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P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement

Interview P-0020
Signe Waller Foxworth
8 March 2014

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ABSTRACT – Signe Waller Foxworth

Interviewee: Signe Waller Foxworth
Interviewer: Joshua Clark Davis
Interview Date: March 8, 2014
Location: Home of Signe Waller Foxworth, Greensboro, North Carolina

Signe Waller Foxworth, the author of *Love and Revolution*, was part of the New Communist Movement and became a press secretary of the Communist Workers Party (CWP) in the State of North Carolina after becoming widowed during the Greensboro massacre on November 3, 1979. The realization that the Vietnam War was driven by imperialism led to her antiwar activism and the founding of the Greensboro Peace Center, which drew the attention of Nelson Johnson, who pushed Foxworth's politics leftward. She was active in the multiracial African Liberation Support Committee and her teaching contract at Bennett College was not renewed after she invited Howard Fuller to speak to her classes, so she "proletarianized" herself by working in a textile mill. Despite being threatened not to even think of unions, members of the Workers Viewpoint Organization, including her husband, Dr. Jim Waller, Bill Sampson, and Sandi Smith began organizing unions at Cone Mills plants. Jim Waller published the *Granite Workers Update* to build support, led a strike for better working conditions, was elected president of the union, and was subsequently fired. He succeeded in uniting the races at the Haw River mill, which Foxworth identifies as his most dangerous success. Foxworth cites the transition from investigative journalism to media journalism run by corporations as the reason that the massacre was so inaccurately covered in the news and why the police, who were central actors, were barely mentioned. The massacre was not an equally-armed shoot-out as the media implied. She says that the danger of media is telling people what to think about and gives examples of deliberate suppression of truth. Foxworth then became press secretary for the CWP and recalls police surveillance and the suppression of CWP events. This interview is part of Media and the Movement, an oral history and broadcast collection project housed in the Southern Oral History Program and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

TRANSCRIPT: Signe Waller Foxworth

Interviewee: Signe Waller Foxworth
Interviewer: Joshua Clark Davis
Interview Date: March 8, 2014
Location: (Home of Signe Waller Foxworth, Greensboro, North Carolina)
Length: One audio file, 1:41:50

START OF INTERVIEW

[Beep of recorder]

Josh Davis: Okay. I'm sitting down today with Signe Waller. I said your name correctly, right?

Signe Waller: Yes. I now call myself Signe Waller Foxworth.

Josh Davis: That's right, yeah.

Signe Waller: But I—you could use whichever one. Maybe Signe Waller is less confusing because you're dealing with the history, so that's okay with me. I don't care.

JD: Well, it's your name. So, yeah. [Laughs]. Today's date is July—.

SW: Seventeen.

JD: Seventeenth, 2014. And we're going to be talking about media and other things, how they intersected with your activist work. Now, you've written *Love and Revolution*, which just for the record, for this interview, I was going to mention, because it's such an excellent and detailed account of your activist work. So, I'm often going to refer to it in shorthand, but instead of just replicating what's in that book, I think—when I

was reading it last fall, it just struck me how much the media came up in the book, in many different ways—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and not only traditional media, but also what we could call activist media. A number of publications I'd never even heard of. And so, we can talk about things like that today. But I guess we could kind of start just by maybe you could give a little background about your early days in Greensboro, and how you even got to the state.

SW: I moved to Greensboro with my family in 1971. I had two small children. My husband was a—had a position as an art history professor at UNCG. That was the occasion of our moving here from the North. I really felt like a Yankee [laughs] for a very long time afterward. There was a sense that you don't have generations here, so you don't really belong here. Anyway, I don't feel like a Yankee anymore.

But I, at the point that we moved here, I had been protesting the Vietnam War. I had been part of that. I had not been in any leadership capacity. I simply went to every demonstration I possibly could and then was arrested in May of 1971 when I was with a group of people who were trying to take over the Key Bridge in Washington, D.C. [Laughs] It was a very exciting time. But, anyway, that just several hours in jail, not even a complete day, was a time of people recommitting themselves to the struggle to end the war.

So, when I moved to Greensboro in [19]71, the first thing I did was to investigate: Is there any kind of antiwar organization already set up? And I learned that, for one thing, there was a vigil in front of the downtown courthouse, so I joined that. There wasn't really an organized group. It was people of conscience and preachers and students and

everybody who knew that the Vietnam War was immoral, shouldn't be happening, had to be ended.

So, after just a little while, I started an organization called the Greensboro Peace Center. That was really the first time I had gotten myself involved in politics in any kind of leadership thing. And I was already—I had taught philosophy in Massachusetts. I was a philosophy professor, or that is, I was an assistant professor. So, we joined with people who were protesting the war. We took great pains to educate ourselves.

I remember at the time the American Friends Service Committee was producing these incredible programs. I guess they weren't called videos. What were they called? Slideshows? [Laughs] Or whatever was the technology then. It's like really—seems antiquated now. But they had one, I believe a slideshow, called "The Automated Air War", [0:05:00] and they were showing how the war in Vietnam was being conducted.

And, you know, I came to understand that this wasn't just a policy mistake, that there was a whole system, political, economic and social system that people were calling imperialism. And that that was the reason why this powerful country that I had been born in could not let some upstart country on the other side of the world have a different kind of political system. And I became active then as an antiwar activist. That kind of led into my being sympathetic to the women's movement, the civil rights movement, everything that was all around me.

When I got here, it had been a couple of years since Nelson Johnson had been arrested at A&T, and I met him very early on. I met him just a couple of months in Greensboro when the organization I had started, the Greensboro Peace Center—since it was 1971, that's when the peace treaty was signed with Vietnam, in Paris—and the group

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of loyal people in the Peace Center were trying to decide, “Okay, the war is at an end now. That was our purpose, so we should disband, right?” And other people were saying, “No, because we have educated ourselves politically, and we understand that the problems are here at home, that it’s not just the foreign policy. It’s the whole system, it’s domestic policy, it’s everything, the racism.” We began connecting the dots and we saw that there was still a need for a Greensboro Peace Center and for programs.

And it was at one of those programs, and I talk about that in my book, that Nelson Johnson came. He had just been only a year or so out of prison from that, the incident when the federal government attacked the students at A&T. He made quite an impression on me, just the first time I laid eyes on him and heard him speak. That has only deepened and increased over the years. He was an extraordinary human being.

Anyway, that was the beginning of a kind of leftward movement until I got to the point where, you know, I began studying—at the time, there was something called the New Communist Movement, okay, that had come after the sixties. The sixties was a wonderful revolutionary period. And the things that people were striving for in the sixties, they did not see them being realized, in terms of women’s equality, civil rights, anti-racism, anti-economic oppression. That was not resolved by that wonderful, exuberant period in the sixties. And some people just grew up and went on. And other people started looking for answers, you know, to continue that struggle.

And I ended up with my beliefs and my sympathies aligned with the New Communist Movement. My understanding then was capitalism really is at the root of this whole problem, and it seemed that the only thing strong enough, the only antidote strong enough to deal with capitalism would be communism, you know. And so, I accepted that.

I still think capitalism is the root. I haven't seen an example of communism that's promising enough, you know, that I think it's the answer. And anyway, I've kind of gotten beyond that whole way of thinking, because I'm more today—you could categorize me as an environmentalist, almost more than any other aspect of a political movement. So, I see political systems as a relatively shallow topic, compared to your attitude toward nature and how you treat the earth and each other. So, I have more of a spiritual basis for looking at these things than I did then.

But we were tackling all these problems, and capitalism was the root of it. and there all these organizations around. There were so many of them, you know. It was a very lively movement, this New Communist Movement. And there was the communist this-and-that, and the Socialist this-and-that, and movements that were socialistic but didn't have that in their title. [Someone coughs] [0:10:00] Everything was out there, you know. Other socialist organizations were trying to recruit me, and I was studying. I am quickly going to lose track of the question you asked me, so let me—I'm elaborating too much, am I not?

JD: It's good.

SW: Okay.

JD: Yeah.

SW: Anyway, the early period in Greensboro I think is what you asked about. It was a political education for me.

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: And very soon—meeting Nelson and meeting Joyce and Lewis Brandon and some other people, I became involved. Also, I was using Uhuru Bookstore and having

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my students—[someone coughs] I taught at Bennett College for a couple of years, until they threw me out on my ear. And the reason they threw me out was I invited Howard Fuller to speak to my [laughs] to my classes. I was teaching philosophy. One course was mass media. Anyway, they didn't throw me out; they just failed to renew my contract. But it was right after Owusu was there on the stage, and it just so happened that—and my students invited him, actually. I let my students say, "Who do you want?" You know? And they said, "Owusu." It was fine.

So, it just happened that weekend when he spoke and had this revolutionary speech at Bennett, it was alumni weekend, or whatever. [Laughs] So, they had all these people, all the parents and relatives and everybody from whom they were hoping to get a lot of money, come on campus, and they hear this revolutionary speaker, which I don't think that was really the expression of the majority of people there. Maybe it was, I don't know, but shortly after that, they said they had some—they had to retrench, or something like that, and they couldn't renew my contract.

So, and meanwhile, I'm in study groups, and I was in study groups with Nelson and Joyce. And they were—actually, I mean, was a novice. I was the one who didn't know very much and just feeling my way along. And they already were deep into it, in the Black Liberation Movement, were leading that, you know, were going to meetings in Durham and everywhere else. And so, I really—I looked up to them then because I saw that this is, you know, really, these are my mentors. That hasn't changed over decades and decades.

[Sound of footsteps and door opening/closing]

JD: When you met them, the Johnsons, were they still leading SOBU, the Student Organization for Black Unity? Or was this already kind of in their Marxist phase? I mean, the reason I ask is because were they still deep in this kind of Black Nationalist mode and willing to work with whites?

SW: Yeah, that was—well, they never really got—some people got hung up in that. I don't think they got terribly hung up in that. They were in a Black Power phase. I think SOBU probably was still going on. But actually they had a community organization called the Greensboro Association of Poor People, GAPP.

JD: Right.

SW: Okay? GAPP was very strong. And when I met them, that was the phase, the GAPP phase. They were in a Black—coming from a Black Power mode, they were building a community organization. I think SOBU was still going on, was part of that, you know.

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: You know, and they were friends with Sandi—excuse me—Sandi Smith was one of the five people killed on November third. So, they had all this experience. They had also helped with the founding of the African Liberation Support Committee, which was around that period, I don't know, [19]70 or [19]71. But anyway, there was a black newspaper that was published. All that was going on, but, [someone coughs] yeah, I was here in [19]71, and my intense political training was from about [19]71 to [19]79.

I actually joined the Workers Viewpoint in 1979, shortly before November third. Okay? I don't know if I wrote that in the book. There were many years in which [laughs]

I had to deny—there were even times when I denied that I had joined the Workers

Viewpoint Movement, the Workers Viewpoint Organization, because there was so much, I guess, the spying and the keeping records. Maybe it's worse today with NASA and all that, but that was going on. But then, at some point, I was an open spokesperson.

[0:15:00] I was a media representative and all of that, so I really couldn't deny it. But I remember denying it, feeling that I had to.

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: I guess that's off from where—I'm sorry, just bring me back to what the topic you want—.

JD: No, this is good. You do the talking. I'll mostly just listen.

SW: Yeah, they—no, Nelson and Joyce were into this, the Black Power, the African Liberation Movement, and then, the African Liberation Support Committee was really my primary political work for the longest time, from about the mid-seventies, even up to 1979. [Someone coughs] The main thing that I participated in, worked for, you know, was the African Liberation Support Committee.

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: And we had meetings, you know, everything. So, that was—you know, there were some white people in that, so it was beyond that phase. I know about the phase in the Black Power Movement, the Nationalist phase when—I had a student at Bennett. Her name was Michelle, and I really liked her. I mean, a lot of students just aren't that interested in philosophy and, you know, you can't get them too interested. She was very bright and very interested. And so, we kind of got along very well, and I wanted to be friends with her. And at some point, she said to me—she sort of felt that we were kind of

getting too close and she said, “I can’t be friends with you.” Basically, she was part of the Malcolm X Liberation University. It was like, “Don’t trust Whitey.”

JD: Right.

SW: [Laughs] So, we both had warm feelings for one another, but she let me know that we couldn’t become friends.

JD: Yeah.

SW: So, I think that foolishness—I don’t think Nelson or Joyce ever really participated in that.

JD: Yeah.

SW: And I shouldn’t call it foolishness. I mean—.

JD: Well, that’s good to just have as part of this discussion, because I think that’s still one of the main misconceptions about the Black Power Movement is that it was always a separatist movement. There were separatists efforts and separatist institutions. But then, there were also efforts where Black Power activists would work with leftist whites.

SW: Yeah. It was all out there in every gradation. And at one point, as far as my political theory, I really believed that black people should have the right to secede from the Union if they wanted to. So, in a way, I was kind of [laughs] a separatist, too, in my thinking.

JD: Yeah. And that’s an interesting idea. Is it Harry Haywood or the—he was an African American Communist writer in the thirties and forties who was writing about that Black Belt thesis, I think, the idea that five states in the deep South could secede, and blacks could have their own country.

SW: Um-hmm. Yeah, I was very sympathetic to that. I even wrote an article, a scholarly-type article, and published it somewhere, you know.

JD: Oh?

SW: But I'm not—I never have been a real expert on that topic. I really don't consider my views to be taken that seriously, you know. I am not somebody who experienced that and really studied it in depth for a long time.

JD: Right.

SW: But I was, just in terms of the whole issue of racism, when it comes down to it, I have childhood memories when I knew racism was wrong, when I was in situations where I was cautioned, "Don't play with that person. Don't bring that person to the house," and so forth. You can't grow up in this country and not be aware of racism. You know, you don't have to be black to be aware of it.

JD: Right.

SW: So, I always had—and then, when I was in like, I don't know, the third or fourth or fifth grade or something, writing a social studies report on the white councils in the South. What were they called?

JD: White Citizens Councils.

SW: White Citizens Councils. The White Citizens Councils, you know, I was aware of that, knew it was wrong, you know, had heard about the Klan. I had a very strong reaction to that also because I'm Jewish.

JD: Right.

SW: And, you know, I knew people who had escaped, had come after the Holocaust, had somehow escaped it. I had met people who had been through it and

somehow survived. You know, I mean, I married my first husband—almost his whole family was wiped out in the Holocaust. [0:20:00] So, I—you know, I couldn't understand why people—I could see them in my Jewish acquaintances, not my—my parents were pretty liberal. But some of my other relatives and the Jewish people in the community who were prejudiced against black people or thought black people were somehow lesser, and knowing even just a little bit of the history of Jewish people, that totally baffled me. I mean, how can you, coming from people who've been persecuted to the nth degree and, you know, put down and thought lesser and all of this, how can you visit that on somebody else, because you should know that it's wrong, you know? So, I've always had that. And I think that's what I had when I was active in the African Liberation Support Committee, I mean, those feelings.

[Knock on door] Hark, hark! Okay. Excuse me. Okay, be right back.

[Beep of recorder]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

SW: Do you think I'm projecting enough into that? I have a very low, monotonish voice.

JD: I think so, yeah.

SW: Okay.

JD: That microphone, the volume is turned up pretty high. [Beep of recorder] I think you were just telling some anecdotes about growing up in Brooklyn, right?

SW: In Brooklyn, yes.

JD: Just for the record. And so, that was interesting. But you also mentioned African Liberation Support Committee.

SW: Right.

JD: Which maybe you could tell us a little bit about that. Again, this kind of dovetails with my question about the Johnsons. There's not a whole lot written about the ALSC. And I feel like most of what I've read suggested that it was an all-black organization. And reading your book, actually, was the first time I think I'd ever heard about the fact that it was multiracial, at least by a certain point.

SW: Yeah, and at least in North Carolina. And Paul Bermanzohn, who is a survivor of November third, he also is Jewish. He comes from a background where his entire family, except his parents, wiped out in the Holocaust. And he was very active in the African Liberation Support Committee. At the time, Zimbabwe was called Rhodesia, right. South Africa was not liberated. So, we were supporting those struggles for liberation in Africa. We were also, at one point, collecting medical aid and sending it to Zimbabwe, to Rhodesia. Right now, if you ask me to tell you dates of exactly when, I don't have it in my head. It's probably in my book.

JD: Yeah, and that's not necessary.

SW: But the African Liberation Support Committee, at least in Greensboro and in Durham, it was very closely tied to other community organizations and community people. So, the one here in Greensboro, yeah, the majority was African American, but there were a few white people in it. It may be other chapters there weren't white people. I don't know. But pretty much it was centralized.

I think it was started when the president of one of the Central American countries—God, I should know this, and I can't think of his name right now, [laughs] but it was actually started with some high political figure getting together with activists,

African American activists, in this country. I do have a lot of—since I was so active in that, and there were newsletters and flyers and everything, I've got tons of that [laughs], and it's part of what I put aside. I know you wanted to look at the workers' struggles, and I have that. I have the old, the granite finishing plant, the newsletter that we put out.

JD: Yeah.

SW: So, I do have that in my study to show you. And if you ask Nelson about the African Liberation Support Committee, or Joyce, or Brandon could have talked about that, too. But Nelson can tell you. He's the best source for that. He will tell you the whole story.

JD: Yeah. And it's important to point out, just for the interview, that Nelson Johnson in Greensboro and, by that time, Howard Fuller, who was actually by that time known as Owusu Sadaukai, they were both national leaders in this movement.

SW: Yes.

JD: And I think, [0:25:00] if I recall correctly, Owusu was maybe the first chairperson of the first African Liberation Day in Washington in 1972. And so, that's a very interesting connection there, I think.

SW: Yeah. Now I recall—I had forgotten a lot of this stuff. You know, I don't think about it every day now. Year after year, we would go to African Liberation Day. We would have buses going from Greensboro and Durham. It was a great occasion. And I have, I think, a picture of Sandi with her bullhorn. But that was the main organization that I was affiliated with. I did work during those years, too, after I left Bennett College—I worked at Bennett from [19]73 to—no, [19]71 to [19]73, I think, or it could have been [19]73 to [19]75. I can't remember now. I've lost my thought about that.

JD: African Liberation Day. And you mentioned Sandi Smith.

SW: Yeah. Oh, yeah, after teaching, and I couldn't get another teaching job and I was getting so politicized anyway, I went to work in the textile mill. The mill was, oddly enough, called Revolution, [laughs] owned by Cone Mills. Sandi was working there. Her husband at the time, Mark Smith, was working there. There were a lot of people working there who were beginning to be drawn to or were part of the Workers Viewpoint Organization. So, I worked there for a while. Then, I worked at Cone Hospital for a couple of years. So, I was—part of my political education was my intentional effort to proletarianize myself.

I had come from a really middle class family in Brooklyn. My father had a business that he owned. At the height, he may have employed about thirty people. Usually it was fewer than that. But it was an imprinting business. So the way, according to the jargon of the time, I was petite-bourgeoisie, because my father owned a business, you know. We didn't have a lot of money, but that was my background. So, according to our belief at the time, which I think is a little bit too narrow now, to say the least, you know, I needed to get a feel for the working class. So, I'm in the textile mill, I'm in the hospitals, you know, doing that kind of work. Then, I had another job in the textile mill. I was working in the textile mill when November third happened. I had just started there.

And I'll never forget the first day that they hired me, and they gave us a little orientation. The very first thing they said at orientation was, "If we hear the word *union*, you're out of here!" I mean, they just flat-out, you know, "Do not talk union, or you won't have a job!" [Laughs] At the time, it was very aggressive, the antiunion campaign in the South, because even the—certain magazines, you know, that were not intended for

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the workers—it was intended for the bourgeoisie, okay—would have full-page ads about keeping out the union, you know, bragging about, “Come and invest in the South! Open up your shop here because there’s very low unionization.”

So, that was the struggle that we were in. That’s why when Jim went into the factory—that’s the context of his and other people from Workers Viewpoint going into these factories. And some of them had unions, but they were very weak, very disjointed. We had the right-to-work—we still have, I believe, the right-to-work law that you have a union, but not everybody has to join it. So, you can never build a union that way because, you know, people won’t pay the dues. It’s a way to keep the union weak or nonexistent.

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: So, that was the context, the historical context, that we were going up against, that tremendous propaganda machine that, “We won’t have unions in the South.” And, you know, they used racism also to split the unions all the time.

JD: Now, you mentioned Jim, Jim Waller.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: And he was working at Haw River, is that right?

SW: Yes, yeah. [0:30:00]

JD: And that was one of the things that really caught my attention in your book, was this publication, *Granite Workers Update*.

SW: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

JD: And maybe you could just say a little bit about that.

SW: Well, in order to prepare for you coming today, I went to where I thought these files were, and I found where I had all these files from the union, from the *Granite* Interview number P-0020 from the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

Workers Update, and all of that. So, apparently, it just went through seven issues in [19]78 and [19]79. I think the last one was February of [19]79. Jim was elected president of the union. But that actually was—actually when the *Update* came out, I think he was vice-president.

What happened was the company fired him. And then, after they fired him, he had a case pending with the NLRB, National Labor Relations Board, okay, that they fired him. The excuse was that he was a medical doctor. By that time, he had done all of the building the union, they had been through a strike and everything, and he had allies. He had done a lot of work to unite the races. I mean, there were some white guys, white workers there, who were very racist, and they went through the strike together and they began to understand, you know, relate to the black workers, their black brothers, who were working there, and sisters, you know. So, he really changed the atmosphere. People really matured, in the sense that they understood that we're all in this struggle together. So, that's really what was so threatening about the work he was doing there.

But they said that when he filed, when he applied for the job, he had failed to note that he was a medical doctor. And there was a rally to try to get his job back afterwards, and one of the white workers, who had been very racist, but really was transformed, said, "As bad as the working conditions are in this plant, they ought to be glad to have a doctor working there!" [Laughs] You know?

But anyway, that was the ostensible reason, but they fired him for leading the strike and all the union activity. And then, after he was fired, and he's in this suit to get his job back, there was a union meeting. And I still—I have the ballots that people cast.

They voted him from vice president to president of the union local. And really, the union

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grew, the size of the union, from a handful of active union members in the beginning. And after his leadership, and they went through so many struggles together, and he filed grievances and pleaded for the workers and all of that, the union grew until there were a couple of hundred people, from about a dozen to a couple of hundred just in the space of several months.

So, that was just Jim Waller. And then, Bill Sampson was doing something similar at White Oak, which is another Cone plant. Okay? And what happened there was—this is very interesting. [Laughs] There was an election that was set. And Bill Sampson and this progressive slate of workers alongside him, black and white, were very clearly going to be voted into the new union leadership. And right before the election could happen, the union stepped in and put the union local into receivership.

JD: The national union?

SW: The national union stepped in.

JD: Yeah.

SW: Which was the Amalgamated—was it the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, ACTWU?

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: Okay. They put the local into receivership, meaning that the national people would say what went on, and so the election didn't happen. And that was not too long before November third. So, you had Jim Waller leading union activity at Haw River, Bill Sampson leading it in Greensboro at White Oak, both of these now acknowledged by their fellow workers for their leadership and to be heads of their union. And furthermore,

there was also the Revolution plant, which at that point I had left and I had taken a job at

the hospital. I also, somewhere along the way, was working in a steel operation, Binswanger Steel in Greensboro. But anyway—.

JD: What was it called?

SW: Binswanger.

JD: Okay.

SW: B-I-N-S-W-A-N-G-E-R. Sandi Smith was leading the struggle for a union in Revolution. [0:35:00] Revolution did not have a union. They had tried a couple of times, and they had really been squashed, I mean, really repressed in that effort. And she was leading a struggle, which she did that really, really well, because she was organizing workers with signing cards, and they were not going to really go public with it until they had the support built. They were trying to keep it a little bit under wraps, you know. [Laughs] She was also one of the people killed November third.

So, you have a weak union at Haw River, with Jim Waller about to leave that; a slightly stronger union at White Oak, with a little more history and activity, and Bill Sampson about to leave that; and Sandi Smith. There was a huge meeting I went to when the effort to have a union at Revolution became, was announced publicly. And there were a lot of workers came to that. So, she would have been leading that. And they may have, if that attempt had been allowed to continue, they may have had a union in Revolution. So, they were all Cone Mills, okay, all Cone plants.

JD: What do you think Jim wanted to—?

SW: [Calls to someone] Hey, Bobby! Excuse me, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Bobby! Bobby!

Bobby: Yes?

SW: I'm sorry. You were on the phone before, and Linwood is here, and he's been waiting patiently in the dining room.

Bobby: ()

SW: I know. Well, I'm being interviewed. And he brought the list, which is good we have, because it's a different list.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

SW: At that time, I didn't interrupt myself; I interrupted you. You were right in the middle of a question, and I screamed, "Bobby!" [Laughs]

JD: It's not a problem.

SW: That's our in-house communication system here—.

JD: Yeah, sure.

SW: Scream upstairs and downstairs.

JD: I was just thinking about the *Granite Workers Update*.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: What do you think Jim was trying to achieve with that publication?

SW: He was trying to build the union, to make that union that had been around for a while, that had a president—the president was a black guy who had been president for a long time, but he was not doing anything, just basically sitting on that position. And Jim was trying to get all the workers to join the union, build the union. That's what he was doing.

There was another organization called the Trade Union Educational League—I probably also mentioned that in the book—which was, actually, was founded by the

Workers Viewpoint Organization in order to have another organization that was focused

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on trade union education, and it had representatives from different unions in the area, both North Carolina and maybe Virginia, too, Roanoke Rapids, maybe. But that was—maybe there were as many as half a dozen different union locals that had representatives in that. I don't know exactly. [Clears throat]

So, Jim was trying to build that union local. Then he was trying to build an educational league about trade unions in the area. And then, he was trying to build a national movement and party, Workers Viewpoint, that would change the whole basic structure, economic and social structure, of this country in a way that would make it truly democratic, would get rid of racism, classism, you know. So, it all was connected together. It wasn't just—it started with “we need some decent wages, we need safe working condition,” because people were like losing body parts and getting beat up by machines, and also the cotton dust was so bad, and they didn't bother cleaning it up, because it may have been too expensive. So, they were getting brown lung. Black lung is the coal, you know. So, he's trying to improve the working conditions, organize the workers, get better wages, better terms, in terms of vacation and all of that and pension. At the same time it's regional, it's national. You know, it's part of a larger political vision. I think that's very important, because you don't—you know, you don't just do something for your own little group, you know, I mean, if you have a vision of what's right and what's wrong. [0:40:00]

One of the nicest things happening today—I bet you just love this—the Moral Mondays.

JD: Right.

SW: You just love that, don't you? I just love that! That's wonderful.

JD: Yeah. I got arrested, actually. [Laughs]

SW: Oh, good for you!

JD: ()

SW: Good for you.

JD: Yeah. So, yeah, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

SW: No, but that was—some of that spirit was the spirit of the Workers Viewpoint Organization, [sound of door opening?] the difference being, if I can speak about it frankly, and it's the only way I can speak about it—[speaking to Bobby?] if you want to join us—do you want to join us?

Male: No. You don't need me in here.

SW: I don't need you.

Male: I'm just the butler.

SW: You're just the butler? [Laughs]

Male: That's how I got involved with all this good stuff around here. She brings all these things like the Currency Project and all, and I serve tea and coffee to everybody.

JD: You're the butler?

Male: I'm the butler!

JD: Okay.

Male: Then I sit down and I get interested in it.

SW: Okay.

Male: Is there any particular reason why you want me here?

SW: No, no. I just wanted you to feel welcome if you do want to.

Male: I'm fine.

SW: Okay.

Male: I'm sure I'm totally welcome.

SW: Did you speak to the ladies from Virginia yet? [Sound of cellphone message?]

Male: I think I just got something from them here.

SW: Okay, alright.

Male: I haven't heard from them yet. [Pause]

SW: I'm going to continue the interview if you want to take that. [Pause]

Male: Okay. It's not her, but anyway ().

SW: I was saying that a lot of the spirit of the Moral Mondays reminds me of Workers Viewpoint Organization.

JD: Yeah.

SW: But there's something—I think the Workers Viewpoint Organization and the Communist Workers Party that followed it, it was too bound by the ideology. [Sound of door closing] You know, it was too narrow, and we still did not break out of that “us and them” (mold/mode), you know. If you talk to Nelson, he definitely in the course of the interview will, you know, talk about that kind of thinking. I think that Reverend William—.

JD: Barber.

SW: Barber. I'm thinking, “Barker—no, that's not right.” [Clears throat]
Reverend William Barber makes it so clear that this is totally inclusive.

JD: Yeah.

SW: And that you're not—that the division is “you're against the things that are wrong, not the people who are wrong.” And the ideology was a little bit constricting, or a lot constricting, but that was that time. I mean, in that time in history, I think that's more understandable, but I think Barber has the right idea.

JD: Well, like you mentioned, this was part of the New Communist Movement, right?

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: And Workers Viewpoint, led by Jerry Tung, out of New York, really came out of a Marxist framework.

SW: You should—you know what? You should interview Jerry Tung if you can get hold of him.

JD: [Laughs]

SW: [Laughs]

JD: I'll talk to you about that after the interview.

SW: Okay.

JD: I've heard interesting things. But to follow up on what you were saying, just as a little side note, it's not just that the spirit of Workers Viewpoint is in the Moral Monday Movement, but some of the people are, too.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: And so, Nelson, of course. At the HKonJ March, the Historic Thousands—.

SW: Roz Pelles.

JD: Roz Pelles? Okay.

SW: Yeah, that's right. I didn't even think of it that way. It's not just the spirit. It's the people who have that spirit, continuing the work.

JD: A few of them, yeah. And I went to a rally last year for the Moral Monday stuff, and a friend pointed out to me someone else in the crowd who he had just talked to, and I think it was Jim Wrenn.

SW: Uh-huh, yes.

JD: And so, it was interesting going to some of those rallies. A lot of these people I didn't know but would see friends talking to them, people who have been active in the state politically for thirty or forty years who are coming to these rallies.

SW: Let me suggest, too, that Jim Wrenn would be an excellent person to interview, in terms of the Workers Movement. He really is knowledgeable, very, very knowledgeable and has a lot of experience. He'd be excellent to interview. I'm sorry that slipped my mind to mention beforehand.

JD: No, that's good for you just to bring them up [0:45:00] as they occur to you. Were you ever involved with the *Workers Viewpoint* newspaper?

SW: Well, I didn't ever write for it. I think I have every issue that was ever published, from the first to the last.

JD: Wow.

SW: And is in my—we call our barn—in our garage, or our barn.

JD: Wow.

SW: Yeah. We—I had it, read it all the time, circulated it, we studied articles in it. But I never was a writer for that.

JD: I guess we've kind of gotten up to 1979, but we really haven't gotten to the massacre yet. And again, I mean, you do such an excellent job in the book of just unpacking it. But it's a big question, you address it some in the book, but how do you think the media handled the massacre? There are so many different media and different kind of media, but what are the things that come to mind when you think of media portrayals of the massacre November third, 1979?

SW: Um, I have a rather strong, unequivocal view about that, which is that, by that time, you have corporate media. Already, investigative journalism is on its way out the door, you know, not to be resurrected, that I can see, in any of the mass media. I see excellent examples of it in *The Nation* very often. The media were just—they simply are a reflection of the power that was running the city and running the state and running the nation. And while there were individual reporters, from time to time, who really tried to do a good job and often did a good job, they did not have an impact because they would move on, and other people would come in. So, the imprint of the corporate power is all over the media.

And the way that story was told—the corporate power in North Carolina and in Greensboro only wanted that story told a certain way, and that's—we had to be, this had to be just a struggle between the good guys, good versus evil, in this case, the Communists versus the Klan. I don't know, does that make us good? No. [Laughs] Just two bad organizations having a gang rumble, I mean, that's the framework.

JD: Right, two extremist groups—.

SW: Yes, two extremists.

JD: Come to blows, essentially.

SW: Right, come to blows, exactly. So, that's the paradigm, you know. And, you know, the reason—I mean, they have a real stake in selling that to people that way, in just making *that* the paradigm in people's minds, not just on their newsprint and the TV. Because, if you just remove that or put that aside for a minute, and you look—even look at the videos, the films that were taken that day, and even talk to people and find out what was going on—if you just look at the facts as they are and what people saw with their own eyes, you know, you're going to have a very different story.

You know, you're not—you're going to have a story, first of all, very central to the story will be the local police, the Greensboro police department, which was not there in visible shape on November third. However, as you know, there were a couple of police officers down the block. They had tailed the caravan all morning and they had spoken to the Klan leader, Ed Dawson, before. And they were apprised of the Klan and Nazis' plans and they had had a police officer outside earlier in the morning when the Klan and Nazis were amassing and getting their weapons in their trunks and everything. So, they had the Klan and Nazi caravan participants under surveillance all morning. They had had the previous knowledge—they had given the [0:50:00] Klan leader a copy of the parade permit which we had filed, which otherwise, you know, the Klan might not be sure where to go, because there was actually another point we were sending people to, which was more convenient for out-of-town people, Windsor Center and not Morningside.

So, the utility of a lie here, of a *big lie*, you know, and then getting everybody to believe that big lie, is that you successfully cover up the malfeasance of the powers that be and the established institutions that have done criminal acts, okay, because for the police to conspire with the Klan to attack people is criminal. And yet, they did that. And

we have since learned of particular officers who went to meetings before November third with the Klan. I did not write about that in my book, because I have not—for various reasons, okay. The SBI, they knew about it. The BATF, they had an informant in the Nazi party. So, the government and the local police are all over this thing, with foreknowledge of the event and then helping the execution of the event happen the way it did, with the Klan and Nazis fleeing and not being—you know, being able to get away, get away with murder.

And then, the aftermath, when the media cooperates very nicely, thank you, with, you know, presenting the trials—not asking the questions and talking to the people who can give you straight answers, but just constantly promoting this paradigmatic story of these two evil organizations and a gang rumble, two extremist groups, you know, Klan versus Communists, that's what it's all about, and the police are just not in that picture primarily. They kind of come in later—the police officer who arrests a couple of Klan who are getting away was not supposed to be there, because he just went there. He was not told to be there. He was actually disobeying orders by being there.

And the Klan and Nazis would have been out completely. There wouldn't have been any arrests, but one of the Klan members was wounded by his comrades, not by us. We didn't hurt anybody. And they took—they went to pick him up. And so, they were a couple of seconds late getting out, you know, the last car in the caravan where the shooters were. Okay? So, the cop was not supposed to be there, and the van that's late getting out, that results in a few arrests. But then, these trials, you know, what ensued was six years of ridiculous travesties of justice, you know.

So, all of that—[pause] I don't know. You want to know about the media. I mean, the media supports all of that. The media supports all of that. And if sometimes a sympathetic word is said about one of us, or a little bit of truth peeks in, or—there was one article, there were a couple of articles by a reporter named Martha Woodall, who is now working I think in Pennsylvania. At the time, I was very bitter toward her, because for one thing—she was working for the evening paper and she had an article where she had interviewed someone. Jim Waller, when he was killed, he was working for the City of Greensboro in the treatment, the sewer plant, the treatment plant. And there was a guy—very few workers there, but there was one worker who may have been a police informant, or anyway was an old military guy, and he lied to this reporter, Martha Woodall, and told her that Jim Waller was talking about how the CWP wanted martyrs: “We wanted to get ourselves killed so we could have martyrs for our organization.” And that appeared in the newspaper.

And I, a few days into widowhood, when I saw that article—it was quite early on—I cannot tell you the anguish, on top of losing a husband, for somebody to scribble in the newspaper, “He wanted to be martyred.” You know, “He wanted to kill himself so he could glorify his organization.” So, that's the kind of trash, you know, and it all was a cover up. It's all to cover up [0:55:00] malfeasance and crimes done by those who hold power and want to hold onto power at any cost.

So, the way the city is run, I mean, it's been run that way ever since, you know. I mean, it's a very interesting thing. I think you can see this in *Closer to the Truth*, in Adam Zucker's film. In maybe 2005 or 2006, some years ago when the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission was working on its report, it was brought before the city

council. And they were asked to support, not knowing what this report is going to be, what it's going to say, but just to support an *effort* for truth and reconciliation. And the city council voted, not only not to support it, but to *oppose* it, to oppose truth and reconciliation. I mean, all these decades, this is the mentality, you know, in the city and this power structure.

So, the media is—if you had different media, if you had a truly independent media and people who were not beholden to some higher authority for their job, for their pay, you know, beholden to corporate America, which really owns these papers and owns the TV stations, *everything* would be different. What people are exposed to every day would be different, you know. I mean, if people were encouraged to ask questions and to think, if they were given facts, and not some kind of story being solidified at the beginning that's going to be helpful to the powers that be and is harmful to other people—you know, suppress the truth, keep the power structure the way it is, you know. That's what they do and they, you know, they tell themselves—they call that objective reporting, or whatever they call it, you know. They say that that's—and it's such incredible bullshit.

So, I'm so glad that there *is* alternative media, you know. There are alternative media springing up all over the place. I know—I do not watch television. I do not read newspapers. And yet, I pretty much know what's going on in the world. I have at least a dozen different news sources. I have—I look at “Democracy Now” sometimes, and there's “AlterNet”—I'm trying to think of all the different news things. I can't think of them now, but I have like a dozen different news and analysis sites, IPS, a dozen of them, to give me world news on the internet, different perspectives. And from this, if I read

several of these and look at these, I can figure out, you know, what's going on. And the local thing, I mean, the media, the way it is now, the paper is published for the advertisements, not for the news. People buy it, not just for the news, but because there's these little entertainment features and coupons and all that kind of stuff and comics. So, it's so bastardized, I hate it.

JD: Do you remember any of those alternative media sources that actually did an okay job reporting on the massacre? I mean, at that time, I mean, we should mention the fact that you became the press secretary of the Communist Workers Party in the State of North Carolina.

SW: One of them, yeah.

JD: Okay.

SW: I shared the position with somebody else. Yeah, I mean, I think at some point the *Southern Exposure*, which is the Institute for Southern Studies, they did an excellent job. The woman who did a lot of that work has since—I don't know whether she's gone off the deep end or is in the pay of people who are controlling her, or what it is, but she has become a real teller of falsehoods, let me put it that way. [Laughs]

JD: About the massacre?

SW: Yeah. Well, she published a trashy book.

JD: What's her name?

SW: Oh, I have to say it for camera? Elizabeth Wheaton. Her book is doo-doo.

JD: Wait, is that the *Project Overkill* book? No.

SW: Yeah. Greensboro—Greenkil, *Project GREENKIL*.

JD: Yeah.

SW: That is so unreliable. It's so full of falsehoods. It's garbage.

JD: Okay.

SW: It's really garbage. I mean, it has no focus. It's very biased and full of lies. But she did a credible job on—.

JD: They did a special report, [1:00:00] I'll just say for the interview, and I just came across a copy in a bookstore and bought it, but I think it's called "What Happened on November Third", or something along those lines. And it was a freestanding issue, I think, that was devoted to the massacre.

SW: Who published it or wrote it? Do you know?

JD: That's *Southern Exposure*.

SW: Oh.

JD: Maybe they just repackaged what had appeared in one of their issues as a pamphlet.

SW: Um-hmm, yeah. Well, they did good work. Paul and Sally Bermanzohn, when Paul recovered from his critical injuries, they published a little book. It was good but it was a little too political, you know. Anybody who wasn't political and didn't like all this jargon would put it down in disgust. But Sally's book is wonderful, which she published pretty recently, 2004 or something like that. Who else did a good media—? There were good things. There were good things. There was something in a New York paper, not the *New Yorker*, but another paper, and I can't think of it now, that was pretty good.

I mean, I have these materials and I could show you, but like I say, my memory— this is thirty-five years now, you know, [laughs] and I don't retain all the details. I

remember a lot of it but, I mean, I've forgotten things that are in *my* book. I'd have to like—and I do this often—I go look in my book to find something out. Because I researched it; I didn't just write that from memory. My book was written with *tons* of research materials. I also did interviews. I interviewed my friends. And, I mean, I did a lot of research. I researched everything that I thought I remembered to make sure I got everything straight, and it's very well researched.

JD: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's really something you can't help but notice about your book. I mean, it is so detailed, and there's lots of references, lots of citations. I mean, thinking about—going back to what you were saying about the, I guess, the corporate media, when there are some examples where it's very clear how the media were trying to reframe this. So, for example, you make a really good case in the book about how the *Greensboro News-Record* in the original story referred to—.

SW: “Ambush”.

JD: The Klan—right.

SW: “Ambush”, which is what it was. Yeah.

JD: And then, they changed that, however.

SW: “Shoot-out”.

JD: Yeah.

SW: Which implies two, these two extremist groups, spoiling for a fight, equally armed, coming together in order to shoot it out. That's kind of what resonates with that term. And to this day, when people say “shoot-out”, I mean, that was the word that was implanted in people's minds. They could have the best intentions and they even

understand that it wasn't a shoot-out, but that's the word used. So, people ask me, very

well-intentioned, “Well, what happened on that day of the shoot-out? Why did you bring your son to the shoot-out?” [Coughs] Excuse me. The media is so powerful.

JD: Yeah.

SW: Because people—you know, when people talk, they will often state their opinions or they’ll just assert something. And how often do they stop to think about, “Well, why do I think that, and how do I know that?” You know, I mean, people—it stops people from thinking. And they think they know because they’ve heard that and the authority of the media—the “Well, it wouldn’t be printed if it wasn’t true,” you know. But what’s the most dangerous thing of all is not the little lies that are printed. The most dangerous thing is not that they tell you what to think—you know, to think that this was a shoot-out—but they tell you what to think *about*, that they actually frame this thing.

JD: Right!

SW: So that they didn’t put—you could put this event and you *should* put this event in the framework of civil rights history. That’s where it is; I mean, it belongs right alongside the four students sitting in and the A&T campus disturbance when the police came and shot at the dormitories. Okay? I mean, the civil—Freedom Summer [1:05:00] and the civil rights marches, and this is where this event belongs, you know, but that’s a whole other way of framing it from “two extremist groups have a shoot-out”.

JD: Right. I mean, it’s very striking going to the Civil Rights Museum in downtown Greensboro, which has a large focus on the Woolworth’s sit-in, rightly so. But in the rest of the museum, it’s a very general overview of racial discrimination, segregation, Jim Crow, and also an overview of the regional and national Civil Rights Movement, and it just seems very broad. And I hadn’t really put my finger on it—

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SW: [Coughs] Excuse me.

JD: But then, talking to Lew Brandon, he hit the nail on the head by saying, “There’s very little about the Greensboro Movement after 1963 in that museum.” I don’t think there’s anything about GAPP. I may be wrong, but there may be very little. Certainly not the stuff at A&T.

SW: Um-hmm, right.

JD: Certainly not Malcolm X Liberation.

SW: Yeah.

JD: Definitely not the Greensboro Massacre. And it’s obviously not for a lack of funding. It’s a very polished, well-funded museum.

SW: Um-hmm, exactly.

JD: And so, that’s interesting to me. I mean, also, you know, some of the incidents you’ve mentioned in the book, very clear cases of trying to cover things up. For example, I mean, the fact that there were television cameras from two different local stations is really quite amazing, but—oh, four? Okay!

SW: Not all local. There was Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and I think High Point.

JD: Okay. I think there’s an incident where you’re talking about the Greensboro police tried to stop WTVD in Durham from actually showing the footage. I think the guy’s name was Ed Boyd.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: Which is a very [laughs] outright case of the police trying to conceal things.

SW: Jim Melvin tried to stop the showing of the FMY—Jim Waters.

JD: Yeah. Can you tell us a bit about that, because that was an interesting anecdote? I think her name was Susan Kidd?

SW: Oh, yeah. That was the very night that happened, the very night. I think the very night, maybe the day after, but I think the very night. Susan Kidd was the anchor, news anchor for WFMY-TV in Greensboro, which was the CBS affiliate—I think so, anyway. [Clears throat] We knew her because she knew our, you know, our work, work we were doing in the community. I mean, actually, Morningside Homes was one of the communities where Workers Viewpoint had organized around African Liberation Day, Malcolm X Day, you know, all of that. So, Susan Kidd knew—you know, we had ties with these communities. I think she knew of us.

Nelson—it was that day, because Nelson was in jail. Nelson was arrested that day. So, it was that very night, we went—I guess we went there. I mean, some of that day is blurred to me, but we went there. And I remember Joyce was there, I was there, I think (Molina) was there. And I don't remember if my son was with us or not—he was eleven years old—whether he came to the TV station. She said we should just tell her what happened, and we did. And—but first I think we warned her that, “If you have us on your show, you could lose your job.” And she basically stood up and said, “If that's the consequence of this, so be it. You're going to get there and tell your story. You're going to be there and tell your story.” So, she was very courageous, very courageous.

And we were saying, “Our brother is in prison *right now*.” They were interrogating him, and he had been cut up his arm, and they were threatening to put salt on his wounds, you know, really giving him a hard time. Oh, (Molina) was—[1:10:00]

she had been taken in, too. I don't know if she was at the TV station, or if she had gotten

out in time or not. But Nelson was definitely in jail, because I remember saying, you know, “We’re watching what you do with our brother in prison.”

And she just let us talk and talk. And, yeah, there are very, very good people in the media. I mean, what the tragedy is that the very good people in the very bad system, those good people could be doing *extraordinary* work in a good system. So, I have no grudge against anybody doing that work, but I think the system makes it very close to impossible—.

JD: Sure.

SW: To do it really—to really be objective. I mean, first of all, that whole thing about being objective is a bunch of hogwash. *Nobody* is objective! [Laughs] You know, you tell a story, whether it happened to you or it happened to your friend, it’s come through your mind. You’re telling it with all your predispositions, all your biases, all your thoughts and assumptions. You know? I mean, there’s no such thing as objectivity. There is no such thing. There’s only—what there is is making your biases and your background and your thoughts and assumptions as explicit and clear as possible. In other words, don’t hide behind objectivity and say, “Well, I have a degree, you know, so I’m giving you the facts.” But *say*, you know, “I am a member of this organization. I am assuming this. This is how I feel about it. This is what I know to be true. This is how I know it to be true.” It’s your subjectivity speaking honestly, that’s what objectivity is.

JD: Did you—you mentioned WFMY. They allowed Susan Kidd to broadcast that? Was it live? Or was there any pressure from the station to edit it?

SW: I don’t know. It was at night. I don’t remember what time at night. It probably was eight o’clock or later, maybe later. I think they just—my impression was it

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was just aired. Maybe it was edited. I could be wrong about that. I just didn't pay attention to that anymore. We did it, and she filmed it, and probably they have it somewhere. [Laughs]

JD: Yeah, that'd be great.

SW: And I don't know how much they aired that night, you know. That would be an interesting question, by the way.

JD: Yeah. I mean, just for the interview, also, to mention that Susan Kidd is African American and was probably one of the few African American television news anchors in the state at the time.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: I don't know the whole history of that, but it certainly would have made her a pioneer.

SW: Oh, yeah.

JD: So, that's just an interesting side note. Tell me a little bit about what did it mean to be the press secretary for the CWP? And I think I read in the book you accepted that position maybe—not long after the November third massacre. So, what did that mean? What did you do as press secretary?

SW: The main thing I did was—I did not write most of the releases. I may have had a little hand in some of them, but I was not—writing the release was not part of my job. But what my job was, and I shared it with (Charles Finch), who did the same thing from Durham, was notifying the press. We were having press conferences all the time. I mean, [laughs] and we had the list of press people, newspaper and TV and radio, that's what there was. No internet organizations. [Laughs] When I think about the old Roneo

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and the mimeographed flyers and all, [laughs] my God, the technology! Okay, anyway, we had to call the press and tell them of the time and place that we had a release, and then we'd get the release ready.

And some of the more dramatic things I remember, and I did discuss this in the book, is we'd come—we'd, say, go to the Governmental Plaza, and then, at the top of the building, there are men with guns pointed down at us. They're sharpshooters and they're surrounding us from the top of the building—for a press conference. [1:15:00]

JD: This is very shortly after November third, right?

SW: Yeah, but it happened for years afterward like that.

JD: Wow.

SW: And then, we would have press conferences and we would try to have events. I did write about this in the book because our civil liberties were just—forget it! We didn't have any civil liberties. We'd have an event. We'd book a place. An insurance company or a cop or somebody would call the place, the owner of that place, and say, "You don't want to have those people there. They'll be trouble. I'm not sure we can continue to insure you," or whatever, whatever, you know. And then, so we'd get a cancellation notice. So, then we had people coming in from out of town and we had a press conference saying, "Well, we can't hold it where we told you we were going to hold it, because that place has been pulled out from under us. So, we're going to be at this place. It's kind of sleazy, but that's where we're going to have this conference," you know. [Laughs] That happened repeatedly.

The media—the power structure breathing into the media's ear, and the media following us around, that was part of the scene. So, the main thing I did was I called the Interview number P-0020 from the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

press and said we're having a press conference, okay. They knew I'm somebody involved in this whole thing. Sometime—often I gave interviews. The other thing, too, is that I was sometimes in touch with the workers in—well, by then, it's the Communist Workers Party in New York. And there was a press secretary for the entire—I will not mention her name or his name, but there was a press person for the national organization. I don't know if that person wants his or her name mentioned.

JD: And they were writing the press releases?

SW: No. We were writing—.

JD: Or Jerry Tung was?

SW: No, no, no, no. We were writing them here. We were writing the press releases. I wasn't personally writing them.

JD: Oh, okay. So, who was writing them?

SW: Well, Nelson wrote some and other people wrote some. And I only attained that position—see, they killed our best people, and so the second tier of people, like myself, had to fill in places, you know. I mean, that's how I think of it, and I think that's—anyway, the—yeah, there was one other point about media I wanted to say.

Oh, yeah, getting in touch with New York, okay. We did try to coordinate, although we wrote all of our releases down here. Occasionally, the national organization would put out a release, but we did our local releases here. We wrote what we needed to write. And we were getting support from the national person. So, I had to talk on the phone. I couldn't use my phone because I knew my phone was bugged, because right after November third, my phone rang in my house on Cypress Street, and this voice said, "SBI—oops," and hung up. You know, I knew my wire was tapped.

So, I would have to go—then, there were lots of public phones, okay. In the era before cellphones, there were public phones all over the place, in front of a grocery store or drugstore, everywhere, okay. So, I would go to a public phone. I'm sure probably—there were only like four or five or six phones that were, you know, within walking distance, that were convenient, so I kept kind of going back to the same phones to call and speak to the person in New York or to speak to other people that I didn't want the—I thought maybe this won't be tapped, you know. Doing that very frequently, sometimes a few times a week, in all kinds of weather, sometimes standing in the little booth, freezing to death in the winter, sweltering in the summer, and long conversations. [Laughs] You know, political people discussing theory and strategy goes on and on and on, you know, long conversations on the phone in a phone booth, because I can't use my phone. [Laughs] And that was a big part of what it was like to be a media secretary.

JD: Do you remember how—how did black media respond?

SW: Better, better!

JD: For example, *Carolina Peacemaker* or—?

SW: Better! [Laughs] They were contaminated by the whole corporate thing to a lesser degree and definitely understood the race issue to a greater degree.

JD: Right.

SW: So, yeah, the better media was like *Carolina Peacemaker*. You know, that doesn't mean they always explained it the way we would have liked. But at least they kind of knew the—they could grasp the situation a whole lot better and weren't taken in by the police lies and the mayor's lies and all of that. There were lots of other media. If I, you know, go back to my files back there, I will remember that there were lots of

organizations [1:20:00] or little alternative media things or courageous reporters. We had good media, too. I've got a big pile of stuff, and it's not all terrible.

JD: You mentioned that so many places wouldn't let you meet there. And there's two that stood out to me in the book, I think, places where there were meetings. One was—I think it was called the Cosmos Club, [SW coughs] which was essentially a black nightclub that usually was a musical venue.

SW: Yes, right.

JD: So, that was interesting. But, in particular, the Uhuru Bookstore, run by Lew Brandon.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: Um, that was interesting.

SW: Yeah. The black community early on formed a—there were two citizen groups that were there to support us, that kind of knew that this thing did not come down the way the paper said it did. And one, I think, was largely black, and the other was more liberal whites and some blacks, you know. They were both integrated, but they were a little bit different. One, I think, was called the Concerned Citizens for November Third, or something like that. I can't remember the name of the other, based more on Guilford College.

And the people who joined those, they also—they had courage to do that, because some of them were in a position where they could be ostracized or be in a vulnerable position. And where some people might just sign a petition or go to a meeting, others went with us when we went to Washington, D.C., or when we really stepped out, you

know, to talk to the Justice Department and things like that. At the trials, you know, these

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organizations would be there, and individuals would speak to the press. So, there were courageous, concerned citizens in Greensboro and in Durham. You know, they would write letters to the editor, although the majority of the letters were negative. [Laughs] They were swallowing the whole media story.

But we had so many people who were supportive in the ways they were able to be supportive. You know, the Greensboro Justice Fund did work mainly around the trials, and they were helped a whole lot by these local citizen groups supporting them, you know. So, I think—and there's media involved there, too, because the Greensboro Justice Fund puts out a newsletter, maybe the Concerned Citizens have a flyer or a newsletter. So, you have all these community media outlets, a little variety there, you know. And that was how we got out our story. You know, we depended on those little crevices and cracks in the—.

JD: Um-hmm. What's the story behind the documentary, *Red November Black November*? That was interesting to me. I mean, it was made within two years of the massacre.

SW: Yeah.

JD: Can you remember a little bit of the background about it?

SW: Yeah, um-hmm. That was mainly directed from the party headquarters. I have a very close friend who was one of the people who worked on that. Um, it was—that, too, had a lot of ideology. I think that's very good, by the way, the whole thing. I think it was good. I think when you see it now—I haven't seen it recently. It's been years. But the last time I saw it, it had been plenty of years past, you know, and [clears throat] it struck me as being dated in the sense that this particular politics and ideology, the things

we're saying about what's going to happen, like revolution in the eighties, obviously didn't come to pass, right? [Laughs] So, you have to say that's dated. Also, because people aren't thinking and talking and organizing like that anymore. At the same time, it does have this—the universal in it, the spirit of universality that if you, despite the times, that you put this in a certain time period, it says something about universal human nature or human beings. I think that the interviews in it are good, you know. I think it's very powerful. If you look at it as dated but you take it on its own idiom, it's very powerful. So, I still think that. It's been about five years since I've seen it. [1:25:00]

JD: It sounds like an important historical document.

SW: It is. And I think that we here in Greensboro didn't really have any input into the way that documentary was structured. There are long clips in it that are not in the edited version, by the way. Somebody who did put it on DVD took out a lot of the ideology and politics. [Laughs] But there's, you know, a lot of speaking by Jerry Tung, who is Chinese American, and his English was not all that good, and it's not that easy always to understand him, okay. I'm thinking that we understood him because we were used to hearing him talk. But he's struggling a little bit with English still, although he had been in this country for a lot of years. You had other people who are giving you a lot of political ideology.

Also, there are these scenes of the actual shooting, but in the whole melee and everything, the four television stations, they weren't always holding the camera steady, right, so you have the camera going upside down. Have you seen that?

JD: Yeah. I've seen some of it online.

SW: Yeah, I mean, and then getting blurred and all of that.

JD: Right.

SW: So, you don't have excellent footage. You have very far from excellent sound. So, that's just, in a technical sense, is a problem with it. But it's very—it is very powerful. The most powerful part of it, too, is it does show the five people who were killed. It shows pictures of them, talks about their background, what they were doing when they were killed, you know, the organizing they were doing. It really shows the context of the organizing, the labor organizing, the African Liberation Day background. So, it's very good for showing you the context and showing you the five people, how they were part of that context, and then hearing from the widows and others who were injured, why they were at that rally and their perception of things. Mainly, the widows are asked to talk about their spouses who were killed, you know, and that's what I did, that's what Dale Sampson did, and Floris [Cauce].

JD: Sally Alvarez, was she the—?

SW: Yeah, she's the one who made the movie.

JD: Was she local or was she in New York?

SW: She had been—she was from North Carolina. She was not originally from North Carolina, although I think she was born in Greensboro. Sally was born in Greensboro? Yeah, she was born in Greensboro, I believe. When I met her, she was living in Durham, and she was part of the original groups around the Workers Viewpoint that were in Durham. She was doing media work, too. She and her husband, Joe, had moved to New York around the time, shortly before November third. They were both doing union work, a lot of union work. She also held a position, a media-type position with a union and university, Cornell, I think. She would be a good person to talk to, also.

JD: Yeah.

SW: Sally Alvarez. Yeah, she'd be excellent.

JD: You briefly—

SW: So, she's a good friend, and when she was in Greensboro, we were very close. We even lived close together for a while.

JD: Yeah. Yeah, well, she sounds like someone interesting to talk to. You mentioned Malcolm X Day. What was that?

SW: No, scratch that. Malcolm, just Malcolm X. There wasn't a Malcolm X Day. I realized right after I said that that—what we did was we had appreciations of Malcolm X for, I guess, for his birthday or the anniversary of his death or something.

JD: Okay, gotcha.

SW: Yeah, there was no Malcolm X Day. Please scratch that. I should have mentioned that right away.

JD: That's okay.

SW: I caught myself on that.

JD: We've covered a lot of ground, and there's so much more to this. But I just wanted to end by asking if there's anything else you would add, you know, especially about the media dimension of your activism. Maybe I covered everything, but I don't know. I just wanted to open it up so that you could add whatever you thought should be added.

SW: No, I don't. You know, my being a media spokesperson, I didn't really have the background for that, from a philosophy professor to revolutionary media, I mean. And now, I only became a more serious writer afterward, [1:30:00] more recently, since about
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2000, or no, 1998 or something. And now, I am—I'm writing other things. I've written other things. I'm writing other things. I just—my views about the media are not somebody who has specifically studied media, like yourself. Okay? It's more a philosophical view about how you have a responsibility to tell the truth, and just—they don't do that. I mean, I deplore the state that the media is in.

But, on the other hand, I think that is changing. I really do. I think the internet has just broken that wide open, and there are too many people who are too conscientious to let that go on. So, I see the media, that media structure that's used to just being the maidservant of the corporate world—I don't see that as something that's going to be with us forever. I think that's breaking up.

JD: Um-hmm.

SW: But I don't have any credentials to do what I did. I just—I had to step into the void then, and I did, that's all.

JD: Yeah. Well, that—I mean, you did what you had to do. And, I mean, it's just—I'm glad we can sit down and talk about it. Although I will say, I did catch the fact that you said you taught a class on mass media. [Laughs]

SW: I did, at Bennett College. [Laughs]

JD: At Bennett College. So, that's—at the very least, it's a coincidence. But maybe you are more credentialed than you give yourself credit for.

SW: Well, what I did in that class was—it was a political awakening class. What it really was is a political awareness class, because we looked at media dealing with, you know, women's equality and all the issues of the day. But I guess I even—I think I'd read Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* way back. I've read a lot of Noam Chomsky.

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So, I mean, I've read that stuff. But, you know, I hadn't ever been trained as a journalist or a media expert or anything like that. But now, I consider myself a serious writer, in that writing is a very sacred thing to me, and I don't do it lightly and I really strive to be as good and honest and clear as I can be.

JD: Yeah. I mean, it's interesting. I'm thinking about interviews I've done. I would say most activists who got involved with media production, they didn't have training. Very few had formal training in radio production or in writing. But there was such a need to disseminate messages, so people taught themselves.

That just reminds me of one little thing I forgot to mention. Can you mention the mimeograph machine that you had? I think that was an interesting detail.

SW: Well, this was manufactured in Great Britain, because Roneo was not the American version of it. I don't know how we got it. It ended up in the hands of Workers Viewpoint Organization. And at one point—well, at one point, I brought it to Sally and Joe. They were living around the corner. Oh, no, that was Ed and Clair. They were also—I'm confused now about whose house. Anyway, we had some other comrades who were living around the corner. [Clears throat] I thought that our house might be searched, and so I brought the mimeograph machine there. I'm trying to think.

I may have these details wrong, so let me just say this about the Roneo, what I do remember clearly. There was a worker at White Oak. We wanted to recruit him, but he was kind of a wild guy and was drunk half the time, very sympathetic, but—but anyway, the mimeograph machine ended up at his place, because we couldn't keep it in anybody's house, because the (bullies/police) might come and take it. So, [1:35:00] we ended up

giving it to him for safekeeping, okay. And apparently he had it outside in the rain and

the snow and the sun. [Laughs] The next time I saw that mimeograph machine, it was a skeletal ghost of itself, and that was the end of the Roneo. Anyway. [Laughs]

JD: It's interesting, though. I mean, it comes up a few times in the book, because it sounds like you and other party members put it to good use for a while. And it was, you know, in the era before widespread affordable photocopy, that was an important tool for publishing, for printing.

SW: Um-hmm.

JD: And the fact that you had one that was [laughs] going from private house to private house.

SW: Yeah, and it was serviceable. I mean, I spent a lot of time typing the leaflets and the press statements. But there's a little afterward to this story about the mimeograph machine. We had—Jim and I lived with my two kids in a house on Cypress Street that I had bought. It was really kind of like an old mill house, but a very nice house, nice and big and spacious, 702 Cypress Street. Well, there was—on the second floor, there was this little room. You couldn't even call it a room. It was more like a closet, and the ceiling was very low. It was a sloping ceiling, but at the highest point, maybe I could stand up, and there would be one or two inches. I'm five-foot-three-and-a-half, and I was five-foot-four then. So, the highest point was like a person five-foot-five or six could stand up. So, when Jim went in—I mean, anybody over that had to put their head down, you know.

And I was the one—sometimes Dale helped me—who took the—the mimeograph machine was there, and I ran off the flyers there. We also had posters from the Zimbabwe struggle and other struggles, ALSC, in this little closet. And I took some paste and I

plastered the posters all over the room. And then the door closed, and it's like a secret room. You know, nobody would find this room.

So, in all these decades, what has finally happened is a few years ago, this house was totally redone, gentrified, made into a—let's see. I think my first husband and I paid, was it seventeen or twenty thousand dollars for it, something like that, in the mid-seventies. Okay? I kid you not. This house was on the market for like two hundred and eighty thousand dollars. I wish I had held onto it. I'd be rich. Anyway, I don't think I got but like forty or fifty thousand a long, long time ago when I sold it and moved to the Midwest. I think the house is—a few people have lived there, but it's totally—they rerouted the rooms and shut off rooms and everything, They totally redid this house. It's not at all, except for some things I did to it—I put in a fireplace and I did that work myself, tiling work.

Anyway, upstairs where the mimeograph room was—they actually knew the history of this house—and they have a little like story on the outside of the door, talking about the secret room, and they left the posters that were left plastered there. They left them there. They redid the entire house, but they left this little closet with the posters and they put this little exotic thing, you know. They actually used it to their advantage, you know, to advertise the mystery and charm of this house, you know.

JD: Someone needs to take pictures of that.

SW: And we went—there was a story about it in the newspaper, and I think this is a shot of that room.

JD: Wow.

SW: I have that, if I can put my hands on it. I think I can. But that was—I went to the opening when they were trying to—at one point, where the ones who had it were selling it, and they had an open house thing. A friend of mine is on the Greensboro Preservation Society, so she told me about it. She said, “Come on along,” so I went with my husband and my son. And it was really quite an experience to walk through this thing and see what they had done to it and recall the way we had lived in in, and the meetings we had had in it, including the one right before November third. The night of November second, we had a meeting in our living room, and then I’m running upstairs to knock out more flyers that we needed for the next day, and people are arguing in the kitchen and, you know, I could see all of this happening.

But you can’t even have access from one room to another the way we did, because they shut off [1:40:00] from the kitchen to what was our bedroom, you know. And where my kids lived upstairs, totally changed those rooms and created an extra room. One big room, they made two rooms out of it. My daughter had this huge room. We had put in a second bathroom, Jim Waller and I. So, it’s really weird.

What’s weirdest about this is that when all—after all this happened, I was conscious of all the political activity that had gone on in this house, and the other house in Greensboro was Nelson’s house. These were the two political houses that were always being spied on. And I was saying to people that someday this house is going to be a museum of the revolution. You know, this is right after November third, thinking that the other revolution is coming. Ten or twenty years, and this house is going to be the museum of the revolution. And so, here it is. It’s thirty years later or thirty-five years

later. It's not the museum of the revolution. It's still in corporate Greensboro. But there's this little "charming" anecdote—it's kind of like not a museum but it is a museum.

JD: Yeah.

SW: It's really very weird. I mean, I haven't told that to anybody, so you should be honored. [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] That's a great story to end on. I think that really is a nice way to kind of connect the past to the present.

SW: Yeah, I can show you that article.

JD: Yeah, I'd love to see that.

SW: I have—why don't we—let me show you what I have.

JD: Yeah!

SW: I can even give you a couple of copies of the *Granite Workers Update*, because I have one set of all seven that I want to keep intact.

JD: Oh, wow.

SW: But then three or four of them I've got multiple copies.

[Recording ends at 1:41:50]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council