing is I just would verbalize sometimes where I was at—and I said, "You know, I'm getting to the point where I really wish you didn't need to have diapers at night." And so he goes off with his diapers one time with Anne, and he comes back the next day and I say something about the diapers. She said, "Oh, he didn't want to wear them." And he never wore them again. So it was just a nice thing, too, that I had support, I had help, and that Casey had access to other people. His father did leave when he was about a year-and-a-half, and so then he was going some nights a week to his dad, so he was experiencing being with people other than his mother.

07-01:18:30

From six months on, I started working with Union WAGE at an office job, as it were, in the home of Jean Maddox, the president at that point and an incredibly wonderful woman. I learned a lot from her. But anyway, the drudge work of the small organization was in her apartment at that point, and so I would go in and log the new subscriptions and all that kind of stuff. And I had a friend, who was at that point living with a couple—with three other people—and the couple had a small child who was a little bit older than Casey. So once a week I would take Casey in Oakland, drop him off to Linda and Tetsuge, and then I would go to Jean Maddox's place and work for, like, whatever it was, four hours, and then I'd go pick him up and we'd come home. That was before he went to formal childcare. He was first going to this friend with this older boy, and I was able to do some work. That was work for money, so that was nice, a little bit of money, because that was the office work.

07-01:19:45

But the most important thing about that is I got to, when we took a break, was talk to Jean Maddox, who was at that point dying of cancer. She had been the founding president of Union WAGE. She also had been president of her union [local] and was key involved in what she always thought was the first strike of women workers, as women, against essentially sexism, when they discovered—and this was Lucky stores. The clericals discovered that their union contract was not equal to the grocery workers'—male—contract, and so they went out on strike. That was just a privilege to be able to talk with her, learn from her, learn about her life. Her father had been part Native American, and she'd been raised to be very proud of that, whereas a lot of white people who have Native American blood were given the information that that was something to be ashamed of, but she was not; she was raised to be proud of it, and she was. And she was an old lefty. She had a lot of experience.

07-01:20:59

Tewes: Yeah. I want to speak a lot more about her next time when we truly delve into Union WAGE. But I want to thank you for all of the insights you've provided about community and childcare that's important in *doing work* for women. I appreciate that. But I wanted to ask a follow-up to that and ask you: what impact, if any, do you think becoming a mother had on your approach to the women's movement or organizing in general?

07-01:21:37

Allen: Huh, I'm not sure I've ever answered that question. I think in my case, although I say I was not isolated in terms of help with childcare, I was isolated both by my age and being interracially married from a community of women who were all raising their kids at the same time. I was taking Casey—Tetsuge was already a couple of years older. Then the women in Third World Women's Alliance, who I'd known in the [Venceremos] Brigade, they started having kids a little bit younger. And when they would meet, the men would all take care of the kids, but they were like a little community with it. I was kind of isolated. I did not, myself, participate in building the children's—I don't know if it was called the [Bay Area Women's and] Children's Center yet—but the childcare concerns that women's liberation had in San Francisco, the work that they did, there were women that did that. I was not part of that.

07-01:22:41

But I would say more than feeling an identity with mothers, per se, I would say two things. One is there became an anti-male tendency towards boy children in the lesbian feminist part of the movement. And having a boy child, I was very empathetic with the women who had to deal with that, because many of the children born of the turkey-baster, children of artificial insemination, were male, and that was a contradiction. So that was a very serious question at one point: what about the male children? And can you raise boys to have many of the good qualities of women, and to hold onto the good qualities of men, but not, because of the dominant culture, become the obnoxious males that so many are? I can say my own experience with that is

that's a yes and a no. When he was in this house, that child knew enough to put the toilet seat down. But when he left, he stopped doing it. [laughs] As far as I'm concerned, that is one of the key questions in any household: is that toilet seat down or is it left up?

07-01:24:22
Tewes: [laughs] A good point, a good point. Well, as we close out for today, Chude, is there anything you want to make sure we discuss?

07-01:24:32
Allen: I think I'm happy at the moment with where we are, and I'm looking forward to talking a bit more about Union WAGE.

07-01:24:38
Tewes: Yes.

07-01:24:39
Allen: Very much so, because I think it's an organization that has not gotten its due from historians, so I'm very happy to put in a plug for Union WAGE.

07-01:24:50
Tewes: Excellent. Looking forward to it. Okay, thank you.

Interview 8: February 17, 2021

08-00:00:00

Tewes: This is an eighth interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on February 17, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you for joining me again today, Chude.

08-00:00:24

Allen: Yes.

08-00:00:25

Tewes: We wanted to start off thinking about some labor work you were doing during the women's movement, and one in particular being a picket in Stockton for the laborers there. I was hoping you could tell me a little bit more about that, and maybe around when it was?

08-00:00:43

Allen: So I think the way to talk about it is to mention June Jordan, who was—when I came to California, she was one of the early people in women's liberation, as well as having done other things. She was a bit older. She was in that next half a generation up and had been active in her unions, and so she was very connected to the union women. She was the one that got us women's liberation women to go out to Stockton or Antioch, wherever it was, to the paper and pulp mills to do a support picket with some of the women workers who were picketing to have protective laws extended to men, rather than taken away from women. I think I did mention that we were told to wear dresses, and they were all in pants. [laughs]

08-00:01:34

But the issue that it was dealing with is one of the key differences between what you would call a working-class perspective on the Equal Rights Amendment and the professional women's perspective, because the protective laws had been established on the basis that women needed more protection than men, because they were the weaker sex. The people working to unionize the women workers and to get them the protections that all workers really deserve hadn't been able to get it done any other way, and they felt it was still too important. So you had things like a fifty-pound limit—a woman couldn't pick up over fifty pounds. And so then what would happen, of course, is that companies—in managerial positions, the worker would have to be able to pick up fifty pounds, even though he—*he*—was never going to do it, but it would keep women out. So the professional women and the women who were focusing on upward mobility wanted to get rid of these protective laws, because they hurt women's chances of moving up.

08-00:02:48

I remember before I met—before I talked to June Jordan about this and met the Union WAGE [Women's Alliance to Gain Equality] people, I remember

being on one demonstration we did, which was against this particular protective law. I remember one of the women walking with her child in a pack on her back with a sign saying, "This is more than fifty pounds." You know, so there was that whole question. But that became one of the real questions: do you pass an Equal Rights Amendment that destroys all protective legislation, or do you pass an Equal Rights Amendment that guarantees that the protective laws would go to men? So some of these were—like fifty pounds, obviously, that was just as good for a man as for a woman, that that's a limit on how much you would pick up. There are lots of working-class men that have back problems and, of course, have to leave the workforce, because of disabilities and things. Those kinds of things were, you know, were things.

08-00:03:51

There were other issues that were particularly more oriented to women. One of them was couches in the ladies' room so a woman could lie down, especially when she was having her period. Now, of course, it would be perfectly wonderful for men to have couches, too, that they could lie down on. [laughs] But you can see how the particular of that—and places, they took them out as the whole question of equal rights started to become a—even without the Equal Rights Amendment being passed, the whole issue of equal rights now was up in the air. And, Oh, men don't have this, now *you* don't have it. Another key one, probably one of the most important, was that women workers had to be given rides home at night if they worked late hours, again, as a protection. And all of a sudden, you know, You can take a cab, you could take the bus, you can walk home. Who cares? Men don't get it—instead of that, Yeah, all night workers ought to have a way to get home, to get—because it's dark and it's dangerous in almost any place. So those were examples. That's what the issue was that we went out and supported those women for, and that was one of the key issues in Union WAGE.

08-00:05:09

Before I came into that organization, they had been organizing against it, and they got the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution to only pass the Equal Rights Amendment if it included extending protective laws to men. What you note in most histories of the women's movement, of the whole issue of equality for women, is that protective laws don't exist, except as a bad thing. That really does reflect the writers and the thinkers, the academics who are thinking much more about—what do they care? They can go to the bathroom whenever they want, that kind of thing. If you're a professional, you have a lot more freedom. But the idea that women on the line, women who were working at kinds of jobs where those kinds of protections were key, that was really important.

08-00:06:06

So then this same June Jordan invites me for lunch one day, and she had told me when Union WAGE formed—Union WAGE formed in '71, essentially because of a NOW, National Organization for Women conference that was held in Berkeley. There had been a critique that there's no—that nothing on

their program involved working women, so at the last minute they put up—they had a panel. Jean Maddox and a woman named Anne Draper were on that panel. And then the story always goes that they started complaining in the ladies' room about how there really should be a working women's organization. I gather Anne Draper, who I never was privileged to meet, she was one of those doers. So well, [hits palm with fist] let's do it! And she told Jean, and Jean announced during, I guess, the panel, that there would be a meeting at lunch of anyone interested in a working women's organization, and thirty-five women joined. So June Jordan had told me about this, and she told me it was for women in unions, and it was to focus on getting more—the unions more sensitive to women's needs and to get more female leadership.

08-00:07:19

So she invites me to lunch one day—probably '73, maybe '74, I can't remember—after lunch she says, "Well, how come you haven't joined Union WAGE?" I said, "Well, I'm not in a union. I can't." And she said, "Oh no, we changed that." Because the other focus of the organization was to get women workers *into* unions, to organize the unorganized. And they realized it was a contradiction to only limit the membership to people who were already in unions, if their goal was to bring in the unorganized. So then I dutifully gave my $3.50. When I went into the organization, that's what membership cost. By the time I left in '79, it was $7.50. So I've been thinking, like, the $7.50 is probably about $50 today, I would think. You know, not an insignificant amount, but not a huge amount. It could have even been a little less, because that was what it meant to be a member. That's all. That you said you agreed with—there was a purpose and goal set, and that you said you agreed with them, and you were in.

08-00:08:33

So I thought I was just supporting the organization. But I had signed up for a workshop with Joyce Maupin, one of the key leaders of Union WAGE, and she was doing a workshop on working women with—probably the [San Francisco] Liberation School—with one of our lefty community schools. And this, I believe, would have been '74. And so I go to the first meeting of the class that was held at Modern Times [Bookstore], when Modern Times was on Seventeenth St. I'm sitting there, and Joyce turns to one of the other older women and she says, "Pam's our newest Union WAGE member." I'm going like, Oh dear, that means something. And sure enough, I get a phone call: will I come and help put out the newspaper? They had a paper that came out every two months, and they would have—back then, we did everything by hand. There were no computers. And not only was everything typed, but then you kind of pasted it on the pages and stuff.

08-00:09:39

The first couple times I went, every two months was in Berkeley. Maxine Jenkins was editor, and it was somewhat chaotic. The first time I went not all the articles had been written. They're just doing their best, right, and you'd help wherever you could. And then after a couple months, the layout for the

newspaper moved to a woman's loft in San Francisco, which meant we had space, and then we could really lay out—we could put—because they were large pieces of paper. The paper was a newspaper size, and you were laying out the pages. And then it was easier to assign people, "You two work on this. Here are the articles. Here are the photos you could choose from. You lay out these two." People would be talking and working, and then at lunch we would all sit and talk. It was very much a combination of doing meaningful political work, and doing it in a way that really sustained and nurtured. So that was a very positive thing.

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Then it was Joyce who called me up one day and said, "We need more people to run for the executive board. That's all. She didn't say, "I wish you'd run." Not, "We think you'd be good," or these reasons or anything, but just, "We need more people." So I said okay, and I ran for the board and I was elected to the executive board. We are now talking about a woman who has never worked in a union—I mean, never been in a unionized job at that point in her life, who has mostly worked in semi-professional and limited kinds of things and been primarily an activist, and so knew very little about the whole thing, but was getting on the executive board.

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What I want to say here is that what I was being offered was the opportunity to work with women who were my mother's age and extremely experienced organizers. Many of them had been in leftist organizations, as well as unions, so they were—they had a lot of skills. By the time I got there, they had already, in '73, won at a statewide AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] convention. They practiced and practiced the Robert's Rules of Order and how to do it, to get the convention to agree to have some kind of women's commission. So they were focused, they knew what they were doing. They, of course, had also been organizing against taking protective legislation away from women workers. So I was all of a sudden in the situation of being with these kinds of women.

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What happened in the fall of '74, I believe, is that the [Coalition] of Labor Union Women [CLUW] was organizing, and the whole question became: do we need a Union WAGE if there's now going to be CLUW? Now, CLUW, of course, limited its participants to women in unions. And so you got into this question of: oh, then what will happen to the unorganized workers? Well, I went to a meeting in Berkeley where this was debated, and it was, for me, a really profound experience, because these women were so experienced that first somebody would speak on one side, and I would go, Wow! Then somebody would speak on the other and I'd go, Wow, yeah! [laughs] I mean, it was really interesting that there were good arguments for both disbanding Union WAGE and going into CLUW, and taking all this trade union experience that they had and putting it there; and there was a good argument for keeping Union WAGE, because there's still this question of the

unorganized workers that—I read that in '79, in one article, it was 12 percent of employed women were organized. I mean, we're not talking about 80 percent were organized. Even if that's not quite the right statistic in '74, it's not like most people were—most women were organized yet. But it was a period where there was a lot of movement around women who were trying to organize into unions. That was happening.

08-00:14:13

So part of the question was that Jean Maddox had been president of OPEIU [Office and Professional Employees International Union] Local 29, and that is a union that, in the East Bay, that had been very active and very militant. Prior to the founding of Union WAGE, in 1970, the women—Jean was president of the union, and they realized that their contract in the Lucky stores, the women's contract, the clerical workers' contract was not comparable to the men. And they ended up going out on strike demanding that they be treated—that they have equal contracts. Jean used to think—and I have no idea if it [is true]—but that's the first time that the labor union and women's liberation came together. She gave a great deal of credit to women's liberation for opening her eyes to thinking about this question of, Wait a minute. Why do we have lesser? Why are we accepting a less good contract than the men?

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Now, to step back to June Jordan, she told me that she had been involved in a strike when she was working where the union said to the women, "Now, the men need to support their families, and so is it okay if we just give them the strike benefits?" So of course, she said yes, and she lost her house. She was a single mom. I mean, you know, this was totally—I'm not sure it's possible to understand what it was like back then, that the ways in which women were discriminated against was so given, and the mythology that everybody had a husband at home supporting the family and a woman was only working for [makes air quotes] extras or something, was big enough that even somebody who was a single mom would agree to such a thing. So Jean Maddox was very key on the fact that women's liberation had opened her eyes to some of this stuff. Oh, you know? So that was 1970.

08-00:16:34

That was the Lucky strike, and they were effective. But they were a very radical union, and eventually the international put them into trusteeship, which meant they took the leadership away, they were no longer allowing the union to run itself. And that had originally been set up, of course, for corruption. An international could go in and take over the leadership of a local union when the union leadership had been corrupt, but these were radicals. They'd had a stand against the Vietnam War, they were militant, right? So Jean and Joyce, who was retired by then, and some of the older—what I would call old guard, they were really wrestling with this question, also, of independent unions versus being in an international, where the international can actually take the control away from you.

08-00:17:34

So in 1975, in the fall, Union WAGE organized a West Coast working women's organization [conference], and the idea was to get together as many different types of working women's organizations as we could. Now, I was home at that point with an infant, and so I took over the organizing, and I was told to find as many women's unions and women's associations as I could, which I did. And 500 women came to San Francisco, and we had a two-day conference, [ORGANIZE!].

08-00:18:15

[laughs] As an aside—again, given when we're—given the period, it helps to remember the timing. We had asked the women at KPFA—you know, all these places, like KPFA, KQED, etcetera, they're all starting to have training programs for women and minorities, so we asked some of the women: would they take care of the sound system for our conference? And then, of course, we didn't have much money, so we decided that we would take the risk, even though it was November, that it wouldn't be a cold day. [laughs] Needless to say, it was a cold day. So the women go over there the week before or whatever to just check things out, and they go into the auditorium which we've rented. They look up on the wall and they see two speakers. And they go, "Oh wow, it's got speakers," and they leave. Hello. Nobody checked the speakers; they hadn't worked for years. [laughs] So we get there, first day of a conference with 500 people—women—not only is it freezing cold, but we have no microphones. These are the concrete things you learn. But back then, people were—women were just being trained in this kind of stuff, and it was such a classic example of, No, it's not enough to look. You have to *see* if something works.

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But politically, the key thing of that conference was that some of the old guard were really interested in independent working women's associations, because of this question of trusteeship. And some of the union women were horrified that you would even consider an association, many of which were partly [an] employer-allowed kind of thing, versus a union. What made it more difficult was that the vice president of Union WAGE, Kay Eisenhower, was getting married that weekend. Somehow, she had completely spaced out on the dates for the conference. And so she gets married on the second day of the conference, and we were all like, What? You know, that's just what it is, except that then she comes back and writes a scathing, just a scathing critique of the conference, because of all the independent associations, because she's a union person.

08-00:20:51

In terms of the question of leadership, that's one of those times where things got screwy. And so the debate that ought to have happened prior to organizing, between the president, who wanted the independent groups, as well as union people and the vice president, who thought it should only be unionized, didn't happen. I want to say part of the contradiction of Union

WAGE is that Union WAGE was encouraging women workers, full-time workers, to be active in their unions, to organize if they didn't have a union and to be active in Union WAGE. And if you had a family, where were you going to have the time to do all this? So this is one of the major contradictions of that organization, was that the people who were most—really competent to lead the organization and to raise these kinds of questions, also were the most overworked, if they weren't already retired. That's just what it was.

08-00:22:00

Plus, when Union WAGE—during that debate about whether to disband and all go into CLUW, the majority voted to remain Union WAGE, but a segment of that same group left to go to work in CLUW. So again, some of the people that ought to have been moving into leadership as people like Anne Draper had died, Jean Maddox was dying of cancer, as the older, retired women who had helped to organize this were moving out, that next age group a little bit older than myself, maybe five, ten years older, who were experienced in the labor movement, were less available. And so what you had is you had, at the same time as some of these union women moved over to work in CLUW, you had women's liberation people coming into Union WAGE, who wanted to learn more about working women and to support the organization of working women, and in some cases were new to unions themselves and wanted to learn the skills that Union WAGE could offer. These are the kind of contradictions.

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Then Maxine Jenkins, who had been editor of the paper, who Joyce and Jean both had thought, This was the person, this is the charismatic leader who could combine the labor movement and the women's liberation movement—that beginning that Jean had seen at the Lucky strike that they won, where women's liberation came in and you had this beginning of working women and women's liberation people working together to better the conditions of women workers—they saw Maxine Jenkins being the person that could do that. But she led a walkout from SEIU [Service Employees International Union] among city workers, which Union WAGE people were fine with, except she decided, or they decided, to affiliate with the Laborers' Union. And so the question here was: what is acceptable? The question wasn't: should you or shouldn't you affiliate with an international? That was a different question that people were debating. This one was: what *type* of union? And the old guard in women's liberation [in Union WAGE] were opposed to joining, for them, aligning themselves with the Laborers. I don't know enough to know all the proof of why they were what the Union WAGE people said they were, but the point is they did not think that morally and ethically that was the kind of union you should join with. So this created a crisis, because this was the woman that they had really hoped was going to bring the labor movement and women's liberation together.

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Then one of the people on the board, Denise D'Anne, had originally walked out with Maxine Jenkins and the people—was part of that walkout and

decided when they were going to join with the Laborers that she did not—could not approve of it. And at that point, she came to the next executive board meeting and told us that she was transsexual, that she had been a man and now was a woman. Maxine had threatened that she was going to tell people if Denise didn't stay. And I not only know this from Denise's side, by the way. I can't say whether Maxine really did or didn't [tell people], but Herb Caen did have a column—he did not *name* Denise D'Anne, but he had a column in which he did imply that there was someone in that union—in other words, somehow he knew. We're talking about '74, '75, we're talking about that period. This is not a period yet where being transsexual is something that you can just be out there with. We're '20, '21 now, [laugh] right, and we're only now having—so but what was significant for me was that these older women did not pause, "Yes, you are welcome. Yes, you have a place here." There wasn't even a hesitation. It was quite amazing.

08-00:27:02

I think that that was one of the things about Union WAGE I can also say, is that it was an organization, for that short period of time of the seventies, where younger women and older women could work together. Lesbian and straight women could work together; we had at least one transsexual. There was this range of women doing traditional female kinds of jobs and women in alternative, non-traditional kinds of jobs. At its best, it was a place where women workers and women supporting working women could really meet and work together, and at its best it worked very well. And this is at a period in especially the later part of the seventies where that's not as true in some of the women's liberation groupings, where there's more tension. But for us, it was—we were all learning and working.

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I think part of the reason we could do that, one of the strengths of this organization, is that it was focused on concretes. Again, the women who set it up, they were professional—I mean, professional in the sense that they've been doing it all their lives—organizers. They knew what they were doing. But the purpose of the organization was to help women to organize into unions, which means you need skills. So there were articles written in the paper, and then we did—we put out a handbook, *Organize!*: *A [Working Women's] Handbook*, on what to do. We had numerous how-tos and we had workshops. Sometimes people would be trying to organize somewhere, and they would contact the organization and come in for a workshop, or come in and really get some tutoring from one of the more experienced people. That was the most concrete of what we did, and it was quite exciting.

08-00:29:08

Now, one of the times that—early—that I was involved had to do with the question of the minimum wage. The Industrial Welfare Commission was having a hearing about whether or not to raise the minimum wage. When, at this point, I think Union WAGE thought that the minimum wage should be $4 an hour, and that was very much bigger than what it was at that point. [laughs]

I mean, it's, again, it's a long time ago, fifty years ago, and of course there's been inflation. They had a position of what it should—what the minimum wage should be. So we were supposed to go in and testify in front of the Industrial Welfare Commission, and I had never done anything like this, I had never testified in front of a government board. I had my little speech which—I gave it. But the one I've never forgotten was Joyce Maupin. Older woman, highly experienced. She goes in there and she goes—runs down this list of, "If you only make this much money, this is the—you can only afford a bra that costs this much, and after four washings, it has fallen apart. If you only make this much money, you buy a blouse, and it lasts five washings, and then *it* falls apart. If you have only this much money, you have to buy—" I mean, she went through this list, and it's the clothes ones I remember the most. I was so impressed. It's that whole thing: the poor pay more for what they have. They pay more for lousy—for their housing, and it's lousy. They pay more for food, and it's the lousier food. They pay more for their clothes—she was showing you end up paying more for your clothes, because you can't afford the good tweed that could last twenty years, and so you end up having to replace the Orlon sweater—I think we were into Orlon at that point—[laughs] but you know, the synthetic sweater. I was just so impressed with that, that she was concrete. She wasn't just [saying that] everybody deserves a living wage, but what does that mean? What does that mean? That was a real gift of working in that organization.

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I became editor of the newspaper at some point when the previous—well, first of all, Maxine Jenkins had been editor and then she was gone. And then there was a different—Lenore Weiss was editor, and when she resigned, I became [editor]. Now, Jean was dying. I was working also doing some of the bookkeeping for them. They'd had somebody doing some of it who left, and they asked me if I would. It was one day a week, an afternoon, and I had—my baby was about six months or eight months at that point, so I would drop him off at a friend—I think I mentioned that already—and I would go and I would work with Jean Maddox, which means we would—I would open up all the envelopes and the new people sending in their memberships, and write it all down. It was all pretty hands-on at that point; we didn't have computers. No computers—a typewriter, but no computers.

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At some point she said to me that I needed to move into leadership, and I said, "But I never was in a union." [laughs] And she goes, "Doesn't matter. You'll learn what you need to learn." Now understand, there was this vacuum, because the—so some of the people who should be moving into leadership as Jean is dying and we need a new president, and we need—some of these women that would have been excellent at this have gone into CLUW, and others are already overworked. Remember, we have a vice president who couldn't quite focus on us that fall, because she was getting married. And you know, good for her, but it did present a problem in terms of the vacuum. So

people like myself were moving into leadership positions, as much because there was a need as for any other reason.

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And then, of course, Jean died and there was Joyce still. Now, Joyce was a very different kind of leader from Jean. Jean Maddox was charismatic. She was the kind of person that people had loved, she was a beloved leader of her union. Joyce was not charismatic. Joyce was a nuts-and-bolts person and an excellent writer, so she was the kind of person who was more making sure that all the people who'd sent in letters with their dues, it all got written down. Just the concrete, nuts and bolts of running an organization. And as I say, she was an excellent writer. She wrote a couple pamphlets on—one called *Labor Heroines: [Ten Women Who Led the Struggle* and *Working Women and their Organizations: 150 Years of Struggle]*, which were short, little vignettes about different union organizers. Excellent, excellent stuff. Very good at writing down concretely the kinds of things that people should know.

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But we lacked a strong—I'm not positive just "charismatic" is quite the right word, but we lacked someone who had the vision—that's the right word I want, the "vision." We had a nuts-and-bolts person, but Jean had been the one with the vision. And I gather Anne Draper had been, but Anne had also passed away. Jean was also very positive towards the women's liberation movement, as was Joyce, so we were very welcomed. But in my opinion, I was thrust into doing a level of leadership I had no experience with. What I had experience with was years in women's liberation, and before that the Southern freedom movement. That's what I brought in. And I had taught myself how to write with the *Free Space: [A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation]* pamphlet, so that I was competent to begin to do the editing.

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I worked in Union WAGE from certainly '74 to '79—I'm not sure if I came in in '73 or '74—and I was in leadership for most of the time I was in this organization. At the end, there was a struggle. I was part of a group that felt that the organization, which—the organization had a strong, long list of purpose and goals; it hadn't at the beginning. At the beginning it had been focused basically on trade union women and organizing women into trade unions. But over the years, there was a statement against racism, there was a statement against discrimination against lesbians and gays. There was, you know, this long list. And we *did* things. [laughs] We did things like two of us put together a booklet. We had these booklets on how to organize, and we had these booklets on labor heroines and stuff, and then two of us put together a booklet called *Woman-Controlled Conception* by two women who wrote this article anonymously about turkey baster babies, about how to get a baby without having to have intercourse with a man. You needed, of course, a friendly male that was going to give you his sperm. But we did that. We did that because they needed to stay—at that point they needed to stay anonymous, because they weren't sure that the state wasn't going to come

down on them and take their babies. They didn't know, at that point—there was no safeguards that—so we did that. So I'm working in this organization where the organization was fine with us doing that. We ran part of it as an article in the paper. We had these broad things in the paper.

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At some point, I proposed that of the six papers we did a year, that three of them be focus issues. Like we do one on family, we do one on health and safety or the health industry, and we do one on education. And for some reason, which I don't understand, that became controversial. And really, the organization kind of got to a point where there were some of us that really thought that women workers' days don't stop when they leave the job, and the kinds of issues that they face in all aspects of their life should be part of it. We'd run an article in the paper, for example, which I'm very proud of, by a nurse who worked on a ward where women had abortions, and she did an article where she described three women and *why* they had to do the abortions, and it was not callous at all. It was not, "I got pregnant. I'm going to get rid of it." It was they couldn't afford—she talked about the grief, she talked about how hard it was for them. And I've always been very proud of that article. That didn't fit the organize/union wing, that was a different thing. So but it got into a struggle about that.

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Some of us, we developed something called Women's Words, [a performance group], and this was partly connected to my mentor Pat Robinson in New York. She would be sending things. Some of the writings ended up in the paper, again. Some of them were very perfect for the paper. A wonderful poem about imagining a woman getting up from her place at [the factory and joining] the shirtwaist strike of 1909; and a beautiful poem about what it was like, about going and waiting, and then everybody getting up and going. Just a great—I have no idea how historically accurate it was, but it was a wonderful poem about rising up together and taking a stand. Right. And we had Hattie Gossett, who did a great poem on being a waitress—"The Butter Poems," they were called—and did some other writing for us, too. There were different things in the paper we'd already done, but now we were trying to—we actually did readings with some of this stuff. We did one at this convention in '79, of Union WAGE, when this was the issue. How broad are we going to focus? Or, How much are we going to just stay on the issue of women workers organizing into unions? That was really the issue. And it was never an either/or from our side. It was never like, Stop that, but it was about broadening it out.

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There are two things. I am criticized in at least one study: that I didn't understand the importance of unions, I didn't understand how important it was for women to organize and the power that's involved in organizing. I don't think that's quite right. But there were two things I can say. One is that Cathy Cade used to do photographs for us in this period, throughout Union WAGE

time. She did a lot of photographs, and we've done one or two presentations. When she was collecting the photographs for the presentations, she could see how the strikes had subsided. By the end of the seventies, there was not as much organizing and there wasn't as much vital strike—that wasn't happening as much, so there's that—just that that was the case. And the other thing I'd say is that it seemed to me then, and I would still say, if there'd been the leadership just to do—there's no reason why we couldn't have done it all. But I knew I couldn't replace the people who had been teaching how to organize a union, because I had never organized a union. I could certainly help, and I could certainly make sure that things were in the paper. So I don't think it was quite as cut-and-[dried] as that, but there's no question I was for expanding the way that—the vitality of the organization.

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The thing I would say in terms of this is that I don't think there was the leadership to move it to whatever would have been the next stage of really vital help for organizing women workers. The timing wasn't there, and we didn't have the personnel. I certainly was not one of them. I couldn't have done that. I left the organization in '79; they ended in '82. They did some good things. You know, it was a small organization, and they still did some good things around supporting—but the idea of the original organizers, and especially when CLUW was formed, that Union WAGE could be a national organization as an alternative to CLUW, that would bring in all the unorganized workers, that vast number of women that were not yet in a union, that was not able to happen. There were a few chapters that formed, but it—we never became that kind of organization.

08-00:43:03

I consider it to have been a great training ground. I learned how to do Robert's Rules of Order—and I think I mentioned last time I was so sick of consensus decision making—and I learned that I was a good facilitator. I learned that I was capable of being a chair, and listening to both sides of an argument and articulating both sides, and I could do that. And then if you have an opinion and you're the chair, you step away from the chair while you do your opinion. That part of it I really liked. And I liked the fact that there were minutes in meetings, and that if I disagreed with something I could say, "Put it in the minutes." [laughs] I don't know whatever happened—I mean, the minutes are at the Labor Library [Labor Archives and Research Center, J. Paul Leonard Library] at San Francisco State. And I mean who cares, but at the time, after all those years of being in consensus decision making, where you'd say things and it would drop on the floor, it was just nice to know it would be somewhere. That was one of the very positive things, along with learning a lot of things, learning how to speak in a different way and a lot of organizing tools, so I did learn all that.

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But it was a difficult ending, and it was—by the time I ended my time with Union WAGE, I had been both a paid worker and a volunteer; I was both

things. I was paid for doing some of the bookkeeping and I had been paid for being the editor at one point. When my marriage ended and I needed to get a job, I said to the Union WAGE people, "Either I need a little bit more money or I have to stop being editor, because I needed to go get a full-time job." And I had a kid. So they paid me. Part of it was that I was doing both, and it did give me an inordinate amount of influence in the organization, to be both in leadership and to be one of the paid workers. And that was, for some people, one of the problems. They thought that was too much. I have read the opposite. I have read someone's—a woman of color talk about how in a nonprofit, the white upper-middle-class women are on the board, and then they hire the staff and they're the working-class women of color. But who's got the decision making? So you know, I think those are difficult questions. I don't think that's an easy question to answer.

08-00:45:37

And so, I'm not sure—do you have any other questions you'd like to ask me?

08-00:45:42

Tewes: Yeah, I'm really glad you brought up the paid work idea, because as you mentioned, you're becoming a single mother during this period that you were associated with Union WAGE, so that was important to nail down. You also mentioned the labor heroine series. Did you write the labor heroine [book] on Jean Maddox, *[Jean Maddox: Labor Heroine]*?

08-00:46:01

Allen: Yes, yes. We were going to do a whole series of interviews I was going to do with her. I went over one day and forgot my tape recorder, so we just sat there and talked. I've always wondered about this. I've always wondered about the pros and cons, because what she did is she talked very personally. So I know a whole lot about her life and who she was that I don't think she would have told me if we'd been—if we'd had the recorder on. But of course, that's not in the book, the little pamphlet on Jean Maddox. Some of it's based on an interview Cathy Cade had done with her that had been published in the Berkeley Bowl—Berkeley, no, whatever the co-op was that was called back then—anyway, the grocery store co-op, [Consumers' Cooperative of Berkeley]. I think that's where it was. So anyway, I used that. I used lots of other information, and I knew a lot, of course, from talking with her.

08-00:47:04

But to go back to that question of—just for a second—of how much of ourselves as a total person should be part of the focus of this organization. Both from working with Jean, and from riding back and forth with Joyce when both of us lived in San Francisco and the office was in Oakland, Joyce and I would—I would take the BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit] over, and then Joyce would drive me home. Well, either doing the grunt work, you know, when you didn't need to think, you were just doing things, or when we were riding, I would hear all these stories! [laughs] Great stories, you know? There was this way in which these two women were always more than just

women workers, you know what I'm saying? They had these bigger lives, and they seemed to be—that just seemed important to—I mean, it was valuable to me and very important to me.

08-00:48:05

Jean Maddox was part Native American. She was always very proud of that, and that was not a secret or anything. I would just think the only relevant thing here is that she lost custody of her children after her first marriage, because her second marriage was to a Black man, and racism in that time was such that the father got the kids. You know what I'm saying, in terms of being—to me that meant a lot. That meant a lot that she did that. She also talked about, which I think was true for a lot of women, that—I don't know which husband it was—but that she was busy all the time. Husbands don't like it when you're out all the time. You know, you're working full-time, and then you're going to all your meetings. You're not taking care of them. I mean, these are real questions. These are super questions today for men and women, not just women. How do you have a relationship? How do you raise children and also be politically active and work at a full-time job—or even a half-time job? How do you do it? Those are important questions. How do you make sure that you don't lose the personal side, the nurturing that's important in a relationship?

08-00:49:39

For me, one of the problems was that for the people who were working, they couldn't call until evening, if they needed to be discussing problems. We didn't have answering machines yet. [laughs] You see, I think the answering machine period was probably the best on this question, because now everybody expects you to answer your cell phone right away, right? And so, you're caught in the same dilemma I was caught in, that the phone's ringing; if I don't answer it, this person can't report to me what she needs to report to me, ask the question she needs to ask. But I might be sitting there eating dinner, you know? It was difficult, and I would think it'd be difficult today. I think now it doesn't even have to be political work. Most people seem to be obsessed with answering that cell phone. And I've even read that kids tell their parents to put them down. [laughs] But it's really a question when you're trying to also do political work, it's a serious question: how do you have a private life and all the work it takes to make that work? How do you have—do you earn your money to live? Remember, a lot of working-class people, it's not a question of career, it's a question of a good job with benefits that can support the family. How do you do this?

08-00:51:07

A little side thing here is that I used to take my son to a parent-child observation class down the street with Nina Mogar—incredible teacher. One year, one of the other mothers that I started talking with, her husband worked for Safeway, and one of the things they did was they maintained a strike fund. In other words, what you would call a savings [account]; they literally put money aside every month, because they knew eventually there would be a

strike, and they would need it. Now, I wrote an article for the paper about it. I went over and interviewed them both. That's not something I would have known, but how intelligent. This is different from that June Jordan problem that only the men got strike benefits. But even with strike benefits, you're going to suffer, and so they planned for it. It was one of the things that was just part of what it meant for the kind of work he had. He *was* unionized.

08-00:52:17

But if you were going to be able to continue to get better and better contracts—and we're not just talking about money; we're talking about health and safety, we're talking about—and for women, one of the things that Jean Maddox was very clear about—dignity. She said, "I am perfectly happy to give the employer the *best* job I can do, but I want to be treated with respect." And I think that's true of the clerical workers a lot. That the clerical workers, when they do organize, they want respect. They want to stop being treated as an insignificant part of the—working as hard as they are, but being treated like they're nobodies. You know, that was—so respect was part of it, too.

08-00:53:09

Okay?

08-00:53:12

Tewes: I really appreciate, not just in this instance, but throughout our conversations, your recognition of the personal difficulties of organizing, and the sacrifices and the impact that has on personal and financial—all the other parts of one's life, so I think that's really wonderful. Thank you for sharing all that.

08-00:53:37

Allen: Well, let me add something, too, because the other side of that, too, is the contradictions in the union. I've been criticized by Diane Balser [in *Sisterhood and Solidarity: Feminism and Labor in Modern Times*] for not understanding the importance of unions. But let's talk contradictions. So that people work for a union [are employed by the union], and they are worked harder—they're supposed to work harder than the people that they're organizing against the employer. They're treated worse. They're treated like they don't have the right to a private life sometimes. And one time Union WAGE—we were all down on Valencia, my son's in a little carriage at that point, and we are marching with the clericals from the electrical union, because they wouldn't let them organize.

08-00:54:24

Unions have their contradictions, and that's part of it, too, that—and I think I would say there that one of the things that happened in one of the last issues I put out in Union WAGE was that there was a woman who wrote an article. She worked at City College [of San Francisco], and she was raising the question whether public sector workers, it benefited them to go into a union. Well, there were people that did not want to print that article. I took the position, "You know, if you're going to encourage people to organize, you've

got to tell them the pros and cons." Jean Maddox, again, sitting in her house one day, "Tell people all the problems that might happen if they decide to organize. Don't just promise them the moon." Her thing was: you start to organize, and all of a sudden whatever was the little wiggle room you had in your job is going to disappear, because they're going to come down on you like this. Be prepared—it's worth it, but be prepared. And so that's at one side. This woman was saying, "Well, what if it's not the best thing for public sector workers, because of certain—" you know, she had her questions. So the question is: should that have been in a newspaper with people who are promoting unions? Some people said yes, some people said no. It *did* go in. Those of us who voted to put it in dominated.

08-00:56:03

And that makes me think of something—if you'll pardon me—totally on the other side: [laughs] the question of the personal side. When we did the family issue, I had gotten this article from an African American woman that I had met through [a] Union WAGE-connected [Methodist Church project], something else, and I had met her. She had written this poem in rhyme about her son wanting a father, because she was a single mom. And it was really a sweet poem. It was not great poetry, it was in rhyme, but it was—there were people that didn't want to put it in. It wasn't—whatever. I don't want to say good enough, because that's—but I think that's what they felt, that it was [not good enough]. It was a wonderful poem. And that issue, that poem, one of our members who was a hospital worker, she saw somebody running in the cafeteria to show it to somebody else—not our members, not our members, you know? That was one of the reasons I believed in expanding it out, because there are many ways working women are still whatever they are.

08-00:57:22

But those were the kinds of issues we faced sometimes, was that—I was accused of being too professional, but I can guarantee you that was not one of the times. That poem didn't—they didn't dislike it because it was too professional, I can promise you that. I think they didn't have kids. I don't think they understood how wonderful it was that whatever-his-name was wanted a dad, and the whole story about him finding somebody who could be his—who could play that role for him in his life. Yeah.

08-00:57:59

Tewes: Thank you. So you left Union WAGE around 1979, and I have written here—correct me if I'm wrong—that you leave the larger women's movement in 1981. And so I'm curious as to what happens in those years, between those years, and why you chose that moment to exit.

08-00:58:23

Allen: That's a good question. Well, when I left Union WAGE, I did, sometime in that same period, become a member of the Women's Building Advisory Board, and that was a very interesting experience. It's in that period that I do that one-time meeting with the staff, with also the Asian American woman,

where we're trying to help them work out some of their differences that I already spoke about, where white women tend to—like myself—tend to get real tense and judgmental when we're uptight. She was saying the Black women tend to come forward with aggression. So you had two different ways of showing your uptightness, both of which were terrifying to the other group. So that was a kind of—I learned in that period. I'm not sure I need to talk a whole lot about—I learned some things in that period, and that was a good period. And I was in—really in transition. I was exhausted. I got a job. All of a sudden, I was just working full-time, just taking care of my kid when—and I should say, I co-parented. I never was a single mother in the sense that there was no father in the picture. Casey lived with me mostly, and then did see his father a couple days a week usually.

08-00:59:45

So at some point, there was a—it would have been probably an International Women's Day event out at San Francisco State, that's my guess, is the time. The invitation to this event was that it was to be a dialogue between women of color and white women, so I went to see—curious about—to see what it would be like. And so the panel was women of color and these women spoke, and then there were starting to be questions and answers in the audience. And a young Latina stood up and said—I haven't told this story already, have I? Does this—no? Okay. She said, " I think the white women should leave so we women of color could talk together." These things used to happen back then, right? Where all of a sudden it would be time for the white women to leave—and continued to happen in some antiracism workshops, where you would split people at various times. And I had done, of course, a lot of work with white women around the question of racism, as well as with mixed groups of women. And so I stood up and I said, "You know, if you give us a room, I'm happy to go with the white women." And so they did, and we had a lovely meeting talking—partly talking about why this happens and talking about the responsibility as white women to understand white supremacy and racism. And I felt very fine about it. I'd done it before, and this was fine.

08-01:01:33

A couple days later, I ran into one of the women who'd been on the panel, and she said, "Pam, when are you going to stop saying yes? I can't support you until you say, 'No, we're not leaving.' " And then I ran into a Latina sister I knew, who I'd worked with in the Venceremos Brigade, and she said—[laughs] she wasn't there, by the way—she said, "I heard about this from two of my students. You should not have gone. That invitation was very clearly to be a dialogue between white women and women of color. If they wanted one of just women of color, it was their business to organize it."

08-01:02:17

So that's the point at which I left the movement. I was at the point where I could not once more be the one that was the furthest out there—neither of those women might be in the room next time, you know? Okay, and maybe Jean, [the speaker on the panel], would support me—I believe she would, if

she'd been there. But it was like, No, I need a break. Whether all my leadership's been good or bad, who cares. I put my whole heart and soul into everything I've done up until this moment. I need a break. I can't be the one that goes out there on the limb at the moment. That's how I felt. I think it was, in terms of where I was at, emotionally correct.

08-01:03:03

What I didn't say so far is that the break with Union WAGE had included my seeing myself destroy support that I had built up for what I was proposing for the paper, and I saw myself destroy it by essentially saying too much. The way I would put it now is someone—I had done a defense of my proposal, and someone said, "Say more." And what I understand now is that when someone asks you to say more, you don't say more in terms of different stuff, you go back and you say the same thing again with different words, different analogies, different ways of making your point, because that's what the person's asking you. "Say more about this. Help me to understand this better." But I took it to mean say more, and so I started saying *more* of what my thoughts were about the organization, including that I thought that there were elitist tendencies in our organization, which some people, of course, would say was true of me. But the point is, even though it was another—at the conference we had there was a compromise, and it was another six months before I needed to leave. That really was the moment, that was the breaking moment.

08-01:04:27

I think now I would say I had reached—I couldn't do it anymore without more support. There were a whole bunch of people that were against me, and I was fighting for what I believed in, and it was like, I needed a break, I needed to let other people step forward. And this is a key thing for organizers, is you have to believe other people can do the job. You don't have to do it all yourself. It's a horrible pressure, there's always too much to be done. You don't know until you do it whether it was even the right decision or not. The pressure constantly to be—to use the term politically correct in its right way—to be politically correct. But at the same time, using it in its negative way, that somehow the pressure becomes: you have to do everything right. And the minute you do something wrong, there's going to be a certain number of people that are going to jump your ass, because that's what happens. And that's not okay, it's not okay. It's no way to treat your leaders. We were going to get to leadership. [laughs] Sometimes I've heard people say, "Movements eat leaders," you know? Movements—people can resent you. They can use you, and then they can resent you. They can also applaud you and support you. It's a hard place to be, and I needed a break.

08-01:06:06

What I would say now about the incident that finally caused me to think I can't do this anymore, is I would say, well, I don't know whether I would or wouldn't [have said, "No, we white women aren't going to leave."] I was still enough into believing in third world leadership that if this one Black woman

and this one Latina woman told me that I should no longer get up and leave, if somebody said, "White women leave," I was enough in that place of thinking, Well, they must know what's right. But I wouldn't do that now. Now I would say, "Oh okay, now I know that. I'm going to have to make my own decision." And I might go to a meeting now in that same situation and just say, "Well, I'm not going to do either one. I'm not going to be the one that stands up and says, 'I'll take people out,' and I'm also not going to be the one who says, 'No, I'm not leaving.' I'm just going to let other people work this one out, and I'm going to be a follower." But you know, you get caught in thinking that people have relied on you and you have a job to do. I just needed the break. That's what I would say.

08-01:07:16

Tewes: And that makes sense. Just to remind you, and myself even, but you had been involved, in some way, since 1967 by that point and had been working—[laughs]

08-01:07:29

Allen: Well, and if you count the Southern freedom movement, it's '64.

08-01:07:33

Tewes: Yes.

08-01:07:34

Allen: And if you count the other kinds of activities I did at college, it's '61. So it had been a long time. But yes, in terms of having it as my focus, absolutely, absolutely.

08-01:07:46

What I would also say—we haven't talked much about spirituality. I had said that I left the church in '67, because they wouldn't ordain women. In '66 I left, and in [1974] they did ordain the first thirteen [women priests]; it was kind of illegally, but they did it. And then the Episcopal Church started to ordain women, but I was already on a different trajectory then. I was involved in a secular women's movement. Women's liberation and then Union WAGE, these were secular. This is not the women's spirituality wing. And I had lost that sense of my inner—whatever you want to call it—inner connection, inner nurturance. I continued, after Union WAGE, to also sometimes speak about the woman suffrage movement and those kinds of things, but mostly I was depleted, and part of the reason I was depleted was because I had lost this connection with any kind of spiritual base.

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I remember once many, many years ago now, probably late eighties, maybe early nineties, hearing Ericka Huggins talk about that in terms of the Black Panther Party, that there was that—she had found a spiritual base, and she was saying that was one of the things that [had been] missing. And when you're dealing with as much—I mean, with them that violent repression, but even with any kind of political work, you're dealing with a lot of opposition. You're

dealing with all kinds of other issues, people bringing in their personality stuff, all this stuff is going on, political differences. One needs some kind of base where you go to, whether it's meditation, whether it's prayer, whatever. And I needed some time to find that again for myself.

08-01:09:57

Tewes: Yes, that's definitely something I'm curious about, so I appreciate you mentioning that.

08-01:10:01

You know, thinking about the women's movement in the Bay Area, I'm wondering if you can—is there a way to define this as being a regional component of the women's movement, or was it very much all these different factions that you've been describing over these interviews about race and class and sexuality intersecting with gender? Is there a way to define this movement in the Bay Area?

08-01:10:35

Allen: Well, I would. And I think it's one of the things that's so interesting, is how much it's omitted in histories [of women's liberation] where somehow the focus is—possibly sometimes with books, possibly UC Berkeley and SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] there. But in some of the East Coast [laughs]—Chicago/East Coast people—and this was a different—there was a different quality here. But I'd say you were to look at it as a whole, the impact of the poets, and especially the lesbian poets, is just huge, and the dances and the poetry readings. And the point that Judy Grahn makes in her memoir about the absolute importance of public space for lesbians and how they hadn't had that, and how important it was to build that and to have that and to find that. I don't think, again, people understand what it was like when there wasn't public space, where you risked—for lesbians, you risked being arrested. But even for women, even for heterosexual women, there was not a lot of public space where you could be without a man and safe, you know, and be safe.

08-01:12:05

But when you add to it the question of sexuality, it was all of a sudden there was just this blossoming of the women's bookstores, women's books. Old Wives Tales in San Francisco and—now my mind—A Woman's Place, I think it was called, in Berkeley, that was up on the corner at the end of College Ave. I mean, these were incredible places, filled with women's books. Remember, we didn't—all of a sudden there's this whole women's [self-]publishing. A lot of it, again, lesbian feminist—big time, and women going around publishing things and going around the country sharing them. All of a sudden, there were places you could go and get that stuff, and see how much was out there, and there would be programs. Now, this is kind of the cultural [side] of feminism. But wasn't apolitical, in the sense that—because it demanded that we have the right to meet. We had the right to express ourselves, and in particular, lesbian feminists had the right to be open about who they were and who they loved, and the goodness of it and the rightness of it. This was radical stuff, you

know? It wasn't confrontational in the way that some actions were, where there were real confrontations with institutions that needed to change. But this was more the wing that was creating our own institutions at that point.

08-01:13:46

I'm not sure of all the analysis for why they ended, but certainly one of them is that the big publishers all of a sudden figured out there was money there, and they started publishing people and they started—so that was one thing. You didn't have to go—and then there was the shift, also, for some people to go with the gay men and beginning to have the gay bookstores, and so that question for a women: do I feel more comfortable in a bookstore with gay men, or do I feel more comfortable in a bookstore that's very lesbian feminist defined, but has a lot of straight women? So you had those issues. But yes, I think that this was—and the poetry! I mean, the poetry was just incredible, and there was, you know, interracial poetry; it wasn't just white women. So yeah, I think there was a lot of different kinds of things.

08-01:14:44

There was an interesting thing about that bridge, [the Bay Bridge], which I've mentioned before, that the East Bay had, was its thing, and San Francisco/Palo Alto was our thing. In both cases, both San Francisco, but especially the East Bay, had socialist feminist organizations. My memory is that that's who joined with us to do that working women's conference in '75. Those were the two groups. So there was quite a lot of activity for quite a while. Yes, I'd say it definitely had its own identity, strongly a lesbian feminist identity here. I think that even though there were a lot of problems at various points, there was a lot of goodwill. That's what I would say, a lot of goodwill amongst different people doing different things. And at other times, of course, struggles. And as I think I've said, I wish now somebody had told me that that's the way it is. That you'll come together, and then you'll find the ways you're different; and then you'll find ways to unify again, and then you'll find your differences. That was very hard for a lot of us, because we didn't know that's what was going to happen. But that's normal, it is normal that we will find points of unity, and then we will find points of differentiation, and how to work together to keep moving in a progressive direction was important.

08-01:16:38

And then there were some really basic—there are real issues, like how much was the women's movement about individual advancement up the corporate ladder and those kinds of things, and how much was it focused on trying to better the conditions of all women? That's a real question. There are some people on the individual advancement side believed absolutely that getting women into the leadership positions in corporations, in your universities and all these things, was essential, that that *was* one of the ways to make women's lives better. And there are other people that thought that was a bunch of bunk. [laughs] They will say that their woman supervisor was worse than the two men they had, you know? I mean, both things got—but the real question was: what are you *doing* there?

08-01:17:30

So if you move into a professorship job, and you're a Latina and you've got good politics *and* you are representing to all your Latino/Latina students—or now I guess it's Latinx students—that you can do this, that's good! I don't think that's bad. But to the degree that people have moved into the universities as either women—white women or women of color—and they've got individualistic politics, who knows whether that's better. I'm not sure. I'm not sure now that I would choose a woman of color giving—who was a conservative and believed in capitalism over a white male who was going to teach me about a critique of capitalism and alternative—if you understand what I'm saying. But there was a period where we thought just getting women in was important and would be progressive. We thought women doctors would be better than the men. I can't tell you that now. [laughs] I don't believe that. They might be, they might not be.

08-01:18:48

But in and of themselves, these are political questions. These are political questions, of like, Who are you? What's your perspective? Who are you thinking about? Who are you caring about? How do you handle competition? Remember, when we started the women's movement, this was one of the big things. My God, we've always, except for a couple of friends, not liked other women. You always saw them as competition for the boyfriends and all that stuff when you were growing up, right? All of a sudden, that wasn't—it was looking like we didn't have to do that. We could get to know each other and work together, and it was wonderful. But it doesn't mean that there weren't problems, especially like if you were competing for the same job or you were competing for influence in your organization. Again, how you deal with these questions, what they mean, these are still questions.

08-01:19:56

Tewes: So, Chude, we've been speaking throughout our conversations about the roles historians play in shaping some of our memories of this time, and I wanted to take a moment of reflection and say I've been using the terminology "women's movement" throughout. What kind of terminology would you have been using to describe yourself and this group you were a part of?

08-01:20:26

Allen: I described women's liberation as being the early women's liberation groups that we tended to be—we were anti-capitalist, we tended to be pro-socialist, we were certainly against the Vietnam War, the women that had a kind of radical politics that started women's liberation. So I consider that the women's liberation movement. Now I would say I was involved in the women's movement, because I would have put Union WAGE more in the women's movement side, you know? Things [got] more expanded, although their politics, their purpose and goals, were pretty much the same.

08-01:21:03

But there was a kind of limit to how much politics we would talk in Union WAGE. And my thought, from what I could understand, is the old guard, they came from, some of them were Socialist Party, some of them were SWP [Socialist Workers' Party], some of them were Communist Party. They came from different tendencies, some of them, and so it was kind of like an unspoken rule that you didn't get into that. And every so often, we would have people come in who had—they were part of some party, and so they would have a kind of politics. Union WAGE didn't discuss—we just did not, for the most part we didn't have those things. It was a concrete organization, it was much more concrete.

08-01:22:02

Some people have very strong feelings against the SWP for the period when, in women's liberation time and now, we're organizing to decriminalize abortion. Because their members were very, very clear about the importance of keeping it a single issue, and many of us felt that it needed to include no forced sterilization. And Union WAGE, as one of these things, it's supposedly about organizing women into unions, but one of its positions was free abortion on demand and no forced sterilization. And we've already talked about—I've already talked about that, that I'm not convinced now that—I think there are times when single issue is right, and there are times when you still keep the broader perspective at the same time. That's what I would say there.

08-01:23:00

But historians—the difficulty—since we're onto historians here—is one of the difficulties with historians is the way in which they repeat each other. They quote each other, rather than going back and investigating whether that is accurate. The other thing is that speaking as if you're God, rather than admitting your politics. I shall give you an example, because last week I spoke to a class at Dickinson College on race and second wave feminism. And they were reading the Sara Evans's book, *Personal Politics: [The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left]*, and the teacher had wanted me to [share] what my opinion of it was. I didn't talk a whole lot about that. But at the end, having done the kind of thing I do here, talking a whole lot, I finally just burst out with, "I hate that book." [laughs] The students all kind of—and then I said, "And you know, she's not a radical. She's a liberal." And they all look at me like this. I said, "You don't believe me? Go look at page ninety-six and how she discusses Malcolm X. I tell you, go to page ninety-six and see how she discusses Malcolm X. She implies that Malcolm X, when he was assassinated, was still anti-white. This is *not* true. This is absolutely not true." But if you're a historian, and you've been writing all this stuff, it's like, why are the students going to think you don't know what you're talking about? It was the politics. I think that particular historian has a real issue around violence. So that's the only way I can come up with that one, is that—but it happens to be a paragraph. It's about the uprisings in Harlem and then in Los Angeles, and the this and the that, and Malcolm gets killed. Well, the way I put it—and I'm being off the wall, but what the hell—

[laughs]—is the big bad people, the big bad Black people, doing these things. And you don't do that with Malcolm X, you just don't do that with Malcolm X. He deserves your respect. He went through changes. He went to Mecca, and he came back and he was changed. If we do not believe we can change, it is all over.

08-01:25:31

I know I've said that before, I will say it again. It is absolutely essential that we acknowledge people as they change, as they grow. Nobody should be staying the same. If I'm exactly the same today as I was in '75 or '64, you know, that means—what kind of human being doesn't change? Being human means you're constantly growing and you're constantly changing and, hopefully, you're learning from your mistakes.

08-01:26:06

I guess we should be ending, but I would say one thing about Union WAGE. I think I may have mentioned this before, but I can't remember. But when it was over, Geraldine Daesch, one of the women with whom I worked and who was very supportive of me, came to me and said, "I think your big weakness was that you didn't know how to let go of an idea. When you believed in something, you pushed it even when people weren't ready to accept it." I think that's true. I think that was an excellent observation. It was, I think, one of my major weaknesses. It's still a major weakness, but I'm better at it, which is that if an organization—if you're working with a group of people and you say, "I think we should do this," and the group isn't ready to do that, at some point you make a choice. You either say, "Okay, we'll do this other," or you say, "Okay, I'm going to go do something else." You make a choice. But you stop beating it over the head, because that's not what the majority want to do. And there's nothing wrong with respecting the majority, there's nothing even wrong with supporting them. But the thing I had to learn that I didn't understand then is I don't have to be responsible. If you think this is what we should do, you take leadership. I'll support you to the degree I can, but I do not have to take on the job of making this happen if you're the one that thinks it should happen. I can support you. But I didn't understand that then. I always felt I had to—you know, I had to get in there and make it happen. And now I know I only have to do my little bit, you know? [laughs]

08-01:27:53

Tewes: That's a good moment of self-reflection, and I think that's a great place for us to end today. So thank you, Chude. Let's say goodbye for now.

Interview 9: February 24, 2021

09-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a ninth interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on February 24, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thanks for joining me again today, Chude.

09-00:00:23

As we're nearing the end of our conversations together, I wanted to give a brief recap. When we left off last time, you had just left the women's movement around 1981, but this starts a change in other portions of your life. We thought we'd start today with talking about the name Chude itself and your decision to come to that name.

09-00:00:48

Allen: Yes. Well, it started at the period in the mid-seventies when my husband was—first husband, Robert [L. Allen], was saying that he wanted to leave, that he wanted our marriage to end. And I was, at that point, in a writing relationship with my mentor Pat Robinson. She sent me a book she wanted me to read, because she wanted me to, from her point of view, she wanted to show me that an interracial relationship could be still what she would call a revolutionary relationship. Whereas my first husband was saying that he felt there was something irreconcilable between Black and white—which, by the way, he no longer remembers. And certainly, his own—would never agree to now. But that is what he was saying when—and that's what I was wrestling with after all this time, the time we'd been together, wrestling with the question of being interracial and what that would mean, having, finally, a child, who was blond at that point, like [Robert's] mother, like the African American side of the family, which was very difficult with other people of color out here in San Francisco. In the North, a lot of people who were of African American descent and so-called [makes air quotes] looked white might begin to pass. And so for them to see this blond child was, you know, was somewhat difficult. Although, as I say, [Robert's] mother and his sister looked just like my son. But these were the questions that we'd been wrestling with when he decided that he felt that he wanted to leave.

09-00:02:29

My mentor, Pat Robinson, sent me a book about the life of Eduardo Mondlane, who was the leader of FRELIMO [Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, Mozambican Liberation Front] in Mozambique, the anti-colonial struggle against Portugal. Eduardo Mondlane had come to the United States to study, and had met a North American white woman named Janet [Rae Johnson]. After they graduated and went back to Mozambique, they got married and she went with him. Now, his mother's name was Chude [rhymes with Jude]—although believe me, they probably don't pronounce it that way in Mozambique; I only read it in a book. She'd been a fighter against the

Portuguese, and she had been—at times when he was growing up, she would have moments of essentially insanity and believed that the Portuguese were bombing again, and she would run into the jungle. As a young boy, he would have to care for her. And then when he married Janet, they had a daughter that they also named Chude.

09-00:03:32

So my mentor, Pat Robinson, wanted me to write another woman who was working through the breakup of her relationship, and they were both African American, so the question—the issue of race was not the point. She wanted me to move past thinking that, because I was white, that was the reason for the contradictions. And so I took the name Chude, because she didn't want me to use my own name, because this young woman was prone to gossip, and we were, of course, known in the Left, and so I did. That woman always referred to me as Chudé; that's how she pronounced it. And at some point [she] said that Pat had been correct to have a second name, just, you know—so for many years it was like my nom de guerre. It was my name for people that were doing the same kind of work I was doing, and trying to understand, with the help of Pat Robinson, the ways in which the political is personal. She was not a personal is political; she was a political is personal.

09-00:04:35

She was the one who raised the question to me of, "You have to figure out how it is that your husband is leaving you, what *your* side of it is." She was not into who he was and all that stuff, but your side. And so I began really looking at that question of, Who am I? How much had I expected my husband to be the person that I wanted to be? I was raised to be a wife and mother. You know, people forget how strong that was when I was coming up. And then, of course, I was conditioned in the Southern freedom movement that the Black—it should be Black leadership. Well, what a nice dovetail, if you can imagine, right? You're raised to be a wife and mother, and have the husband be the one that's out there in the world. And the Black movement is telling you, if you're white, you should step back and let the—you know, and let there be Black leadership. But at this point, I had to come to terms with the fact that I'd been wanting him to do what *I* thought he should do, which is never okay. [laughs] You know, but it is a very classic—from the tradition of the woman as wife, then she has to have her husband become whatever. So I got to really take a look at that, and in the process, I began to use the name more and more.

09-00:06:02

I didn't use it in my job that I got after leaving Union WAGE [Women's Alliance to Gain Equality]—I was still Pam then—and that was in the Sex and Disability Unit at UC San Francisco [Department of Medicine], and I just learned a lot about disability and a certain amount about sex, you know? Politically, I would just point out that women have more trouble not peeing than men, they're more likely to get an infection. Well, one of the things that happened when the buses here were forced to open up the jobs of drivers to women, is that even though there had been a union, the drivers did not have

places to go to the bathroom. These were male bus drivers who had little stores that would let them and others that wouldn't, and so they would never go in those stores. I mean, you know, this was supposedly really big. Well, the women come on and—at least the story was—the first thing they insisted on was bathrooms. You know, if you're going to drive a bus all day, you have to have a place to go to the bathroom. Again, the political is personal, the personal *is* political. This is a good example of that, right? So anyway, I learned a lot. I learned a lot about sexuality, I learned a lot about disability.

09-00:07:23

Where I worked was downtown, and the Sex and Disability Unit was also with Independent Living [Institute] and [United] Cerebral Palsy [of San Francisco], so I knew—I met other people, knew other people. One day [I] was invited to a party of some of the independent living people, and there I met a young man who was not physically disabled. He was a friend of some of the other people. And I started what was—what I would call an intimate two-year relationship. We were much less lovers than we were very good friends. And I don't mean this in the friends-with-benefits stuff, I don't mean that kind of casual thing; I mean *good* friends.

09-00:08:10

Both of us were at a crisis in our lives. Coming out of Union WAGE and then the women's movement, I was, I think I'd already mentioned, exhausted. And he was *totally* different from me. He happened to be exhausted from what he'd been doing, but he was a very private person and more apolitical, I would say. He once participated in a demonstration at Columbia [University] where they took over one of the buildings in the whatever—I can't remember the year. And then he noticed that they didn't really know what they were doing, so he went home. So that's his level of politics, right? A very good person, and he was somebody who I would have called a "loose goose."

09-00:08:54

And remember, I have been politically active and focused since I became an adult, including now, especially since I had a baby, too, or a small child, but I knew what I was doing every minute of every day for at least six months ahead of time. And all of a sudden, I'm relating to somebody on the weekends, especially when Bob had Casey, because we always co-parented. My first husband and I always co-parented; he was never an absent father. On the weekends, when I didn't have Casey, I would go and visit—stay with my friend. And for the first time really, since I was a young person living at home, living with my parents, I would wake up on a Saturday morning and the question would be, "What shall we do today?" I mean, this is a reflection—and we can talk more later, too, about it, of the kind of pressure and what happens, not only with people who are politically active on a volunteer basis, but I think what happens with people doing nonprofit work. I'm sure it's true of academics. Anyway, there's a workaholism dynamic in our culture, and it was true even for those of us who were trying to change the culture. But all of a sudden, I'm with somebody who is like, "Well, what'll we do? Should we—"

and he lived in the Berkeley area in the hills in a little in-law—"Shall we go down the hill and have some bagels? Shall we—" it was completely new, and I needed it so badly.

09-00:10:36

The other thing that I would say, [laughs] which is just one of those comments, is that we learned that he could come here and help me clean my house like [snaps fingers] that. I could go to his house, and it was much smaller, but still help like that. [snaps fingers] That somehow, when it's not your own stuff, it's so much easier to handle that kind of stuff. So there was a friendship. There was a really—a good, healing friendship on both our parts.

09-00:10:58

A friend of his called one time from LA to say that this particular spiritual teacher that he was following was coming up to give a demonstration up here, and so we went. And that was the beginning of starting to do meditation, *conscious* meditation. I'd already been collecting stones at the ocean and learning how to have quiet time, but this was like conscious meditation. And that particular leader did not pull on me, but he did on my friend/partner, and eventually my friend went to Los Angeles to be with him. But it had opened me up to the whole question of meditation.

09-00:11:47

Somewhere in all of this time I may have finished already my job or not—I can't remember. The job was for two years, and then the whole program was ending. I knew that this job had an end date, so I was saving money so I could take advantage of some months of not having to work, with unemployment plus my savings. Somewhere in there I wrote a long poem on the life of Sojourner Truth. I had, of course, written about her in *Reluctant Reformers: [Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States]* when I was writing about the suffrage movement and the abolition movement, both. She'd been an abolitionist, and then advocate of suffrage, of woman's rights. And I can't tell you why now, but for some reason I was really drawn to wanting to learn about her life. So I read about it, and I wrote a long poem. The point of the poem, the main thrust of it was: how did you forgive?

09-00:12:49

Now, Sojourner Truth was enslaved in New York State. We tend to forget that slavery was, at one time, in all the colonies. And we tend to think only about plantation slavery as being cruel, you know, even if—and so here I am reading about the horror of her early life, where she is sold from her family. She was in a family that spoke a Dutch patois. New York, eastern New York, of course, had been originally colonized by the Dutch. And so she is sold into an English-speaking family, and she is then beaten, because she can't follow their instructions because she doesn't speak English. What I'm realizing now, in preparing to share this, is that I think this is the moment where I was—I would call it guided. I was guided to [study] *her* life, but that I needed, in some way, to now ground myself in the understanding of how slavery affected

an individual enslaved person, rather than just the generalizations. When I was doing *Reluctant Reformers*, I, of course, loved Harriet Tubman. That's who I would have wanted—I mean, there was Harriet Tubman, I mean, she could do it all, right? [laughs] She's the first woman to lead United States troops into battle. She saved all the—she did all this really great stuff, and she was little. And I'm little. I'm now about 5'1", but I used to be 5'2"; and she was like 5'0". Sojourner Truth was 6'0" tall! [laughs] She was an orator, is what she was. And nobody knows how she spoke, because she started with a Dutch patois, and then learned English the extremely hard way, and there were no recorders back there. So who knows. So anyway, I wrote this long poem.

09-00:14:59

Then a friend of mine invited me to go to a workshop with another—these are like a New Age spiritual leader. I call it a cult. I believe it was a cult, but I want to make the distinction that if the Roman Catholic Church was small, you would call it a cult. Any Christian—evangelical—it's the size of it and the number of years it's been around, it gets to be called an established religion. In any of them there's still some kind of belief system that you are being asked to believe in, and there are some kind of rules. And there are, at certain points in the religion or the cult, there are charismatic leaders. So this particular man that I joined for a period was a seducer. I would have said that my friend joined somebody who was a psychic rapist; that's how I experienced him, as being psychically very aggressive. This person was much more, You have to make the choices.

09-00:16:12

I started going to workshops, and at some point I was down in Santa Monica at a weekend workshop, and he challenged me. What he said was, "Don't you trust yourself enough to open yourself to this teaching?" Essentially. It was in a house, and we were standing in whatever you call the area between the kitchen and the dining room that's usually a small area that has a place where there are shelves for the fancy dishes and stuff, and I saw myself psychically take my critical thinking and place it on that shelf. I made that decision to just let it go.

09-00:16:57

In retrospect, I can say most of my political work from the time I came out of the South until now, until after the cult, had been secular, because I had left the Episcopal Church. And it had been, in that sense, also cerebral and intellectual—and I'm very good at that. But I had lost a conscious contact with whatever that spiritual connection is. Some people call it God, I tend to call it Spirit or the inner voice. But the point is I had once been a very spiritual, religious person. I had thrown the baby out with the bath wash, as my mother would say. [laughs] I mean, I had turned my back, which I think now I needed to do, because I think I needed to cleanse out of the patriarchal religion thing, I needed to move away from that. Pat Robinson, who remained my mentor in this, would comment that I was a bit—still focused on what she would call father-fixated—men—and so I chose a male cult leader.

09-00:18:09

But what happened was that the night that I put my critical mind on the shelf, I went back to where I was sleeping, and I was all of a sudden just filled with what I would call spiritual energy. And it was very much identified very much with Sojourner Truth, as if she had just come to visit me. One of the analyses of what happens with people that go into what we call cults, small groupings—and it doesn't matter whether it's political or spiritual—is that they can be a catalyst for big changes, and that the question is whether or not the leader takes respons[ibility]—says, "It's because of me." Or the other way to put it, which is, "If you leave, you'll go back to who you were before." Rather than, "A catalyst is a catalyst." Hopefully, at my best, I have been a catalyst for some people to begin to open up and change in new ways. I would love it if I died knowing that some white people, in particular—some white young people, especially, but even older people, began to trust themselves enough that they could really look at their racism and know they could change. If I could do that, that would be wonderful. I would be a catalyst, but I didn't make it happen; they have to make it happen. Nobody can do that for another person.

09-00:19:39

But I was in a situation where this new thing was happening, and I was just, like, quite enthralled. I was continuing to meditate, and my friend was continuing to come up once a month, because his employer was still up here. He was one of those early computer people, [laughs] did everything by computer, so like once a month he was coming up. And one day, we were meditating before he left, and it was a very profound meditation. It was just deeper than I'd ever had one. And he left, and I was getting my son ready for school. I heard this voice, what I call the inner voice, which is not—there's no sound, just—in terms of, at least, me—I don't hear sound, but I hear messages. And it said, "Go find someone." I thought, Okay. And I wasn't working. This is the period where—that my job had ended, and I had saved enough money to have a few months off. And so I took Casey to school, and I thought, Well, if I'm supposed to go find someone, it's going to be where I normally walk, it's not going to be downtown in the Financial District. [laughs] You know, I'm not going to have to go someplace I don't normally go.

09-00:20:58

So I went to the park. I had a dog, and I was walking the dog in the morning. We were at Stow Lake, and we're in the center part of Stow Lake, and I look across the lake and there's a man sitting on a bench reading a paper. And I knew, with my life, that was the person I was to meet. So over we went, and—that was one of the hard—until I had to hospitalize my mother when she was dying, this was the hardest thing I'd ever done. I mean, you know, harder than Mississippi and anything, is to go up to somebody you've never seen and know that this is—you're supposed to say hello to them and you don't know why. I should comment that in the cult I'd already—they had something called freedom games, where you sometimes kind of were challenged to do things you wouldn't normally do, but nothing like this. And so there's a whole story

there. But the point is we talked, we went for a walk, and at the end of it—well, I guess I should say we talked. I sat down and we talked some. And then these two little old white ladies came and sat between us. And so he's on my [right], and the two little old white ladies, and then me. And I get up, and as I'm walking to leave, I hear myself say to him, "Do you want to go for a walk?" And so we go for this long walk, and when we say goodbye, he says to me, "You know, you shouldn't do this." [laughs] And I say, "I've never done it before." And anyway, we've been married now thirty-six years.

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You know, there's more to the story than that. And he, [Norris Mackie], is African American. He's from San Francisco, so very different in both temperament and upbringing from my first husband. What they share in common is both very decent, good men; but education-wise, personality-wise, they're very different. And of course, how they are both urban, but Atlanta and San Francisco were two different places. So then I go off with this—when I first meet this man, I don't know I'm going to marry him. I could never have done any of this if I'd known that. I just knew I was supposed to meet him. So then I go off for a month-long retreat with this cult. And that was when we were challenged to basically make a commitment to this person as the supreme being who's come back to Earth. Anyway, I went a little nutty, and I learned a lot from the experience. We came back here then that fall and I started seeing Norris, the man I will marry, who was not the least bit interested in this. And there were cult people living at the house for a while.

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And then we reached the point where it was Christmas time of '83, and I realized that I wasn't going to be staying. This was, again, kind of just an inner thing of knowing that I wasn't going to stay. I went to one of the gatherings, and this particular leader had—he was very attuned to people psychically. He said to me in front of everybody, "You will choose to be alone, over ecstatic communion with others." And you know, the meeting went on, and afterwards people ran up to me and said, "What did you think?" I mean, this is about the biggest insult you could be insulted [by] in this group. And I said, "It's true." [laugh] It was, it was true. And what I can tell you about this experience is number one, the best of this man and his teaching was that you have to become 100 percent who you are—not who you think you should be, not who anybody else wants you to be, but who you are. And that's why in this moment I knew I was—that even though I had loved so many of the people in the group, I just—it was ecstatic communion many times, and I was going to be leaving. It was true. So I think that's an extremely important lesson.

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It is true, when I look back, that there were moments of ecstatic union with people in the Southern freedom movement, especially in some of those mass meetings with the singing, with everyone making the decision they are willing to commit their entire lives to this freedom movement. It was ecstatic communion in many ways. There were those moments in, especially the early

women's liberation movement, where there were those moments where we were—everybody in the room was just totally together, and we—it was a form of ecstatic communion. It's true. But it's a dialectic, and the other side of that is being alone and knowing who you are as an individual, so it's a back and forth. And I had reached this place where I needed to leave.

09-00:26:03

Later, I would find in one of my journals, I think, a little, teeny poem that totally summarizes that experience: "Trying so hard to be free, I forgot to be me." And I think that, you know, a whole lot of different groups that fits for. People get caught up in wanting essentially the communion, the connection, the fellowship. And if the group doesn't have a way of—keeps structuring us to go back to being who we are, that individual side, that we can forget who we are. That pretty much summarizes [it]. Anyway, it was extremely, in many ways, a total break with everybody [who] I'd been before. I almost sold my house and joined this group. I almost sent my son, and dog, to live with his father full-time. I mean, I just was kind of on the edge. But then, as I say, when it came down to it, that inner guidance that I had once again reconnected with told me no.

09-00:27:12

So one day I'm sitting out at the ocean, and I start to write to Sojourner. And I'm saying in my journal, I'm saying, "Nobody understands," but I knew she understood. Sojourner Truth, when she was still Isabella [Baumfree]—Belle—[before] slavery had ended, she had, in fact left, made a deal with her slaveowner that if she worked extra hard one year she could be—she could leave a year early. And then he tried to renege, so she'd actually run away. But that was just like one year—but anyway, New York had made slavery illegal. She got into a cult, and it's one where the leader was killed, and she was one of the people that was accused of doing the killing, which is why we have *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: [A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828]*, because that was part of her defense. This is not to get into how much of everything we know about Sojourner Truth, how much of it's true, how much of its story—who knows. But what I had learned was that she had been in a cult.

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And so my second question now was, Okay, before it was when you were enslaved, how did you forgive those people? The cruelty—these are people, these are New Yorkers. Her parents, the son had, quote, inherited them from when his father died. He didn't want to have to take responsibility for them, because they were elderly, so he freed them. So you have these two elderly people who've never been able to earn money, who have no place to go, who he's freed—so that's the kind of cruelty. Her father died alone in a cabin with nothing, you know? How do you forgive? Now it's like, how did you trust yourself? Because she turns around and takes the name Sojourner Truth—sojourner as a traveler, truth as speaking the truth. She becomes, in her view,

someone—a spokesperson for God. So how does she do this, you know? [laughs] How?

09-00:29:47

So that begins a series of whatever we want to call them—poems, channelings, who knows—that have been going on now ever since 1983, off and on, that I write these things. After I'd left the cult, I did some readings. I did one at—we used to have Old Wives Tales [women's bookstore].

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And I had a friend who was going to—worked with a spiritual teacher named Frida Waterhouse—yet another one of my mentors—who had a monthly women's meeting, and I started going to those. My friend wanted me to read one of these poems for Frida at the meeting, and I did. Frida was completely at ease with channeling, so she asked me to both—she asked me once to record one of them so she could take it to a workshop, and another time she asked me to come to the workshop and read it, which I did. Up until then, what I would say about myself a lot was that creative energy, spiritual energy, was a bit frightening. I come from staid Episcopalians; I do not come from a background where people are taught how to deal with the energy coming through you. But Frida—I could see as I was reading this poem and this energy is coming through me, that she was completely there. I could tell by her face she was feeling it. I could tell she was not the least bit afraid. She organized what she called a recital and had me—invited people to come and had me read. So she very much became a support for that kind of—letting these words come through me and sharing when I could.

09-00:31:36

She also taught me [laughs] the importance of—and I think I mentioned this much earlier—the importance of asking people if they want you to tell them the truth—what you think is the truth. She modeled it, you know? She would say, "Do you want me to be frank?" That's what she would say. And I'd say, "Yes, of course." But it was like, that was like the first person who'd ever really shown me that maybe you just don't come along and say, "You know what? I think blabetty, blabetty, boom," you know? But you ask people, "Do you want my opinion? Do you want my perspective on this?" That was new. And I just add that, because I was a political activist, and that meant that a lot of people got a lot of truth shoved down their throat even when they didn't want it, which did not make them like me. So that was good.

09-00:32:32

Now, Frida died I don't remember when. She was eighty, and I was privileged in the—I think it was the later part of the eighties, [1987]—to help her so that she could stay home. This is the second person, of women that had strong influence on me—Jean Maddox being the first—where I knew them when they were dying. With Jean, I was not with her when she died. She had told me she did not want me to come to the hospital, she did not want people to see her at the end, dying, so I respected that. With Frida, we were keeping her at

home, so it was a slightly different situation. But I learned so much from the experience, and it was exhausting.

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But by the end, when I would go to the house where she was staying—I would go on a Friday morning. I was relieving one of her kind of students, who had to work, and then she came back. So I had an eight-hour shift, and I would come up the street, and I could just see, I could just see the energy just coming right out of the building, right? And noticed when she—after she became, I guess, comatose, I could just see it. She was just filled with this energy coming right down. And she believed that people come back until your soul has worked through all of its things and are ready to leave, and this was to be her last lifetime. She was very independent, and so it was very hard for her that in her dying she had to be dependent on other people, even to the point of changing diapers and everything. And it was part, I think, of just total surrender, total surrender to the body.

09-00:34:24

One of her teachings was that none of us know what we would do in a situation where our lives were at risk and we had to make a decision. She would refer to like the Holocaust. You think for sure you'd act nobly. She would say, "You don't know what your body's going to make you do or not do." She was very clear about the fact that our bodies—I think she would say our souls were in a body, and the body had its life force. She had to surrender to the body not wanting to die right away. It was a slow, long, dying. In that process, until she became unconscious, we talked. I think she did it with all the women that took care of her. We talked about our lives, we talked about what—both our questions and what she had learned. She was eighty years old. She was my mother's age, a little bit older than my mother, but had come from a much more sexually permissive background than I had. So that's one of the things I remember, is her saying to me, "Oh, you came from such a repressed background!" [laughs] She was Jewish. Her parents had been socialists. And so, again, she was somebody who became spiritual, because the years of doing political work hadn't been enough, hadn't been enough.

09-00:35:52

The only other thing I would say is that I did—I miscarried the child that Norris and I had hoped to have. And when I did, I wrote to Frida and told her that I'd lost the embryo, and that I, you know, was willing to type for her if she wanted, because I knew she'd, quote, fired the volunteer who had been typing for her, because he was so bad. It turned out that she'd miscarried the only child she'd ever had [conceived]. These connections are just always profound when they happen. But anyway, I started typing for her. This is, of course, obviously, before she was dying. She was what you'd call—she was into [astrology], so—she was a Libra, and Libras don't like to come on too strong. Again, what could be better for me than someone who didn't want to come on too strong, and I'm typing her answers to her letters and stuff. And so she would say something to someone and she'd look at me and she'd say,

"Yeah, I was really harsh, wasn't I?" [laughs] Of course compared to me, it was like, hello, a lightweight. But again, it was modeling. It was teaching me there are other ways to speak the truth, there are ways to speak the truth with love and compassion. That you still are clear, but you're not jamming anybody up against the wall. That was very valuable. So she must have died somewhere in the late eighties, I think, because—

09-00:37:29

Ah, before we move on to the next total phase of my life, there was something that happened out of the leaving the cult that I want to mention. [laughs] This has to do with writing. We keep going back and forth around the writing thing. But I had been carrying, for years, this feeling of shame that when I was in seventh grade, I had read Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and been totally taken by this book and had written a thirteen-page book report, handwritten back then. We didn't have typewriters. I didn't have a typewriter, and we certainly didn't have computers.

09-00:38:15

And so all of a sudden I'm thinking again about this, and I go to the library. I try to find *Riders of the Purple Sage*, which I can't find. I do find some Zane Grey books, and I pull one out called *The Vanishing American*, and I come home and I read it. In the introduction, what I discover is that this is a story that is partly about one of the schools that were set up for Native American children and a white teacher who's teaching there, along with this Native American main character. And it turns out, in the introduction, that when Zane Grey had written it—he had written it that the teachers, the male teachers, had been sexually abusing the young Native girls. And he had the Native American man and the white woman marrying at the end. They were in love. He was told that he had to take them out, both of those things out, and he was to destroy it. He was to redo it so that the white school people were benign, and I think the young Native American man is to die. And so he didn't destroy it. He hid it away in his attic, and it had been found after he died. So I'm just stunned by this, I am just stunned. [laughs]

09-00:39:55

So I go back to the library one day, and they had a collection of [Zane Grey novels], and I pull out—this is a hardbound copy, and it's the old copy. I'd been reading a paperback of the original, right? So this is what the publishers had made him do originally, this is the sanitized version [of *The Vanishing American*]—I think that's the right way you put it. I'm so outraged that I write in the front of the book, this—and tell the whole story in the front of the book and put it back. [laughs] And I swear—talk about taboos—the taboo of not writing in a library book was so intense in me that, I mean, for days and weeks afterwards, I was sure that the library police were going to come get me. [laughs] You do all these things in your life, and it's funny, the ones that really hit up against whatever are the things that you've internalized so greatly. I mean, it took me years to go back to that particular library branch, and by the time I did, they had long since gotten rid of that series. [laughs]

09-00:41:08

In the process, since I'm already on this one, I really also took a look—all of a sudden I'm like Zane Grey. I was so ashamed that I'd fallen in love with Zane Grey, but look at this. He's not such a bad person. So I found *Riders of the Purple Sage* and I read it, which is essentially a story about a Mormon woman who is inheriting land, is the point. But anyway, this Mormon woman's right to marry who she wants, that's what it's about. And I think like, Wow, this is interesting. [laughs] You know, this is interesting, that back when I'm, whatever, twelve years old, I'm intrigued by, touched by a storyline in which the woman is asserting her right to marry the man she wants to marry—who is not a Mormon, and they do have to escape. There's the whole romantic thing of that, and they end up in a secret valley. But the point being that I can look back and I can say, "Oh, even when I was twelve, I was thinking about the right of a woman—a *woman* to choose." If we look at the history of women—women, a lot of them didn't have a choice of who they were going to marry, right? But the right of a woman to choose and to—even to choose outside her class, outside her race, outside her religion, you know, it's—I just add that. So anyway, that was one of my little escapades right after I was out of the cult, before I got too involved with other people. And so then—

09-00:42:50

Tewes: I have a quick question about that, that I think reflects back to your personal life about this same moment. I think you and Norris married around 1984?

09-00:42:59

Allen: That's correct, yeah.

09-00:43:01

Tewes: You've mentioned similarities and differences between him and your first husband, Robert. But I'm wondering: this is your second interracial marriage, years later, and I'm wondering if you could think on the differences and similarities between that relationship and how that presents to the world?

09-00:43:24

Allen: Well, I do know that someone, who I will actually refer to later about something else, but a white woman that had gone to Spelman [College] the semester before I did and then was in the Southern freedom movement. When she first met me, she also knew one of the other veterans, an African American man. She told me that she had asked him how he felt about the fact that I'd married interracially twice. And she said he paused, and his comment was, "But they're so different." [laughs] You know? So I add that to just the point: they're very different kinds of men, except, as I say, both very decent, good men, but different backgrounds, different ways they were raised.

09-00:44:06

Norris comes from a creole family. He's number ten of thirteen. It's a different—and a lot of them are in the Bay Area, so I—when I married, I married into a family. Many times, with heterosexual relationships—I have no idea what happens in gay and lesbian [relationships] on this one—but in

heterosexual relationships, the family socializes with family depending on what the woman chooses. That's one of the problems. It's why you get Christmas cards or whatever that the wife has signed, "Love, Joe and Mary." And Joe doesn't even know they've been done, right? [laughs] That's my issue, right? We don't do that. We always do it together. But I married into a family, and a very loving family. And it was Christmas of 1984. I got married Christmas Eve, so it was, you know, a good twenty years, essentially, after the first time.

09-00:45:05

[In] California it had been illegal for whites to marry people of color until 1950. And it is interesting that California, it was whites were not allowed to marry people of color; it was not the other way around. And mostly, of course, anti-Asian is what it was. When Bob and I married back in '65, it was illegal in Georgia, but not illegal in Pennsylvania, so it was different. But I would say two things. It was on the one hand familiar to me. There were things about it, it was like, Ah, you know, that felt right. And there were other ways in which he was—their backgrounds and just their personalities were so different that I didn't have that sense of familiarity. It was a different kind of relationship.

09-00:46:07

What I learned from both my marriages is that you simultaneously—if you're going to marry interracially or I think if you're going to marry—any situation that is not traditional and socially acceptable—is you're simultaneously relating to an individual with all of their individual qualities, and you are relating to someone who comes from a different cultural background than you do. And in terms of racism, historical things, both things are always true; it's never just one. If it is just one, then there's a problem in the marriage. When I was teaching those antiracism workshops in the YWCA, I did have—one of the students was a white woman who was married to an African American man, and she couldn't understand why anybody—she didn't understand. She had no understanding of history; she had no understanding of racism; she had no understanding of anything, except that she loved this man, and this man loved her. And that's one side of it. But the other side of it has to be that you understand the complexity of the situation, so that as contradictions manifest you have a way to understand them. I know of another interracial couple where it was the brother who was telling me this story. And the brother was very upset, because the—his brother had married a white woman, and they were living in a situation where the kids were going to school and pretending they were white, and the brother was not picking them up from school or in any way being visible, because they were—they wanted to be white. I mean, that's problematic, [laughs] that is definitely problematic.

09-00:48:02

I do know, for example, in my hometown in Pennsylvania, right across the river was New Jersey, and there were a number of both writers and musicians and actors that lived in the whole area. And in the New Jersey side was Charlie Parker, who at that point was married to a white woman and had

adopted her daughter, and then they had a son together. I remember asking her once as an adult—I mean, Charlie Parker had long died, and I think her mother had married someone else at that point—and I said, "Did your mother have any idea?" She said, no, she didn't think—because Charlie Parker's life was a very complex life, with, you know, drugs and—he was a musician, a jazz musician, an incredibly creative, dynamic person. But she said no, she didn't think she had an idea. So I don't know with other people. I don't know quite how they do it. I do know I once sat in on a program with two lesbians talking about interracial relationships among women. And one of the things they talked about is how often relationships started without the white woman having a clue about what it meant for the Black woman.

09-00:49:25

I'm not sure that fully answers your question. By the time I met Norris, I did have a lot of understanding about the difficulties and experiences of African Americans bringing here—enslaved and then discriminated against, exploited, oppressed, the terrorism, etcetera—I had some understanding of that, which is not the same as living it, but it's an understanding of it that I had, that I brought. I did not know a whole lot about large families, because, I mean, I thought I came from a large family, right? [laughs] I had a sister and two brothers, and in the context of my growing up, that was a large family. Thirteen was a whole different story! [laughs] I think that is what I would say. I would just end, again, with the thing is that it's always two things. If I'd married someone who was Jewish, who was actually brought up as a traditional or even a secular Jew, but the traditions of Judaism, I would need to know that to understand certain things. The friend I had for those two years, he was an assimilated Jew, so he himself did not have strong—he didn't have a spiritual Jewish background. He found it in meditation, is what he found.

09-00:51:01

Ah! There was one thing that I forgot about the cult, before we go on, which is—and yeah, I wanted to tell this story. It can seem like this was all bad, right? We did this weird thing. [My friend] went into one, and I went into another. So he's up visiting one time, and he knows I've—my job has ended and that I'm starting—and, oh, that I have left the cult now and I don't have any money. And he says to me as he's leaving and we're downstairs at the door, and he says, "I don't want you to take a job that's not right for you, so I've left you a loan on the table." I figure I'm going to go up and there'll be $200, which would be very nice, because in 1983 that would have been a bunch of money. But it's $1,000, which does help me move slowly into getting work again that is good for me, that works for me.

09-00:52:05

And so at some point I have saved up the money to pay him back. Right at that point, my friend, who had brought me into the group I'd been in, is ready to leave that group, and she has no money. Part of the reason she has no money is because she'd had a job where she'd had to save up, because they didn't take taxes out. At one point, when a bunch of us were living together,

everybody needed money. Everybody promised that they would give her back the money before the taxes, and I was the only one who did, she said. So she was in need of money. That, by the way, is just one of the things I would say about New Age—any of these—the, "I love you, I care about you, you can always count on me" may or may not be true. In this case, it was not true. So anyway, I had this $1,000, which I was about to send back to my friend. And I have this other friend, whom he knew, who needed money. So I call him up and I say, "Can I give her the loan?" He says, "Yes." I give her the loan. It helps her over the hump of getting out of the group she was still in and reestablishing herself.

09-00:53:23

A year or two later—I can't remember whether it was a year-and-a-half, something like that—the first friend is ready to leave his group. He has no money, because, you know, when you're in these things you're giving all your money to the group, to everybody, you're being generous, you're whatever. So he had no money, and so she turns around and gives—and she has the money, and she gives it back to him.

09-00:53:47

Now, I hope the point is clear here. This was not all bad and it was not all crazy. I mean, how these things quite work out I'm not quite sure, but that is a true story. He gave to me, I gave to her, she gave to him. We each got it when we needed it, you know? When I use the word cult, you always think just bad. But it doesn't have to be just bad. You know, there can be good things, even when you go a little out to lunch. There can still be some good things. I mean, I went out to lunch. Actually, at one point when I was still in the group, we were told to go around telling everybody the supreme being was on Earth, so I went around telling everybody the supreme being was on Earth. [laughs] I lean towards being a true believer. That's obviously the case. I throw myself 100 percent into whatever I'm doing.

09-00:54:49

But happily, I had found my inner guidance, I had found my inner voice. I had found, interestingly enough, this interaction, [this] relationship with the voice that I call Sojourner, in terms of writing poetry, in terms of writing guidances to myself. Much of which, by the way, as I go back and I read them—which is what I've been doing during the COVID—this whole year when we've been home, I've been going over my journals and copying out these what I call Sojourner sharings. So I now have—this is my third journal. [shows journals] This was my first one and this was my second one. They're all filled up with handwritten—because even though the logic would be that I would be typing them from one—obviously you should type them, but I can't do that. I couldn't do that, because these are spiritual, and I can't make the transition—at least not right away. Every now and then I pull a little thing out, and I type it up and share it with somebody. But mostly it is—these are inner experiences, these are internal things, and so I'm writing them so they're in one place. But they are themselves their own spiritual experience. That's how I experience

them. But I did start to read—I did read them places. I read, as I say, to Old Wives Tales.

09-00:56:20

And then in 1989, I helped to organize our first reunion for civil rights workers, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Mississippi Summer Project in '89. Now, some of us had met in '84, when the sociologist Doug McAdam had come to the Bay Area to interview people for his book *Freedom Summer*. We had gotten together, so I knew that Robbie Osman in Berkeley had been part of that group. And so I called Robbie to say, "I'd like to do something on—" again, on getting together, "because it's the twenty-fifth." And he said, "Oh! Some young people have contacted me, and they want to do something." So it was really nice. Being California, we organized our reunion to take place in Tilden Park. You know, other places, they had conferences, you know, you're in university buildings or something, but we're in Tilden Park. You know, that's how it was, and it was quite a profound experience to have this thing.

09-00:57:34

One of the things I will say is that we, the planning group, we wanted to start with remembering those who had died. So the question was: do we need a list? So some of the people wanted to make a list so we wouldn't forget anybody. See, what the cult had done for me is it loosened me up. I'm now loose enough that I'm perfectly willing to trust that if we open it up, it'll be fine, it'll work. So happily, those of us that thought, Let's just open it up and see what would happen, we won that particular debate, so that when we start this thing, this huge—I mean, it was just magnificent! People are not just remembering the well-known SNCC leaders and SNCC people who've died, they're remembering the people who'd housed them, you know, Mrs. So-and-So, Mr. So-and-So. They're remember people who they—the local people that they had worked with. It was, in fact, one of the, you know, great lessons that to open things up can allow for—giving that room can allow for more than being afraid you might forget somebody, and therefore keeping it closed and tight. So that was one of the things.

09-00:59:08

Anyway, the next day—we'd invited Bob Moses to come and speak, which for most of us was the first time we'd seen him since the Mississippi Summer Project, and he'd been the leader of the Mississippi Summer Project, right? There had already been one, at least, reunion gathering in the East Coast. I think it was New England, but most of us out here hadn't seen him. And he had told me on the phone that for people it was going to bring up stuff, and it would be very good to have a second meeting. So the first day was for veterans and their families, and then the second morning we had a brunch here at our house, which was to be for veterans. We passed out leaflets the day before to tell people. I can't remember how many, but probably twenty people were here maybe at the most.

09-01:00:09

I read one of my Sojourner poems, [laughs] because that's who I was at that point, that's the kind of thing I wanted to share. And I just would mention two things. One is one of my friends was just freaked out that I was going to do this—she knew ahead of time I was going to do it—just freaked out, because this is going to be embarrassing. This white woman is going to stand there and read, in dialect, this poem that was speaking as if she were a Black woman, right? And weird dialect—that's the other thing, because nobody knows how Sojourner Truth spoke. This is not the literary dialect, and this is not how Southerners would have spoken; this is just what happens when it comes through. And another friend, a Latina vet, came up to me afterwards and said that, you know, that it was just spot on. I'd gotten it right.

09-01:01:06

Again, I think one of the values of this cult experience, when I went so much out the window, is that it for the first—it hadn't dawned on me that I was just going to do what I was going to do, because that's who I am now. [laughs] You know, it's like, This is what I'm going to share [of] who I am. And there had been people in the room that supposedly cared about me that were either wishing I wouldn't do it or were waiting for me to make a mistake. I just put that out there, because I think that's a problem, that's a problem that we do to each other. And I think, especially, again, with white folks in situations with people of color, you want everybody to act perfectly, and you're terrified they might do something wrong, because then what was that going to reflect on you? Well, it's not going to reflect on you. You're you, they're them, right?

09-01:02:04

I've had to deal with that. I'm in a discussion that's on our website with someone who said something that I hated, I just hated—I still hate. [laughs] I had to work it through and remind myself, You're not her. Hello, you're not her, you're not responsible for her. Those are her words. You asked her, "Are you sure you want to say that?" And she said yes, she did. It's her business. Later, I was reading a book by Howard Zinn—and this is a white woman who'd been at Spelman, as well as me—and Howard Zinn quotes her. I think like, Well, what the hell, you know? [laughs] Howard Zinn can quote her. I still don't like it, but she's not me, you understand, she's not me. I'm not responsible—and I love her. I just don't happen to like that particular expression.

09-01:03:03

Politically, that's important that people have that support to be able to be who they are, and not that they have to conform to my point of view of what's appropriate behavior. I didn't used to always be that open. I think that's important to note, that I was very much—especially in the women's movement—clear that we should be doing it a certain way. And that makes it hard, that makes it very hard. It was not one of my strengths.

09-01:03:41
Tewes: Yeah—

09-01:03:42
Allen: So after the—go ahead.

09-01:03:44
Tewes: Yeah, I'm just wondering how it goes from a reunion to becoming an organized group, the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement?

09-01:03:51
Allen: Yeah, well, then what happens is we invite—some of us get together. Okay, Taylor Branch wrote one of—I don't remember which of his volumes had just come out. One of the vets, Mike Miller, organized, essentially, a book party, where we went to talk to Taylor Branch about his book on Martin Luther King, Jr. And in the process, he said that in interviewing people, he became conscious of how many were the walking wounded. So we're talking here about post-traumatic stress disorder, we're talking about people carrying the effects of that terrorism that they had lived with all those years ago. And so the group here decided we should start a walking wounded group.

09-01:04:47
And I believe that comes first, or else we bring Jim Forman first. I can't remember, because we have to have already come together. But anyway, somewhere around 1990, the early nineties, we bring Jim Forman out, who had been executive director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And again, somebody most of us haven't seen since the sixties. And at that point, because of the beatings, he couldn't fly on an airplane, because it had hurt—his beatings had hurt something in his ear, so he'd come out by train. We had set it up for him to stay with one of our members, Jean Wiley, and then we'd set it up for him to have speaking engagements at UC Berkeley, at Santa Cruz, different places. And then we were having a celebration reunion for him in Oakland somewhere, at a restaurant that it was the day off, and so they were giving it to us.

09-01:05:53
One of the things that happened with Jim coming was that the—I couldn't find anybody who could take him to the UC Berkeley African American history class. The only two people that were available were Cathy Cade and myself—both white women. [laughs] So we pick him up at Jean's house and we take him to the UC Berkeley class, and we bring him into this, essentially, Black class, right? And we go, and we sit in the back, thinking to be as inconspicuous as possible, because this is still not clear about how we're all dealing with Black and white at this point. Remember, separatism has happened, nationalism had happened, it's still not always clear who wants to be with whom. We are very self-conscious that the only people that could bring him were these two—were us two white women. So we're sitting in the back, and so the first thing Jim Forman does is say, "I want to introduce you to these two people [laughs] who were involved in the South and da, da, da,"

and just places us there. And it was like, Oh, this shift has happened, where he's totally acknowledging us. And then he goes on and gives his talk, and then we go back and we have lunch together. But it was a meaningful moment, in terms of starting to recognize that the reunions, coming back together, we were coming back having a shared—so much a shared experience. Even though, of course, being white and Black means you have also different experience, but there's still shared experience, there's still a certain trust that starts to—that is there from experiences that people have had. So that happens.

09-01:07:55

So we have this walking wounded group, which isn't quite working. It's some of the vets from the Bay Area and it's just not quite getting off the ground. One day we were having a meeting at Jean Wiley's house, and there's about six of us or maybe eight. There's not a lot of us in the room, but there's a couple of us there. And we're trying to decide what's wrong, because we'd organized this group, walking wounded, to help people who were really having trouble. And Wazir Willie Peacock says, "Well, the truth is, we're the walking wounded." [See www.crmvet.org for more on Wazir Willie Peacock.] And then we start to talk, [laughs] and we're a small group, but still. Two of the others had been involved in political cults. Another, who later came in—a third one—but political cults, and I was in a spiritual cult. And everybody else had had depression issues. As other people would come in, this has been one of the discussions: how hard it was for people to, when they left the South, to reintegrate. And to reintegrate into a culture that you knew was racist, into a culture that you knew was, in many ways, inhuman. Having had these moments of transcendence, the ecstatic community—obviously, not all the time—but there being those times of the moments of transcendence, of connection, of the gift of being able to work with Southern African Americans who had such dignity and such courage. And so it had been very hard.

09-01:09:48

Don Jelinek, one of our members who came in a little later, he's written a book about his own experiences, *Black Power, White Lawyer,* I think it is—or it's either *White Lawyer, Black Power*—it's one or the other. *[White Lawyer, Black Power: Civil Rights Lawyering During the Black Power Movement in Mississippi and Alabama.]* But anyway, he talked about and wrote about, after he had moved, after he was out here, out of the South, he was living in Berkeley and working in Marin [County] at that point, and that he would drive across the Golden Gate Bridge, and he would think about how easy it would be to just drive off. So I want to bring that up, because I think this next period of my life, when I look at it, is partly about both continuing my own healing, of which finding my inner spirituality is key. Because remember, I had that in the Southern freedom movement. I myself was very religious. I was connected to—many of the people were very religious, and I had lost it. But also, just working with other people.

09-01:11:01

So one of the things that had happened after that first reunion here in '89, was that Cathy Cade and I had thought, Well, we should also offer—not only did we do the reunion on a Saturday and the brunch on Sunday, but a month later we decided and passed out leaflets inviting people to come to an all-day discussion. A small group of people came; again, fifteen, twenty, that kind of number. Cathy was leading it at the beginning, and the question was: what was the hardest thing that happened for you in the South? And we were going around and people were saying the various things they were saying.

09-01:11:48

And then a woman named Fran O'Brien spoke. She said the hardest thing was that she had been kidnapped by the Klansmen and beaten, and she had never told anyone, except one student. She taught physically disabled children, elementary school, and one of them had been physically abused on the bus, and had—the little girl had said to her, "Nobody understands." And she had said, "I understand," and had told her. But this was the first time she'd ever told us, anybody else. Partly it's because she was very ashamed, because—and she said we'd always been told never to be alone. One of these situations that happened, where a group of the workers were—had left the Freedom House and they—in Vicksburg, [Mississippi]. I guess it was up a little hill, and they'd come down the hill and were waiting for a car. When the car came, there wasn't room for everybody, and everybody else climbed in and left her there. And we were just like, What? And you know, "*You* don't need to be ashamed. They had no business leaving you." And one of the Black workers said, "Yeah, but you could get arrested if you had too many people in a car." And we were like, some of us were like—women—were like, "No, you do not leave her." Now, she was blaming herself, because she thinks—she thought she should go back up the hill, that kind of thing. But she should never have been left, even if she was just walking up the hill. It shouldn't have been. So but, the driver had said there's another car coming. So the next car comes and she waves, and it's Klansmen. And they take her somewhere. They tell her, "We're going to make you say you're sorry, little girl," and they started to beat her. She must have blacked out, because the next thing she remembers is they'd dropped her off. At least weren't going to kill her, because they already knew what had happened when they'd killed the three, and how much it brought the FBI and everything down. But she didn't know that, she didn't know that. And so she had lived with this for twenty-five years without telling anybody. [See *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* by Bruce Watson, pages 232-234.]

09-01:14:09

And so we began to write, and she began to write her story. I was starting to write memoir. This is the thing—I was using writing as a way to heal, as a way to remember, as a—because this is—when we came out of the South, we went—the combination of there was no vehicle in which to share, no ability to understand it, and life went on. There was a Vietnam War, there was a

women's liberation movement, there was this, there was that. It was just a very intense time. And of course, if you were involved in the Southern freedom movement and then were coming to the North, in terms of the Black movement, that was somewhat difficult. It was not the same, you know, it wasn't the same. No matter where you were, you were coping with a lot, and so a lot got just suppressed.

09-01:15:04

So this was the most extreme that I knew of, except as we started meeting, then the next question was—we began to do some public speaking, and one of the people that did public speaking was Jimmy Rogers. [See www.crmvet.org for more on Jimmy Rogers.] He had been involved—he'd worked in Alabama, and he'd been in jail with, at one time, where when they came out it included Jonathan [Myrick] Daniels, and I do not remember the reverend's name—a Roman Catholic [priest, Richard Morrisroe]—and there were some young women, Black women. They'd all come out together, and they were on a street corner. Some of them were thirsty and wanted to go to the store across the street. And when they did, there was a white man there who shot and killed Jonathan Daniels and wounded the priest. And partly, they killed Jonathan, because he put himself in front of Ruby Sales, who I gather, from reading her interview on our website, didn't speak for a year after that, it was so traumatic.

09-01:16:16

So Jimmy would tell this story, and then Jimmy would tell this story, and, you know, I would—he would go over it over and over again when he would speak, to the point that I thought I would go nuts. And then one day, he said something new. That's when I started to learn, Oh okay. Sometimes for healing, we tell the story, and we tell the story until we can get to the deeper level. And there were like, for him, two different levels. The deepest was the one that they then made—while these two men are lying there—maybe dead, maybe not—the police made the others leave. Jimmy had to leave while two of them were there. And then of course, he didn't need to keep—he could tell it—how do I want to put this? He didn't have to go through everything over and over. He had healed, that's what I want to say. He had healed, at least to some degree, and he could now share the story with students, with community people, and share it as an experience without it just still—I don't mean to say it stopped bothering him, I don't mean that. But I do mean that there's something about—distress sharing is what I call it, distress sharing, when people are in the middle of things. And then as we heal—and for me it has been the writing a lot, is where I've healed from those, so that I can then tell the story without having to go into every detail every time—although you wouldn't believe that listening to me. [laughs]

09-01:18:18

Anyway, that's been a gift. It's just been a gift to listen to and hear people's stories. Once Bruce Hartford came into the group and started the website, about 2000, from then on, if it were—we started recording that. That was one of his brilliant gifts he's given to everybody, is that these discussions are

recorded now. Huge, huge, wonderful thing, so that you can go and you can read them. So you hear people, again, begin to sometimes bring something up they've never been able to tell people.

09-01:18:59

Now, one of them was—and this is a woman that I had met previously—Karen [Haberman] Trusty. She's the woman that had been at Spelman the semester before me and then worked in the South. She had been beaten by the Klan. She's another one who had been beaten by the Klan, in a situation where she was with some SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] workers at—they had gone to Stone Mountain outside Atlanta, where the Klan was having a meeting, because they thought that they should protest it. And she thought she was going to die. So she had, over the years, more than once talked about it. She, in fact, has it on a website, [www.inrarefiedair.com], where she told the story, and she'd begun to heal. I was able, one time, to have her come down from Portland, [Oregon], and Fran O'Brien to come up from Frazier Park, [California], and for them to meet. In both cases, they've let me know how important that was for both of them to actually have the opportunity to meet with and walk with—we went for a walk out at the ocean at one point. And I kind of just stepped back and just—for what it meant to be with somebody else who knew what you had gone through was very important to both of them, so that was a gift.

09-01:20:24

So then [laughs] Karen comes down to this—it was our fiftieth anniversary event we did in Oakland, which we invited vets from all over the country to come. And those were, again, transcribed. They're all on the website. But she ends up being, just by chance, being in a small group—because that's what we did, we divided into small groups to have discussions—with someone who'd always wondered who that white girl was who had gone into the Klan meeting with the other SNCC workers. And Karen's there, and they are able to, you know, like connect. This is just a gift. [See www.crmvet.org for more on Karen Haberman Trust and Fran O'Brien.]

09-01:21:12

Before, when I was planning for: how are we going to end all of this—and there's still more, of course. When I came out of the cult, in that period, that short period, and I was starting this next phase of my life, I never expected that the work I would be doing would be in connecting with and sharing with other Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement. I never would have thought that that's where I would go, the gift I would be given. But it is humbling. It's just been a gift.

09-01:21:55

I have spoken a lot in schools—mostly to kids. [laughs] Now, you know, you learn a lot. The first time I was asked to speak to second graders, the Live Oak School here in San Francisco, I found myself—they'd done a great job of preparing. The kids had been with, I think it was fourth graders, and they'd

done a whole exhibit. They'd done great preparation. So I'm standing there talking to these kids, and I find myself trying to explain the difference between tactical nonviolence and pacifism—to second graders. [laughs] At which point I realized, I don't know how to talk to second graders. So one of our members, Miriam Glickman, who had taught elementary school, told me you have to be concrete. I mean, I did not look upon that as being my great skill, to work with these young kids, but I did try to be more concrete. So there was a kindergarten group once, and we had them make signs, and then we all marched with their signs, and they could write, "Vote," or they could write, "Freedom," you know, that kind of thing, being more concrete.

09-01:23:08

I also spoke to my first grandson's classes, first in third grade, and then in fourth grade. I had by that time discovered I had a neighbor three houses up who had been in the South working with SCLC in the summer of '65, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, on their summer program. And they had given her a camera and asked her to take photographs. In the way those things work, most of the film got sent back [to Atlanta], but some of it never got back, so she actually had some photographs. You know, we went to his third grade class, and she would show these photographs. One of them was an 8x10 with this little thing about this big in the middle [indicates a small size] of Martin Luther King speaking at some conference she'd gone to. And one of these third graders goes, "Oh! Oh, you saw Martin Luther King. Oh, that would be the most wonderful." You know, it was like, it was just too wonderful, too wonderful. And the key thing though was: it made a difference that they were these concrete pictures. They weren't even just up on the—they weren't slides even. You could pass them around. They could look at them. You could look at the one of the [signs], "colored only water fountain," "white only," those things you could pass them around. Very concrete.

09-01:24:44

So then I spoke to my grandson's fourth grade class, and in that one—just as an aside, there was one student in particular that was just all over the place, was all like this. [flails arms] Just, no matter what we said, he was just totally off. And I thought, Okay, we've lost that kid, we've lost him. And the questions start, he raises his hand, he asks one of the most intelligent questions I've ever been asked, which was, "If they think we were so inferior, why did they want us in the army?" So I learned: you can't tell by whether somebody's moving around on his chair, because he can't stay still, you don't know who's listening or who's not, you don't know. You just do your best, right?

09-01:25:32

But the point I wanted to make to finish on this one is that then I get asked—it must have been, again, a kindergarten one or a first grade one, a little one. And so I'm still trying to figure out: how do I talk to these kids concretely? And I thought, Oh okay, beans. Because one of the things was, in the South, they would make up these absurd things that you had to pass, like you had to

guess how many—it was actually jellybeans—from the jar. And if you guessed right, you got to vote, and if you didn't—I mean, you got to register to vote—and if you couldn't guess right, you couldn't register to vote. So I had beans, so I got some beans, and I made a little jar of beans.

09-01:26:13

My grandson was visiting—okay, he's fifth grade now. He's in there with my husband, and he's mixed race, right? He's part African American and he's part Latino and he's part white. I come in and I say I have figured out how to maybe to talk about the way—the discrimination around the voting. I hold up this jar and I say, "I'm going to ask, 'How many beans do you think are in this jar?' " I'm talking theoretically, like, Oh, great idea, good idea. Well of course, the ten-year-old goes, "Um, 370." "Nope, you can't vote." "Norris, how many beans are in this jar?" And he goes, "Hm, 275." "Nope, you can't vote." "Now I'm going to guess. I guess 1. Yes, I can vote." And my grandson looks at me and he goes, "*That's not fair*." I said, "I'm white." Or he must have said first—he probably said first—"That's not right." I said, "Yes, it is. I'm white. I can vote." "*That's not fair*." I had spoken in his class twice. But you see, I still was too theoretical. He needed it to be so concrete.

09-01:27:47

And then I'd use that sometimes in classes, and I remember one—and I think they were eighth graders. The kids were all trying to guess, and this one Black girl is sitting there and she's saying, "None of you are going to get it right." She knew! I don't know who her parents were. I don't know why she was—but you know, she absolutely knew what I was doing. And the others were still caught up in, If I can guess it right—and it was like, No. If you're white, you can guess right. You'll get it right even if you just guess one. And that's literally kind of the way it was, right? I've learned those kinds of things, and that's with the young people.

09-01:28:28

I've also spoken at conferences, and there I tend to read my poetry. And that is one of the things that I learned. Also, I used to do both the San Francisco Freedom School, and then the civil rights class that Kathy Emery did at San Francisco State [University]. And I've learned that the poetry is, for the older—for adults and for older students, is a good way to convey some of the emotion and tension and information in a succinct way. And then open it up for questions, and then do the more political answers in terms of what their questions were.

09-01:29:14

Tewes: Yeah, that's really smart. I love that example. I think that's probably where we should leave it for today. And it was a great way to—again, the concrete example of some of the speaking work you've been doing over the years. But is there anything you want to add before we say goodbye today?

09-01:29:34
Allen: I don't think so. I thank you. This is a good—I think a good place to end.

09-01:29:37
Tewes: Perfect. All right, thank you.

Interview 10: March 3, 2021

10-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a tenth interview with Chude Pamela Allen for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on March 3, 2021. Ms. Allen joins me in this remote interview from San Francisco, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California.

10-00:00:20

So, Chude, we are at the portion of our interviews where we're thinking about reflections about all of your life and work that we've discussed. I wanted to pick back up with the ideas of speaking and writing, because as we've mentioned, this is something that you've developed more over the course of your life. We were just discussing your work in school classrooms, but I was wondering if you wanted to speak more about the work, the increased work you're doing in both of those fields recently?

10-00:00:54

Allen: Well, let's see, how do I want to—I think I want to go backwards, if you don't mind. First to talk a little bit about the nineties, when we had already started doing the—we'd had our first reunion out here of people who'd been involved in the Southern freedom movement, and we were doing that, so that was going on. And we were starting to have public meetings for veterans and usually their families, and so that was all happening. Sometimes, like at the San Francisco Public Library, we would get up and do little presentations. We would invite people to do a five-minute talk, so I have some of those, and that was the beginning of learning how to talk about the Southern freedom movement.

10-00:01:45

But how writing comes in there is that when I was first writing about the Southern freedom movement was right at the time that I was helping to organize the 1989 reunion that we had here, which was our first real reunion [in the Bay Area]. And so I was working on a piece at the same time, because it was so difficult to have all these memories come up, to meet other people who had their own issues, also. What we would now say is that all of us, at various degrees, were suffering PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] in various ways, because it was—we were in a situation where there was terrorism. That was true. And then there was this tremendous loss of a movement that we had all been part of that was so important to us all. And then as we left, for whatever reason we left, there was the thing of trying to integrate back into a society that was not the Beloved Community, by any means. So there was that kind of writing going on.

10-00:02:50

I met some people right at the time of this '89 reunion who were doing something called Open Forum, and so I volunteered to do a workshop. Now, this is a community school, and I will say—this, of course, is my bias—but

there is something incredibly unique about being in workshops with—studying with people who are *not* getting credit and *not* being paid, they're just doing it because they want it. It just has its own dynamic to it. So I decided since I was trying to write about my involvement in not only the Southern freedom movement—but that's where I'd started—that I would offer a workshop on political memoir, because I was finding small numbers at that point—not large numbers—small numbers of memoirs by people who had been involved politically in some way or another, Julius Lester being probably the best example.

10-00:03:51

I had xeroxed up some readings, and my thought was that we would have this little small group, and we'd do the readings and then we would talk. It was a small group of both men and women—white people. We were all white. And for some reason, I had one of those moments of not paying attention to what my brain had planned, and just being spontaneous, and I suggested to everyone that we write. And so starting with that first workshop and that first day—I don't remember what the question was, probably something like: what do you remember most strongly about your—we were all activists, we were all people who'd been involved in different political movements, New Left—some more extreme than others—that kind of thing, women's movement. And so then we went around and we read them.

10-00:04:50

One of the people in that first workshop was Rivka Polatnick, whose PhD dissertation was done at UC Berkeley and is at UC Berkeley. She's the person who studied both the New York Radical Women and the Mount Vernon/New Rochelle Black women that Pat Robinson, my mentor, was part of. She interviewed me, because I was the one person that she knew that had a connection between the two groups. And so she was in it, and she played a very good role in that, just in that—in contrast to how I had been prior to when I, basically, left the women's movement and took a break and had been involved in a cult, is I was much looser. So being looser, I wasn't much paying attention to time, so Rivka did me the favor of paying attention to time. [laughs] Just you know, one of those little things.

10-00:05:43

I bring it up, because there's such a difference between a group of people sharing responsibility, and one person trying to do it all. And it requires, of the person in leadership—since we're partly going to talk about leadership—that you trust the people you're with, and that you have some sense of your own limitations. But also, at least for me, that one of the gifts of being in, that short period with the cult, is that I lost a rigidity. So I was less, you know, "We have to do it this way, because this is the way I planned it" kind of thing, and I was more open, which is why I had this spontaneous moment of, "Let's write together." Even though people did the readings, that's what we did each week, is we wrote together. And then I did a couple other workshops another couple times—they were like six, I think six or eight sessions apiece. I did a couple

more—one just for women, and then I did one that was two weekends, so we were more intensely involved.

10-00:06:58

I'm going to give you a generalization that has no value in the real world, because these are such small groups, but it was something I observed: which was that if a person was new to the grouping or this was their first time doing it, what I discovered when we would go around and share what we wrote, is that sometimes—and I say sometimes, so I'm probably talking about two people, three at the most—the men would go deeper sometimes. They would put down what they wrote and [in speaking would] go deeper, be more honest, more personal, because they'd heard what the women had been writing. My experience with women was the opposite. If a woman put down what she'd written, she seemed to be more—she would step back and become more superficial, more—I don't have any explanation for this. But one of the conversations that's going on these days I'm having with Cathy Cade, who is, of course, my age and comparable experiences, is how there was a period where we really needed to do a lot of our work just with women. But that that's no longer true with friendship and work, that now it's a different period—and in the nineties it was already a different period—so that in these workshops, the men sometimes were the ones that were giving me the most help in terms of understanding myself and my writing by what they were writing.

10-00:08:34

And Rivka, who I've mentioned, at one point she said in that first workshop, she said that the Black women of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle, they questioned us middle-class white folks for how much we seemed to be doing navel gazing. You know, I mean, here we are again looking at our own lives and our own experiences, that kind of thing. And one of the men said, "No, I'm doing this so I can *become* active again." One of the themes for this last session is the cost of things. There's a lot of cost involved in doing political work. You don't make money—or you certainly don't make lots of money. Usually it's long hours. If you're having to do a regular job, as well, you're usually tired. Somebody's paying for it, in terms of time, so your family is getting less attention, your romances don't work, whatever. There's different things, but there *is* a cost. And he was talking about the cost of the experience itself.

10-00:09:44

He had been in a political cult, you see? I'd been in a spiritual cult; he'd been in a political cult. One of the other men had been in—he wouldn't have called it a cult either, but it was one of the heavy-duty lefty groups, and they had their own—there's ways in which groups, and I think this is true of groups—I think it's probably true of a lot of organizations, too—they try to control and contain what you're doing and who you are. In one of these cases, the man, he was very artistic, but the particular political group he was in did not consider culture viable, you know? And so how do you figure out who you are when

you choose to compromise and to let parts of yourself go? And then when you leave that group, with all the pain that's involved always, if you've had a meaningful experience, a deep experience, what [so] you pick up? I have a friend that says that about romances, too, or relationships: that when they end it's very painful, but then parts of yourself that had no room to bloom in that relationship come forward. I would say the same is true of political work, that how it changed—you know, parts of it changed.

10-00:11:05

The opposite side of that is that being involved in political work encourages people to be more than they ever expected they could be. I've heard that from women, especially in SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. It certainly was true in the women's movement. We were all pushing ourselves to become *more* of who we could be. So that's the other side. There may be parts that get kind of pushed aside, but there's also parts being pulled out. And that was true, of course, for me that I did public speaking, and then I learned how to write, because I wanted to share the ideas that we were developing. That's why. I would never have gone through the hell of learning to write if it hadn't been that I needed so badly to share. Later, after the cult, I had made the commitment—I made two commitments. One is I would never write unless I wanted to, and the other was that I would not keep a calendar, [laughs] because, of course, I'd known what I was going to be doing every minute of every day. I needed that loose—now I will write on the calendar that's on the wall, but I still don't carry a calendar. And the writing, it's that I chose to—that's why memoir works for me, because memoir is allowing me to understand both whatever the politics were and my personal experience.

10-00:12:33

And I have found two things: that my speaking is better if I have done a lot of writing. It seems—not particularly my thing—for the most part, I haven't published a lot. That doesn't seem to be the main reason I write. I write to clarify my thoughts, and I write to put down, through the poetry, a way of sharing subjective truth, I would say, and painful truth. You know, when you've written a poem that has a lot of pain in it, you—the words themselves hold you and carry you through the sharing, which is just, at least for me, a whole lot easier than just trying to talk about it straight. In that sense, the writing has always been a help to do the speaking.

10-00:13:30

And then there's this other one, which I talked about last week, the beginning of writing the long poem to Sojourner Truth, which was titled, "How Do You Forgive?" and then beginning to write answers, which have gone on for these years—and still go on. But there was a period in the nineties, especially, and into the early 2000s, where I was sharing some of it publicly. And I realized that I hadn't made the comment last time that within the women's liberation movement, within the broader women's movement—and I think pretty much today—again, it is really suspect for a white woman to be speaking in both the voice of or even, in any way, claiming a connection to bring the wisdom of a

Black person into the world. So I needed to just comment that, because that was what I was working against in one way. Because I come out of that political movement where, you know, there was a real question to white women being the ones to interpret the experiences of women of color, of white women to tell their stories, whatever.

10-00:14:47

But by the time I came out of the cult, I also had learned that I had to be true to who I was. So here's one of those other marvelous dialectics that there is who you are, and then there is the other reality, and how—the political reality, the world, as it were—how do you balance these two? And so for me, in terms of sharing the Sojourner poetry, it has been in small groups, in situations where there have always been, with one or two exceptions, Black women involved in it, hearing me. But they're small groups, and so it's not like I have tried to impose it on anyone.

10-00:15:35

I was in a writing group with Judy Grahn as the leader for a number of years, starting in the late eighties into the early nineties. We did a presentation one time at Mama Bears Bookstore and Café in Oakland, and it was focused partly on—I can't remember how we titled it, but it was about racism. I was going to read a Sojourner poem, and we had invited an African American woman to read in the same second half with me. Vivian Louise was her name, and I had known her when I worked with Union WAGE [Women's Alliance to Gain Equality]. She was working with an organization that—we had contact with each other. And I knew that I could not go to read this with her on the program without her knowing ahead of time what I was going to be doing. I called her up and made an appointment to go see her, and I read her the poem, which, by far, the hardest time I'd ever shared a reading, because it was only to one person. [laughs] You know, it's hard to sit right across the kitchen table, as it were, and all of a sudden really allow yourself to share your writing. And she, afterwards, said yes, that she was fine with me doing that, which I then did at Mama Bears.

10-00:17:06

I also did it for a number of years at an Attitudinal Healing [Connection] Retreat, started in 2001. This is an organization out of West Oakland, and they did a—what we called the Celebrating the Human Spirit Workshop, and it would be a weekend. The first year, I had kind of spontaneously—we met soon after 9/ll. And so things were kind of—people were very intense, and I found myself sharing one of the short poems that had come to me early. And then after that, the next year, I shared a poem—Saturday night was for everybody who wanted to celebrate by sharing something, and it was the Black women who began to, the few of them that were there, wanting me to do this every year. So that experience of having been worried, How can I share this, even though this push is to come up and share? And I had done it with Frida Waterhouse, the spiritual teacher. This was also a spiritual group, by the way. This is not a heavy-duty political group. The Attitudinal Healing

[Connection] does a lot of the *Course [in] Miracles* type of approach to things, but they have their own principles, attitudinal healing does. And so these were people who were open to spirit, that's what I would say.

10-00:18:38

I'm sharing that, because it is so much against what I would have thought would have happened back when I was just a political person, before I regained this spiritual quality in myself, so I just wanted to share that. So I think that clarifies, pretty much, most of the speaking. The one thing I would say about the classrooms and speaking at [San Francisco] State [University] and in the conferences I've spoken at, is that the poetry really works well. To share, to speak my poetry, and then to do the more—what we might call political in the question and answer. So that's more or less what I do now.

10-00:19:30

Tewes: Yeah, and I just want to flag, for anyone looking to learn more about some of your speaking and writing experiences, that you gave a really wonderful convocation at Carleton College, your alma mater, in 2015. Definitely watch that! [Allen laughs] And then, also, you have a lot of great writings on the website for the Bay Area Veterans [of] the Civil Rights Movement.

10-00:19:54

I think I just want to throw this out here to you and see if you want to reflect on this at all. We've spoken, since the beginning, about the fact that you didn't consider yourself a writer, and you had to convince yourself that you *were* an effective speaker and people did want to hear from you. And I'm wondering how you think about both writing and speaking now and, not only for your personal explorations, as you've mentioned, but also in what people want to learn from you, or what they *can* learn from you and your experiences?

10-00:20:35

Allen: Well, I would say two things. One is in the *Feminist Memoir Project*: *[Voices from Women's Liberation]* book there is a—one of the pieces is by a woman named Meredith Tax. And when I read this, which I'm about to read to you, I had never, ever heard anyone else talk about this experience. [reads] "To give expressive leadership is exhilarating, draining, and terrifying. It is not just self-expression; it is letting the spirit speak through you. At certain historical moments when change is possible, collective energy fills the air like static electricity, shooting out sparks. Some people can channel it. They know how to express what a group feels and point the way it wants to go. Like dowsing rods or Geiger counters, they absorb and feed back feeling, indicating energy and direction. Often, this gift is a burden. Sometimes it feels like hubris, sometimes prophecy."

10-00:21:45

Well, I had to look up hubris, because I didn't know what the word means. What it is, is pride. And so how I reinterpreted that from—I mean, I've never read anybody else talk about the experience of speaking to a group, and

having the group be just 100 percent with you in a positive way, and to really feel that sense that what you're saying is speaking really to the hearts of everybody there, which is very different from speaking *at* people and educating people. It's a different experience and it is terrifying and it is exhilarating and it is incredibly draining, all those things. And when it doesn't work, it is horrible, and you do seem like an arrogant bitch and people hate you. It seems like hubris, because you're trying too hard.

10-00:22:39

What I now know is that it has to do, for me at least, with getting out of the way, ego/personality has to be out of the way; it is allowing Spirit—however you define that—to come through. So it is not, for me, that I, personally, am speaking this, but I am a vehicle. And the Lakota medicine woman who was part of the Unleashing the Human Spirit Retreats, Keya Kessler, she gave this information one time, very early when I'd started sharing these Sojourner poetries, that what we want to be is hollow bones, so Spirit can come through us.

10-00:23:31

[That's a] *perfect* example, that for me—I mean, you have to find the metaphor that works for you. That metaphor will not work for everybody, but I got it, I got it. Oh okay, my job is to clear out my subjective emotional shit so I can be as clear as possible, so that whatever is happening, I'm not being triggered to all of a sudden be back in my old stuff. I need to be clear. And to the degree I can be clear, then—for me, it's the Sojourner voice—a lot comes through. But other times, it's just my voice coming through, but it's coming through without my being in total control, that's the only way I can put it. My trusting the inside of me, that it will come up and come through as the truth. Sometimes, even still today, I feel just incredibly vulnerable afterwards. It's hard to be that—to just kind of open yourself up and let things come through. But for me, that is now when I'm most authentic.

10-00:24:39

Now, I have to be very careful that I prepare myself—obviously, when I'm sharing to eighth graders, I'm going to be sharing differently if Spirit is coming through me than if I'm sharing to students in a college class to if I'm sharing in a church. You know, there are differences. And yet I have to trust that whatever comes up is what was the right thing to come up. And this is from one spiritual teacher, the Mother, who worked with Sri Aurobindo. I've read some of her teachings, and one of her teachings is to say, "Thank you, God," essentially, when I mess up, "because you've shown me where I need to still work." Now, that is hard. Believe me, it is hard to be up there speaking, opening your heart. Well, I mean I'm worried about what's going to come out in print from these ten sessions, right? [laughs] You know, what have I—where have I messed up? Where have I done—whatever? But you know, the spiritual thing is, Ah, look at that, Chude. You said that in a way that's arrogant. You need to work on that one. Ah, look at this one, look at this one. You got out of the way. Wow, I said that? Because that's the thrill. The thrill

when it's good, and it comes out sometimes in my poetry, is you write these things and you go, Wow, because it's coming from someplace so deep, which for me is connected to Spirit. I don't know how it is for other people, but that is how it is for me.

10-00:26:20

But I would say about speaking, it was valuable to me to read that someone else, Meredith Tax, knew what my experience was. If my memory is right, she also went into a—again, it was political—but a heavy-duty group for a while. I think these things, they throw us a little askance at times. And we get confused about, Because I was able to say the right thing last Saturday at the meeting and really helped the whole group move forward, does that mean I'm responsible for saying it *this* Saturday? And when I used to think, Yes, if I did it then, I have to do it now, I got into trouble. When I started to learn—and this is even before I left the women's movement—to sit quietly and listen in groups, to really listen, and speak, when I was urged to speak, from deep within, but with a listening to what people had been saying, to what was real for that group. That's another thing, is letting go of the weight that, I have to do it every time, and I have to be perfect every time. You don't have to do it every time, and you're never perfect.

10-00:27:51

Did I remember to tell you, way back from the Venceremos Brigade, that the key thing I came back with was from one of the Cubanas: that to be a revolutionary is to make mistakes? Did I remember to tell you that?

10-00:28:05

Tewes: No, but that's—

10-00:28:06

Allen: No, I forgot. Okay. Yeah, '72 I come, there we are. We were straightening—probably straightening nails, because that's what we had to do. We were building houses and, you know, they didn't—because of the embargo they didn't have a lot of stuff, so we would take the old nails and straighten them, and everybody got to take turns doing things. But that's one of the times you talked, when you were straightening nails. I just remember this one Cuban woman, one of the leaders, telling me that to be a revolutionary is to make mistakes. It makes complete sense, once I've heard it. Of course, if you're going to be on an edge, if you're trying to push things forward, nobody knows what's going to happen. You know, let's forget this thing that we all know what's going to happen. Nobody expected the pandemic to happen that we've now been in for a year, you know? [laughs] I mean, hello, we're not in control.

10-00:28:59

So it was helpful to me—and I will use an absurd example, but it taught me something about this culture—is I came back with this principle now that, Of course we would make mistakes. We had made mistakes; we would continue to make mistakes. We were having some friends over for dinner, and I made

the comment that I had never been able to make a stew, because it was supposed to simmer, and every time I saw it bubbling I'd turn it down. And finally, I had learned that a simmer means letting it do little bubbles. This one person that was there, a friend, said, "Aren't you embarrassed?" I said, "Hell no, I'm thrilled!" [laughs] I mean, now I can make a stew. As it turns out, now my husband tends to make the stews and the pot roasts and stuff, but, you know, I could—see, I'd already grasped this concept, that the issue isn't about, you know, that you shouldn't make a mistake; and that if you do make a mistake, you've got to find somebody else to blame or you've got to cover it up in some way. That's not the point. The point is we all make mistakes. The question is, What do we learn from them? I mean, I was thrilled. I'd learned how to make a stew, you know? [laughs] It sounds dumb, but it's not dumb.

10-00:30:20

That same principle works in politics. One of the things when I was in Cuba, we went and we heard Fidel Castro speak at an educational—it was a conference on education in Cuba. I don't speak fluent Spanish, so I, of course, was listening to a translation of it. But I had never heard a major leader of a country do a criticism—self-criticism of what the government had done. It was like, What? Again, it was a political version of "to be a revolutionary is to make mistakes." We're reforming the educational system, we're educating everybody. These are the mistakes we've made and we're going to try to correct. What a gift, what a gift! Great political lesson. Great political—and personal, as I say, because to me it's all connected. There's no such thing as something just being political and not having personal ramifications. And personal lessons, of course, have political ramifications.

10-00:31:36

So I think that does me for the writing and the speaking, unless you have another question for that?

10-00:31:45

Tewes: I think that covers most of my ideas there. But this seems like a good segue into talking about your theory of leadership that you've developed over the years. And we can even think about what that costs you, as you've been mentioning.

10-00:32:05

Allen: Well, when I'm being cynical or negative, which doesn't happen a whole lot—it's not my personality—but on this question, it does come up this way sometimes, is that movements eat leaders. I think it's an important thing to remember that in leadership, people want somebody else to have all the answers, and when you don't, for whatever reason, then they can get really angry at you. Now, my mentor, Pat Robinson, made this comment about South Africa and [Nelson] Mandela when he came out of prison, she made the comment that people want him to be the great leader, they want somebody other than themselves to have all the answers. And that's a weight. And so for

a while, I think one of my problems was that I thought I should figure out the answers.

10-00:33:05

And the other thing that happens sometimes—and this was not, this particular one was not so much me, but I remember Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, who has written about her experiences in the women's movement in *Outlaw Woman*: *[A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975]*, but her also telling me that one of the problems was that [when] people that were in her groupings started seeing her as a leader, they also started to kind of let her get away with things. The key for anybody in leadership is that you be able to trust the people you're working with that they are going to call you on your shit, that they're going to pull your coattails, as they say. And they're going to do it, hopefully with love, because if they do it with love and with caring, then you can change and you can grow. If they smack you in the back of the head or hit you in the gut, they're liable to make you want to just leave. I mean, I've had both experiences, you know? [laughs] It's like, you know, I work so hard, and all you can do is put me down, because you think whatever? There's that temptation to say forget it.

10-00:34:22

Again, it's a dialectic. There are times when I really got caught in ego. I really got caught in what we would call willpower, that I thought I was right, and it made no difference what anybody else thought. And I needed, at that time, to have somebody tap me on the shoulder and say, "Sit down and listen. You may be even right theoretically, but right now, at this moment, with this group, you need to listen, because you're not in sync with the group." You see? And so again, it's a tension, it's a dialectic. If you see further than where most people want to be, you may or may not be right that they're going to go there, but, you know, you need to get back where [they] are. [laughs]

10-00:35:13

Let me do one example the other way, which is with an individual. I discovered, especially the time I was working with Union WAGE, that I have the ability to see people's potential. But the fact that I see your potential does not mean, necessarily, that the timing is right for you to be doing whatever it is, or even just because of who you are that you'll ever do that. So that's an example of a kind of leadership: when you see potential in people and you encourage people. But not in the sense that this—"I can see you could be the next good lieutenant in this thing. This is what you need to do," kind of thing. That's too rigid. It has to be just, "You know, you have the ability to do this. If you would like to—if you think this is the right thing for you to do, I'd be happy to support you." You know, I'm in a writing group now, it's just a personal writing group, with someone who—she really writes beautifully. She could be writing beautiful poetry. So every now and then I've said that, but it's not what she wants to do. In the old days, you see, I would have said, "You need to be writing poetry." That's not leadership. Leadership is much more,

"I'm here for you. I can see you could do these things," or whatever. Or, "This is what you want to do. Oh."

10-00:36:41

Pat Robinson, remember? When I wrote *Free Space*: *[A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation]* she didn't say, "Oh, that's a bunch of bunk." She said, "Wouldn't it be nice if you're right? I don't think you are." [laughs] But you know, she didn't tell me I was wrong to do it, she didn't tell me that it was a waste of her time to read it, she didn't say any of that. She just said, "Oh, I wish you were right, [laughs] but I don't think you will be." And of course, I wasn't. It's just a little piece of the whole story, it's not the whole thing.

10-00:37:11

I don't know, did that—

10-00:37:15

Tewes: Yeah, that helps a lot. But it also reminds me that we've been speaking about women, especially like Pat Robinson and Jean Maddox, as being mentors for you.

10-00:37:27

Allen: Yes.

10-00:37:27

Tewes: And I'm wondering what lessons you learned from their mentorship, and if you feel you've been able to share that with others.

10-00:37:38

Allen: A yes and a no. I also would include Frida Waterhouse, the spiritual teacher. She's the one I know I referred to last time as modeling for me, "May I be frank," [laughs] instead of my, boom, you know?

10-00:37:51

With Pat it was always: keep your vision broad. And so when I would get too narrow, she would be bringing up the bigger picture usually. But she could also challenge me on a very personal thing, too. She would be probing and pushing and challenging, but always within the context, at the same time, of supporting. So it's an interesting, again, dialectic, to have a mentor who is on your side, and yet wishes you could do more.

10-00:38:29

For example, when she and the people—the [young people] and the women that wrote *Lessons from the Damned*: *[Class Struggle in the Black Community]*, which is, by the way, called "by the Damned," she wrote me and she asked me to write a review for the *Black Scholar*, which is where my first husband, Robert [L.] Allen, was editor. And I couldn't do it. I just could not do it. It was a combination that the writing—to write a review would have been—was hard for me at that point. This is, you know, the early seventies, so the writing would have been hard. But I could not, as a white person at that

point, I just didn't feel I could do it. She was very critical of that. You see, she was not—she never was just into white people step back. She was into everybody contributing, and she was very—and she found someone else to do it, a Black man who actually lived in San Francisco. He did it, and it was a good review. But I couldn't do it then. Now, she wanted more of me than I could give, but she didn't turn her back on me by any means. And I think that's part of it, too, is the learning, you know, with being—having a mentor who stays with you.

10-00:40:00

On the other hand, Pat was a kind of person that every now and then I would suggest like, "So and so, they would really value"—she was a psychotherapist, too—so, "they would really benefit from a discussion with you." [laughs] I sent somebody to her once, and she writes me afterwards and she said, "Well, she's like hanging on a hook on the wall, and all she has to do is reach around and pick herself up if she wants to." Pat Robinson used to speak that way, in these strange, different ways. But the point being, this person is suffering, but they aren't choosing to try to change their situation. Another time I'd sent somebody to—this would be by a phone call, and the person forgot. And they set up a second thing, and she forgot—and she wouldn't work with her. "Unh-uh, unh-uh, I'm—" you know, she was very clear.

10-00:40:58

So that's one of the things I've learned, is as a mentor, you do not do somebody's work for them, you don't tell them what to do. You might ask them, especially if you're in an organization, and there are things that need being done. But you ask, but you don't do it for people; they have to do their own work. That was an extremely important early lesson. [laughs] There's a lot of support for you if you're doing your own work, but again, it's a dialectic. Support does not mean you get to just sit back and somebody else will do it for you. Or like, there's these expressions about, "Let go and let God." Well, no. God still expects you to do your work. I mean, God is helping you and guiding you, but you've still got to do the legwork, as they say. Well, I'd say that's true for a mentor. A mentor is somebody that is there to help you, but you've got to do your own legwork. So I would say I learned that.

10-00:42:01

The other thing I'd say, I think for Jean, who I knew for the least amount of time, because she was in the process of dying, with Jean Maddox she both believed absolutely, as I said, that I would learn what I needed to learn. That the organization needed leadership, and I would learn what I needed to learn. That's how she felt. But she also said these things that I think I said, but I will repeat, which is that when you're organizing, you need to tell people how hard it's going to be. Do not make promises. And that's one thing about the Southern freedom movement. There was no question. If you were going to join a demonstration, if you were going to go to Mississippi, the first thing was you were being encouraged to think three, four times about it. Because you could get killed, you could get beaten, you could get jailed. Your life

could be changed, you could be damaged for the rest of your life. What you were doing was so serious that you had to know what the consequences were. Well, Jean had a similar opinion about organizing a union in an unorganized place, which is that, you know, you're going to take risks, and it's worth it, you see? In both cases, it's worth it. You don't want to keep living in a situation where you're not being treated well. You don't want to work in a situation where you're not being treated well. But it's not like, Oh, do this and everything will be fine. No, because the thing about changing a society, and of course contributing to the whole world becoming a better place, is that it's your whole lifetime, and then it's going to keep going. We're not going to see everything we hoped would happen. Period.

10-00:43:56

Now we have contradictions around women's liberation, as it were, that are very—that are different, at least for college-educated women in the United States. There are a different set of problems, but throughout the world, there are still huge, just huge questions around patriarchy and oppression. And it's not going to be solved in our lifetime. So that's part of it, and Jean was clear about that. That was one of the things: the next generation picks [it] up. With the people I work with in the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, one of our members, especially, always is saying to the young people, "I'm looking for someone to take the baton. This is like—the struggle for social justice is like a relay." And what he was saying the other day was that it had finally dawned on him that you can't give the baton, it has to be taken. So I guess in terms of the relay race, you get to that spot where you go to pass it on. If they don't take it—[laughs] you know, they have to take it. It's not enough that you're handing it, you know? Again, it's two things at the same time. I give what I can. The next generation, or two generations now, take from me what is of value and move it forward, you know?

10-00:45:35

Tewes: I think that's a good assessment. I would like to hear you speak a bit about the arc of activism in your life, because we've spoken about how young you were when you became involved in the Southern freedom movement, and how you worked your way right into anti-war work and then the women's movement for so many years. So I'm curious about how you think about that arc, and the ebb and flow over the years.

10-00:46:20

Allen: Well, I'm going to say a few things first. I think I've mentioned before, but I will say again, that Ericka Huggins, I heard her speak once about the Black Panthers, and her saying that one of the problems was they did not have an inner source of nurturance, strength, you know, what I call spirituality. The need for a movement to have some kind of spiritual connection, however it is defined. That, I think, is an important one

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The other is that I remember reading once that at the point at which Dr. Martin Luther King went to Memphis in support of the garbage workers' strike, he had been—he was ready for a retreat, he was exhausted. And so it caused me—I mean, assuming that's true, because I just read it. I wasn't there, right? Assuming that's true, that's one of those moments where history and personal need, a choice has to be made. So that at that moment in history, it was, I think, essential that he make that stand with the workers. I think that's what he saw. And I think in terms of the politics that he represents, which the dominant society wants to make just kind of nonviolence over here, his politics were: he was against the war in Vietnam; he was against the kind of ravages that greed, of capitalism, had done to the whole world—not just here. So he was taking a stand for the workers as they took a stand for the right to be treated with dignity and be paid—to be treated as human beings. And they used the word "man"—I guess they were all males—but to be a man, that was the thing. But as workers. Not just whether they could sit at a restaurant and eat at the counter, not just that they could vote, but that as workers they would be treated with dignity and respect.

10-00:48:54

So I say that only, because I think that, to a large degree, I want to say out loud that the problem of being a political activist, especially—well, it doesn't matter whether you actually get some pay for it or not, because it'll always try to take your whole life—is that there absolutely needs to be times of regeneration, where there's a stepping back, and there is some kind of opportunity to re-create, really, [laughs] to re-create, and to get in touch both with one's inner self and kind of with one's life. But there are moments in history where you don't get to do that. It's going too fast. Sometimes these things work where you—Ho Chi Minh wrote poetry when he was in prison, as an example. Writing poetry, to me, is a way of finding inner nurturance and regeneration, so that's an example of a time when you're forced to.

10-00:50:11

Sri Aurobindo, who was in India—very interesting story in terms of—because he was an Indian whose parents—his father sent him to be raised in England, with nothing connected to Indian culture, he and his brother. And then when he came back as an, I think it was an Oxford graduate, and came back to India, he felt like finally he was coming home. But he's an example of a person who had been given the benefits of the dominant—remember, the colonial country was England; it was still a colonizer then. He had learned its culture, and he then went back to his own and learned his spiritual culture. Well, he was an early leader in the struggle to—against colonialism. And by the way, not a pacifist. Believed that with pacifism there would be this terrible bloodbath when the English left, as there was. I can't go into all the details—I don't even know how much I know, I just know a little bit about him. But what I wanted to share was that he gets put in jail, and that's where he becomes what they call enlightened, in a kind of, you know, spirituality he has, became enlightened. And so then when he comes out of prison, at some

point—I don't remember, I don't know the details of this. But anyway, what I know is that he is meditating or he's in this connection he has with Spirit, and he gets told to leave. And the British are coming to arrest him—he's already [left]—at his house—as he's getting onto a boat and leaving.

10-00:51:57

Now, Wazir Willie Peacock, who grew up in Mississippi and was a member of SNCC, he would talk about that in terms of surviving in Mississippi in the movement, that you needed that connection to something—whatever you want to call it. Whether you want to call it Spirit, you want to call it intuition, whatever it is, you needed to be tuned in to something other than your—just your own thoughts and what you wanted to be true. You needed to be tuned in, so you knew when you're driving along to go right instead of straight like you'd planned to. You know what I mean, it saves your life! [laughs] It could save your life. Or the other way to put it: some people who made bad decisions died. I mean, it's not my place to say they should or shouldn't have done whatever they did, but I believe in the principle that if you're not tuned in with some kind of inner hearing, you ultimately will make serious mistakes out in the world, that there is this dialectic. But as would happen to Dr. King, there are times when the step you have to make takes you down the road to, in his case, martyrdom, because that's when he was killed. So—

10-00:53:37

Tewes: I want to pivot a little bit away from the activism we've been discussing and just note that you've been in the Bay Area since 1968, so a good long while now. I'm curious as to the changes you've observed in the area, be they cultural or physical.

10-00:54:06

Allen: Well, when we came here in '68 and we saw how—already—how diverse it was, that's when we realized we could have a child, and the child would not have to grow up in quite as much of a Black/white situation. You know, not that there wasn't a lot of diversity in New York, but I couldn't keep living in New York. It was too big a city for me. So starting from really the beginning, there always was—it has always been a very diverse area, and that's one of its things.

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It's also always had that progressive wing to it, even kind of almost to the total edge. I mean, we are literally on the edge, in terms of the Pacific Ocean's right there if you're in San Francisco, in particular. And so there's always that saying about, People come out here when they can't, you know—we're the last stop in trying to find a place where you can be fully yourself. Certainly, that's true among the gay movement. The gay men, this was a place they could come, almost a mecca.

10-00:55:19

And I think for women, it's the whole—it's also the East Bay. The lesbian feminist movement was super, super important in term of the changes that happened in this area, and now are, in terms of the country and the world, very, very positive in many ways. Culturally—leadership, I think, in terms of the right of women to be fully who they are, including to love who we want to love and to have public space, to have the right to be in public without having to be escorted by a man. I mean, you know, that used to be—there are all kinds of places women couldn't go if they were not escorted by a man. A single woman, it was assumed that you were a prostitute or you were at least sexually available. I mean, that's not true anymore. I can go to a café and sit down and write in my notebook and drink some tea, and nobody will bother me. Of course, I'm an old lady now, too, but you understand what I'm saying; it didn't used to be that way. So those kinds of things have changed, that people can be more who they are.

10-00:56:39

And of course, San Francisco, at least, has become more Asian. The area I'm in now is like—the last time I read it was 60 percent Asian, so there's that kind of change going on, the demographics have changed. Large Filipino community south of me, and less and less Black people in the city. Many moved out, and it's harder—and it's more and more expensive to live here. So that's a huge—in terms of the changes, since the economic meltdown in whatever it was, 2008, 2009, has been the housing situation. With it becoming now a profit-making venture, and these corporations and rich people buying things up, [renovating], and then selling them, so that the houses around me—I'm in a working-class neighborhood of San Francisco, where you now can't get a house for less than a million dollars, I don't think, unless it's falling apart. And then you're still paying, what, [laughs] half a million dollars for something that's not livable? I mean, it's hard. It's a real change. We saw it with nonprofits not being able to stay downtown, because they could no longer afford the rents. Now, of course, with the pandemic, who knows what's going to happen.

10-00:58:02

And we had the thing that with Google and the other Silicon Valley [tech companies] having the buses come down from San Francisco, so all of a sudden the little techies could live up here and be in San Francisco in the evening and on the weekends, and they could take the buses to work down in Silicon Valley. That upped all the rents. That changed a lot, too, in terms of people. So areas like the Mission [District], which have lost much of their—many of their young people had to—get pushed out. It gets harder and harder to live here. I know less about the East Bay and this kind of situation, except that I do know that housing issues are real all over the Bay Area, and that it's an expensive place to live. Politically, I live—since I live in San Francisco, I live in a city that does kind of swing a little bit further left than most places some of the time, and then swings back more to the center. We wouldn't have the problems with housing if all our leadership had been progressive in 2008,

2009, and giving corporations benefits and those kinds of things. So there's all these issues.

10-00:59:35

But you're also asking me about what I think about the female leadership, because this is women in politics. I am adamantly opposed to the idea that women's liberation has to do with breaking the glass ceiling and becoming part of the leadership of corporations, because I consider corporations evil, you see? I consider profit as not being a viable motivation for creating a just society. So I'm not particularly interested in how many females are up there at the top making their megabucks and helping their shareholders make lots of money. Who cares about how the workers are treated, and who cares about the pollution and all those things—whatever they can get away with. That doesn't interest me.

10-01:00:30

I think when I first started organizing with women that I was caught up in the idea that somehow women [laughs] would be better leaders, would be kinder, would be better supervisors. And I don't think any of that anymore. I don't think that, whether she's a female or whether you're talking about someone, either male or female, who's Black, whether or not that's the best teacher for a bunch of Black students depends on their *politics*, not on the color of their skin or their gender. So that's just me, that's how I feel. I do understand that it is better to have women professors and women teachers in the higher levels—and men spread all the way through—that it's very important for girls to see that, again, to have mentors and to have teachers and people to look up to.

10-01:01:27

I do not agree with—and I think I said this already once, but I will say it again—I do not agree with teaching girls or boys that they can be anything they want to be, because it's just not true. What I *do* think—because I was thinking about this last night—it's like, Well, what is it then? Well, I think what it is is that if you have a talent for something and if you have a drive, there's a very good chance that with the right set of conditions, if you've worked really hard you really *can* make that step. I think I said it was with the cheerleading, right? [laughs] I mean, if I can't touch my toes, I wasn't going to be a cheerleader in seventh grade, even though I wanted to be. Period. I could have learned better maybe to do something, but you know what I mean. It's, again, a dialectic between who you are, what your particular talents are and abilities are, and what—you could probably, possibly see as the best possibility for what you could do in this world.

10-01:02:36

I believe somewhere in there—again, whether we want to use the word God or Spirit—that that gets involved, too. Sometimes we get stopped in our tracks, because we think we know what we want to do, and we stop. This has been true of me, going down this road and, boom, I get stopped. That happened when I needed to leave Union WAGE. It was time for me to stop, and I sure

as hell didn't know that, you know? [laughs] I mean, I was going to, again, lead the revolution, right? But no, it was time for me to step back, because I needed to nurture the spiritual side of myself. Or to put it another way: to open my heart more, to have an open heart, to believe in people and to come from a place of love. You know, it sounds corny, but that's—the best leaders come from—love people. There has to be that aspect to it, as well as have some kind of clarity, including the fact that you can't always assume people are going to choose the right path. Again, you have to have that dialectic thing of: your mind is working and your heart is open, both at the same time.

10-01:04:06
Tewes: I think that's a great way to frame that, Chude.

10-01:04:07
You've mentioned women in politics in the area, and I was just thinking: what kind of impact do you think the women's movement has had on the Bay Area, in particular?

10-01:04:24
Allen: Well, I know that in the early women's liberation movement here, a number of women then went back into school to get training for different things. And some of them moved into a number of—you know, especially helping professions—leadership positions. And I think that's good. There's a [Bay Area Women's and] Children's Center—I think that's the name of it now—in San Francisco that originally was started by women's liberation people in terms of children. There's health centers, the women's health centers. Things that got started and continue, because the early women, women in the women's movement, knew there was a need. So in that sense, I'd say there's been some good leadership that came out of the women's movement. And I'm sure, in terms of teaching in both high schools and even elementary school, middle school, high school, colleges, there have been some very good teachers that came out of activism and bring that into their classrooms.

10-01:05:47
Tewes: And as we near the end here, we've spoken about your life in a lot of detail, but I'm sure there are still areas where you'd like to make sure we represent well. Is there anything you'd like to add, in that respect?

10-01:06:02
Allen: Well, I'm not sure—I wanted to end with something, at least for me, that I needed to say.

10-01:06:09
Tewes: Okay.

10-01:06:09
Allen: I can answer that way here. In thinking about the number of these interviews we've done and the fact that I don't get to edit them, so that I'm stuck with

what I've said, there are times I've felt somewhat vulnerable, and so I thought the thing to do is to end with some reminders of things.

10-01:06:37

Like number one is: what I'm sharing about, at my best, is still only my point of view. It's my experience, and it is not the whole experience. So even like last time, I referred to a couple people that I worked with in the Southern freedom movement or here in—the vets who'd been in the Southern freedom movement. I realized that when I get the transcript, I'm going to put into just the little brackets where you can find out more about them, their story. Because I don't want to be the source of their story, if you understand what I'm saying. So in that sense, I thought it was important to just say that this is my story. It's how I've remembered. [laughs] Memory is an odd thing, so you don't always—I'm not talking here about the dates—this happened here and this happened there—but even in how we remember things. That it's, again, any researcher needs to be putting this in a context with other people's stories, and [in] an overall context.

10-01:07:52

And so the two things I want to say: one is the context, that Pat Robinson, my mentor, always said, "Put yourself in context, put yourself in America." So I'm realizing, again, to just end with remembering: I'm born during the Second World War. I end up living where I grew up because of the Korean War. These things are key. My father did not go to war, my grandfather did not go to war. My brother was drafted, and he went in as a medic, got brought into—convinced to go into Officer Candidate School, trained one week before he was to be commissioned, went in and said, "I don't believe in killing," and went back to being a medic. My father was so upset. My brother's dyslexic, he'd flunked—at that point had flunked out of college. My father was so thrilled that he was going to succeed, and my brother turns around and doesn't do it. I, of course, thought he should have been against the Vietnam War, but he wasn't against the Vietnam War, he was against killing. So this is the context of the kind of things, this is what's happening when I'm a young adult, is the Vietnam War and the draft. My first husband refuses the draft. By chance, he doesn't go to jail for five years, but we thought he would. This is part of it.

10-01:09:21

There's a Southern freedom movement going on. It starts when I'm still a young person. I'm living in a—basically, a white community. I don't even understand that I'm in a segregated community. I do not know about de facto segregation. I know that there's legal segregation in the South, but I don't know anything about what's going on in the North, until I happen to go to North Philadelphia to work in a church camp and then go down to Spelman [College] and begin to learn about these things. So this is part of the context.

10-01:09:53

I live in a capitalist society, and in a society—a country which has supported corporations to dominate the world. We are not the country that colonized most people—although I think we colonized Puerto Rico—but we are the ones that went in with the money to—as the colonialism ended and imperialism, as they say—you know, Cuba still sits there as one of the few places that was able to throw out the dominators, which was, in our case, the US.

10-01:10:31

I grew up around the time when people were afraid that we were all going to be bombed. And we little kids were taught to go under our little teeny-weeny desks and put our arms like this [covers head with arms] to protect ourselves from the atomic bomb. Really, I mean, you know. So now we still live with those threats. It's just that we all pretend they're not there, but they're there. And we live now—this is 2021—we live where there's constant war. The United States is at constant war somewhere in the world, and has been for, whatever, decades. What is it, nineteen years, seventeen years in Afghanistan? I mean, constant. Dropping bombs and all that stuff, all that's happening. That's the context in which we live. And yet, we don't face it every day, the bombs aren't falling on us. So that's part of our context, too.

10-01:11:38

And now we're in a pandemic. [laughs] And now we're in a pan[demic], and who knows what's going to happen. I'm going to get my second vaccine on Sunday, unless the vaccine disappears or something, so that'll be great. I'll be able to see my grandkids—with masks on still. You know, if this interview were going on a year-and-a-half ago, none of that would be part of our discussion, you know? It's weird, it's different, but that's the context.

10-01:12:08

But for the subjective side, I just wanted to use an example that memory is odd, and I think I mentioned this in terms of realizing this around somebody in the Southern freedom movement, their story about being in an all-Black project when it wasn't. When, in fact, the whites came later, and realizing that, subjectively, that was the memory, because that's how it started. She went in just three of them, and they were—they had to find the housing, and that's what stayed with her.

10-01:12:42

Well, I have this example of one of the women that I got to know and was able to work with who—we did it through our writing and talking—who'd been kidnapped by the Klan and beaten by the Klan and, you know, was able to heal from that post-traumatic stress. And she had told me this story about how she had once said to God that she couldn't forgive those Klansmen, and God—she had heard God say, "That's not your business, that's my business." Well, she told me the story, and the story, as I heard it, was that she'd been at a retreat and that she'd gone up to the altar, and she had basically said to

God—I guess they were all giving things over to God. She was saying, "I can't forgive, and God had said, 'That's my job, not yours.' "

10-01:13:48

So the next year I'm seeing her, because we don't live near each other, and I mention this. [She said], "Well, that's not what happened." I can't remember now even where—I mean, it was some other thing, but it wasn't up at the altar. What I'm saying is, even to this day, that's still the metaphor that—I mean, that's what I remember. It *works* for me. And remember, forgiveness is one of my big issues, right? I mean, this is when I first starting writing to Sojourner Truth, "How did you forgive?" And so for me it works, even though I don't go up to altars anymore. I was raised in the Episcopal Church with an altar, and it works, it works as a metaphor, to go up and say—go to, if you use the altar as that place of meeting God—"I can't forgive this cruelty, I can't forgive this meanness." And you know, I can't. I mean, these right-wing Republicans, I can't forgive them. They are nasty, cruel people. I can't forgive them. But the metaphor is, "That's not your business." My business is to learn how to keep my heart open. My business is to learn how to listen, so that some of—there are possibly times when I would be able to listen to and then interact with someone who perhaps could then be changed and be able to turn their back on that kind of meanness and ugliness.

10-01:15:34

I don't believe in hell. I don't believe in a religion that says that if you don't do it this way, you go to hell. I don't believe in a God that has a hell. But I have to learn how to listen to people who do, about why it works for them and what would be—you know, how then to speak to it. And that was a Pat Robinson lesson, that she learned how to speak to different people. She didn't speak to me, a little Bucks County, middle-class, white girl, the way she spoke to the young Black kids in Mount Vernon, [New York]. I'm still learning that one, I'm still learning to listen, I'm still learning to try to keep my heart open. I just want any researcher who uses any of this to realize that I'm not claiming that I have the whole truth. I have attempted to speak my truth as best I can. And at my best, I have gotten out of the way, and whatever it is that directs me—my guidance has come through me. And to the degree that I've gotten caught up in ego, I won't have done as well. You know, it just is there.

10-01:17:02

And I can end here with: I've been copying out these messages from Sojourner—that's what I've been doing for this year—from all my old journals, copying them out. [laughs] And the one I copied out just the other day was basically that you have to learn to trust the people, even when they refuse what you believe is the truth, and even when they're basically telling you that you're on an ego trip and that you're doing this just for you. Because—and this is the fun part of this—is that, "Chude, honey, we *do* want to be special. It's hard for us not to want to be special. It's hard for us"—as she would put it—"to say just accept that you're just a little, itty-bitty white girl. [laughs] And that's all you are. You want to be special. You want to be

something more." But the Spirit, the truth—whatever that is—doesn't come through me, except to the degree I can become a hollow bone, which means that there's less—my personality has to step out of the way. It's not about me, it's about whatever comes through that's of value to others. And that's what I would say—you'd asked about mentorship. To the degree I'm able to do that, I'm a good mentor to the people I have been privileged to mentor. And again, to the degree that I have spoken here and been able to get out of the way, there will be some value. Otherwise, they'll—as they say in twelve-step programs, take what you like and leave the rest. [laughs]

10-01:19:04

Tewes: Good one to know. And in the spirit of constantly learning, thank you for all your time spent with me, and helping me and everyone who learns from this interview understand more about your life and work. I really appreciate it. One final—anything to add?

10-01:19:22

Allen: Well, it's been an interesting journey to look at my whole life, not just because, as I think I've mentioned, I've been interviewed about the Southern freedom movement or I've been interviewed about the women's liberation or—but to just look at the whole life, because I'm seventy-seven years old and there's a lot there. So in that part, it's been a gift, and I thank you. You've been a good listener. And as I say, I'm a little in trepidation about what it's going to look like on paper. But on the other hand, I've done my best, and that's all I can do.

10-01:20:07

Tewes: It's all any of us can hope for. Well, thank you, Chude.

[End of Interview]