

**U.18 Long Civil Rights Movement:
Heirs to a Fighting Tradition**

**Interview U-0560
Mandy Carter
November 30, 2007**

Transcript – 2

TRANSCRIPT: MANDY CARTER

Interviewee: Mandy Carter

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge

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START OF INTERVIEW

BB: Hi, Mandy Carter. Today is November 30, 2007. This is the fifth interview in a series with Mandy Carter for the Heirs to a Fighting Tradition Project: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists. Bridgette Burge is the interviewer. We're interviewing again at Mandy's home in Durham. Our last interview, the fourth interview in the series, was on July eleventh, here. Neither one of us can believe it's been that long. This seemed to help a little bit at our last recording. I did a quick recap of some of the things that we talked about.

MC: Oh yeah, remind me.

BB: From the field notes, we talked about mostly the years from '93 to 2003 and you talked about your role as the founder and coordinator of the National Call to Resist: Countering the Radical Right in our black community and your work around the Christian Coalition and all the religious right, far right, anti-gay, anti-women agenda; some about your work with the North Carolina Mobilization in '96, when Harvey Grant ran against Jesse Helms again; the Paul Anderson Stonewall Award and twenty-five thousand bucks and what you did with that; serving as a consultant to the office of Lesbian and Gay Outreach of the DNC, Democratic National Committee; the Leadership

Forum; the roles of foundations in the support and demise of some LGBTQ groups; the history of Pride marches; Equal Partners in Faith. We did talk about not having health care some last time and the consulting piece; your involvement with SONG in the leadership retreats, some great stories around (2:33) and the voter turnout efforts in the 2000 election in Florida. You talked about Little Haiti; your work with the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the National Organizers' Alliance; a little bit about the Phil Donahue show and your appearance on CSPAN (2:58). We talked some about your media work. So before we pick up where we left off, I thought we could start around February of 2003 and talking about the Peace and Justice Coalition and your work around the antiwar organizing. We talked about that a little bit. What have you been up to the last several months? Let's just catch up.

MC: Since July?

BB: Yeah, since July. What's been happening with you?

MC: What's been happening since July, August, September, October? Well, the most recent thing was in October, the Gill Foundation held an African-American LGBT and allies leadership retreat at their office in Denver, Colorado, and it was coordinated by a gentleman by the name of Morris Price, as in Price is Right. He is their national program officer. He's African-American. He's gay. And the Gill Foundation, I would say, is really committed to this notion of diversity in terms of people of color, LGBT organizing, and the purpose of the meeting was to bring together about, what was there, like twelve of us representing a series of different national organizations and/or groups, to come together for a weekend and talk literally around what's the status of our black LGBT and ally movement, what is or isn't happening, all toward the vision of Gill really

being serious about giving a good chunk of change for some organizing, not around a particular organization per se, but around the idea of sort of a collaborative of anyone who's African-American, les-bi-gay-trans group efforts. How can we fund those so that, given the reality that the country is getting more and more of color, not less, that there would be a much more highly visible and viable role to play?

I've known Morris Price since he joined Gill and the people that were there, to give you a flavor, for instance, you had Alexander Robinson, the executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, which is right now the only existing national LGBT group in the country that's non-AIDs-related. You had a woman by the name of Sharon—I can't remember Sharon's last name—African-American, straight woman, who works for the People for the American Way Foundation in Washington, DC, who brought an amazing perspective of a black woman working in a predominantly white, progressive group, but does a huge amount of work around black ministers and outreach to people of color in terms of their organizing, all the way to there's a woman by the name of Bishop Yvette Flunder. I don't know if you've ever heard that name, but she's a black lesbian, very dynamic woman, who's doing faith-based organizing out of the San Francisco Bay Area, primarily through the United Church of Christ, to Earle Fohlkes, who's the CEO of the International Federation of Black Pride.

So you see what I mean? So in a way, it was kind of a gathering of people who could sit there and talk about the status of the movement and where's it's been, where it has the potential to go, and it was just the first in a series of meetings. But I was honored to be invited as not only one of the cofounders of SONG, but also just with my legacy or my history of being active around the country. So we did that, that was very exciting.

And of course, that came smack dab in the middle of the most controversial part of this Barak Obama campaign, when he was going to be doing a five-city tour throughout the state of South Carolina and he had a black gospel singer who's anti-gay, Donnie McLerkin, and even before we hit Denver, that was in the news about why would Obama, who talks about being inclusive, go on a tour trying to raise up the black vote and potential black supporters and go on tour with a gentleman who has been so clearly identified as a very rabid, very vocal, black anti-gay soul singer, gospel singer. So we were dealing with that at the time. To make a long story short, how anyone could have been—and Obama does have an LGBT, what do you want to call it, constituency or whatever—how they could not have known this was going to be a bombshell was beyond us. Someone didn't do their homework.

And Obama's response, we basically reached out to Obama and said, "We're not telling you don't do your tour, but just be aware that you've got someone on here that is so controversial." Well, it turns out that Donnie McLerkin had been abused as a child and so there's a long story behind his reasons why he has an anti-gay position, but for him to be going on a tour with Obama and at one point, he only ended up going into like one city, Columbia, South Carolina, but we contacted the Obama campaign and said, "Here's some ways in which you could rectify this," trying to figure out some very systematic way. One way was certainly, whether you tell him he can perform or not, but you'd better have someone up on stage who's either black and gay or lesbian, or black and white, to say, "We understand there's controversy," whatever, they didn't take it; could not believe it. And so what could have been nipped in the bud was not and it turned out to be a huge drama.

And the other part of it, and I'll be blunt, because the word went out about Donnie McLerkin being black, being anti-gay and almost the first voices to speak up, unfortunately, were the Human Rights Campaign, so it looked like white gays against a black man. It got all messed up and we had told groups like HRC that, "This is a moment why we have the Black Justice Coalition. Let us be the face and voice of this." But no, they couldn't let that alone. So they ended up getting a white minister who was gay to come out on the same night and do like a little speech, and no disrespect to the white gay minister, but within a half hour, you had people like Reverend Tanya Rahls, who sits there at the Unity and Fellowship Church in Charlotte, who's black and lesbian, she would have been a perfect person to have gotten. But did they take that advice? No. You had Michael Eric Dyson being suggested, historian, straight, strong supporter. Did they take that advice? No. So that was in October. That was quite a flurry of activity.

And then most recently, I got a contract job with the Walter and Evelyn Haas Jr. Fund, which is out of San Francisco. They have a good chunk of their money that goes for LGBT youth organizing, primarily in the Bay Area, but they're in the middle of doing this sort of interesting listening project of people around the country, both LGBT and ally, and asking about their potential funding work and they had five concepts that they were trying to hear some feedback on: faith-based organizing, same sex marriage, racial equity, LGBT youth organizing, and one that was pretty much called your generic, what are the main institutions that continue to discriminate. And so for about a month, I just made calls across the country and took notes and got that information back to them and that was through October-November and then with December first was out.

So that's what I've been doing.

BB: Ever busy.

MC: Yeah.

BB: Any progress on your search for your family of origin?

MC: Well, you know, this is interesting. The last time we talked, I think I had told you that I had found this wonderful website called ancestry.com and through a friend of mine in San Francisco, who was basically paying for access to this website, I did find out my mother has died and she actually died down in a town outside of South Carolina. And I must tell you that once I found that piece of information out, it kind of took the wind out of my sails. It was like, well now that I know she's dead, I know where she's buried, but it took sort of the "maybe she's still alive, not sure," whatever. So since then, I've haven't done as much, but now I'm sort of on the track of at least if I can find my sister Dolores or Ronnie, who still might be alive, I would certainly like to go at that direction and at some point certainly look at any of her second family that she had been networked with, because her husband is still alive, still living down there, and I could probably go down and do that. But it certainly dramatically changed my emotional sense of wanting to know more about her at the moment. That could change. I certainly want to still follow up and get more information about her side and my father's side. But in terms of relevancy of who could potentially be alive right now, it's my brother and sister. So I'm still trying to figure out some way to get that information. So that's where I'm at at the moment.

BB: How'd it feel when you found out your mom had passed?

MC: Well, you know, it was an interesting feeling. It took almost a week. There were tears. It's almost like the reason it was so dramatic was the only time I laid eyes on

her that I remember having a conversation was when she came to see us, my brother, sister, and me as they were getting ready to shut down the Albany Children's Home. And she showed up with a baby and we're sitting in this room and the first response we all had was, "Well, who is this woman and why does she have a baby and why is she leaving with the baby and we're still--?" In other words, she would have been better off not even coming at all. It was like we knew she had walked out, had no sense of who she was. At the age of eight, I remember this woman coming in and I don't remember really, I can't remember her features, but I remember just how traumatic it seemed to be, like, "Why are you here and why are you leaving?"

And then it turned out and I found out in the papers when she had her obituary listed, they had all the family members of her second marriage, but never mentioned her first marriage and us. And I thought, "Well, what's up with that?" Like she didn't even--. Why didn't she mention that she had three children prior to her second marriage? So there's a lot of emotion around it. But also if you know someone's not alive anymore, you'll never be able to ask why. I might be able to find out from her family and all that, but you'll never be able to have a direct conversation, like, "Hello?" So it was a range of emotions. It was kind of like, oh, well, whatever. So I'll never know.

BB: I'm sorry, Mandy.

MC: I don't feel bad about it, but I think what it has done, it's made me really have a greater appreciation within the LGBT and progressive community for those who either adopt and/or do foster child care, that I have a greater appreciation of wanting to feel more connected to that end of organizing or being aware of what's around, like you have groups like Colage; it's called Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere. It's out

of San Francisco and they only deal with children of gay and lesbian parents, but even within that, there's now a whole world of how many gay and lesbian families are adopting children or having foster children to take care of and bringing that into the picture. So when you have people like me and others—and I'm really surprised how many people I've met that have either been adopted themselves or foster children. So in a way, it's made me be a bit more sensitive of who's out there and hearing those stories and why we don't hear more about that. People just don't share that. So it's a way of bringing it up and having more conversation about it. So if anything, I think it's made me more sensitive about it and certainly when you talk about the concept of family, don't only talk about biological children and/or children of donor—what do you call it, like sperm donors? Talk about adopted kids and foster kids throughout the years. So yeah, it's made me more caring.

BB: Well, let's jump to February of 2003.

MC: That was February.

BB: This was when you played a key role in organizing in North Carolina against the war in Iraq. You served on an ad-hoc planning committee of the North Carolina Antiwar Network.

MC: That's right.

BB: Which later became the NC Peace and Justice Coalition. I served on that committee with you and we were planning for the February fifteenth antiwar march.

MC: The world says no to war.

BB: The world says no to war. And it was in Raleigh, North Carolina, and all of us were shocked that seven or eight thousand people showed up that day in Raleigh.

MC: Amazing.

BB: In our last interview, you said that you thought it was one of the best NC antiwar demonstrations ever. Why do you think that?

MC: Well, I know that before I moved to North Carolina in 1982, that certainly within the state of North Carolina there was a huge anti-Vietnam War effort, if I can use that term. And certainly when you think of the Durham area, you would hear stories about Duke and Durham and sort of like the peace and justice community here that certainly had their own anti-Vietnam War efforts happening here as well. I remember—in fact, I talked to someone like Steve Schewell, who's one of the founders and publisher of the *Independent*, who talked about how they had a huge anti-Vietnam War effort rally at the State Capitol. So it was a frame of reference when you think about what was the last war that you could use to underscore what North Carolina did; it would have to be the Vietnam War. So with that as sort of the backdrop, what was so intriguing to me, though, was nationally and internationally within United for Peace and Justice calling for a preemptive—I've never seen this happen ever—a preemptive action because we hadn't gone to war at this point, asking for people all across this country and around the world, and of course, the slogan was “the world says no to war,” was that on February fifteenth in this country and around the country, people would hold rallies to say, “Don't go to war.”

Because we also had at that time, had started having this Durham peace committee, one of the key questions that came up was whether or not we were going to try to organize because the only other place that was close enough for us to go would have been New York City. Were we once again going to organize a bunch of buses to go

all the way to New York? And we said, “Wait a minute, why don’t we just practically on one level thinking of doing it at the State Capitol. It is the State Capitol. It’s Raleigh.” If you remember, we had a series of conversations about it seemed like it would be a more practical place and also the other reality check, we knew that with the military bases out of North Carolina, we had a really unique role and what was the unique contribution of our peace movement in the North Carolina participating in this. We did this national, as you know, statewide call.

As you said, we put this rally together and had no idea how many people would come, took a full-page ad out—we were surprised at how many people were willing to add their name and money to a full-page ad—held a press conference down in Raleigh. Was it the day before? I can’t remember.

BB: I think we did a couple.

MC: Did we do a couple?

BB: It was pretty soon.

MC: Yeah. It wasn’t there like a couple we did. I thought there was like a momentum-building kind of thing.

BB: Yeah, that’s right. There was one, the big one. That’s right. We were also interviewed outside in the hall.

MC: Right.

BB: I can’t remember. I might be confusing rallies, but go ahead.

MC: Right, we had that. Then, of course, one of the most dramatic things was that initially we just said we wanted to do a rally, but then as we went further on with discussion, one of the issues came up: “Well, why don’t do a rally, but also why can’t we

do a march?" And if you remember, we ran into sort of a road block because the folks at the State Capitol, they're different police, there are different people who control the Capitol versus the people who control what's around it. I think what did we end up doing? We said we would do some last final minute meeting. Who did we get to have change their mind? You were in on that, weren't you? What was the story on that?

BB: Yeah. It was the night before. Y'all sent me to the mayor's office. I'd never done anything like that before and Ed Whitfield was coaching me on my cellphone, saying, "Don't take that. Go back in there and tell them we're marching and they're either going to protect us and make it safe or it's going to be mayhem." Ed was giving me some cellphone fire to go in. And I met with Russell Allen, the city manager, who was most unsympathetic. But Mayor Meeker and I think somebody called Ann McLoren. Dr. McLoren is his wife and she's an ally and somebody called her too. I guess Bill Tall knows her, some Peace Action folk know her; I don't know who exactly. But I think between her leaning on Mayor Meeker and us showing up at the office and saying, "We're doing it anyway," we got the permit at the twelfth hour.

MC: That was amazing.

BB: Eleventh hour, I guess.

MC: And you know what's so interesting? Looking back on it now without us knowing it, because we didn't know how many folks were going to show up, but boy, not only did the numbers show up, but boy, it made it so much more dynamic to have the rally, the march come back around. I'll have to say, out of all the rallies I've done in my lifetime and people have made the same comment—and remember, there was a guy who

was willing to donate a sound system. It turned out it was nowhere near enough for the people. When people started showing up, it was--.

I remember another key decision was made. At first we were going to call it an "antiwar" something and then we said, "No, why are we going to call it an antiwar?" We ended up calling it something for peace and something, even though it still had "the world says no to war," but we ended up with a peace and justice, so it went beyond just the whole anti-Iraq War thing.

The crowd size was unbelievable and who was there and the age dynamics and who came from where. It would have to go down as one of the most profound things we did, and then the march happened and all that. It was incredible. The press was amazing. We all had great press, we all had great press. Then of course, remember, we also had some anti-our things, but the numbers were so dramatic. What did they have? Like, I don't know, maybe a dozen or something. I can't remember. But I remember sitting on the lawn. I thought, "This is why we had to be in Raleigh, for this reason." It was so profound. That was an amazing rally.

BB: What were some lessons you learned in that process about working with a loose group of volunteers to pull off something so huge in a relatively short period of time when there's not clarity around decision-making structure or who makes the call about negotiating power with the police, etcetera?

MC: One of the things I must say I appreciate having been in other places and I still think it's so true with North Carolina and even though there seem to be some times, like who is going to make decisions, how, and when, and what do you do when there's a last minute decision to be made and if you don't have access to the committee or

whatever, but there's a stronger sense of cooperation and trust in the state of North Carolina unlike I've seen in other state coalitions, especially loose knit. Even though you had people coming from Fayetteville and Greensboro and Asheville and then all the individuals not connected with groups, but I think part of that had to do with the kind of groundwork that had already existed in the state because of prior movements that have happened and certainly because when we've talked about the idea of the face, who is going to be the face and voice, the mcs, we wanted to have a balance of speakers so there'd be a diversity of colors and issues and geography, so even putting together who would speak was really important and that kind of input. So I thought there was some real thoughtfulness around that because I thought there was a real sense of "we're going to trust you," meaning the steering committee, and then all the people who devoted their volunteer time to show up that day and do all that, the stage and the sound and media and all that. So to me, what I was impressed with was the infrastructure that exists within the state and people kind of pulling together to make that happen, and then how we dealt with stuff the day of. This last minute thing about the permit, that was scary.

BB: About what?

MC: The permit, because some people said, "We can't go tell people we're going to show up to do a rally and we haven't forewarned them that if you do a march, it might not be legal."

BB: You might get arrested.

MC: For us to have taken that into consideration and the last minute stuff that we had to do to ensure that there was safety on that issue. We had peacekeepers, trainers. So I thought there was a real carefulness around it and I thought that because of that work

and because of past relationships, it also made it easier to have some conversation with people because you weren't talking with total strangers at that point. So I think the coordinating went a bit easier for that. So that seemed to be a real lesson and then working with the press.

BB: And you said because we weren't talking with--?

MC: Total strangers. In other words, rather than having to start from square one with the rally, it didn't happen that way. We had people, because of all the connections that each of us had in our respective networks and communities, that when it came time for the pre-planning, the day of, at the moment day of, that it seemed to be a very tight fix. I can't remember, but there might have been, I'm sure, some hassles that were involved. I remember one that I really was not happy about. I don't know if I should say this or not. No, I won't even add it. To me, there just seemed to be when people said, "We can't hear you, the sound system's not loud enough," well it turned out after I found that, a lot of the people said, "In a way, it didn't matter. We were too busy talking to each other. We hadn't seen each other." People were having all these little get-togethers around the whole Capitol grounds. So in a way, it was almost like, "Oh, that's okay. We didn't get to hear you. We saw. We were a part of this massive seven or eight thousand people."

And the stories that came out the next day in the *News & Observer*, I still have all those paper clips, and the *Herald Sun*. And of course, the *Indy* did a great—and the *Independent* helped a lot because they kept on carrying these sort of pre-story stories. As we kept on building and building and building, I think that made a huge difference too for that. It got on the news, of course, and all that. I remember later on, I told Leslie Cagan,

who is with the United Peace for Justice, I said, "Leslie, even though you had--." And we saw the drama going on with New York. Remember, New York was no picnic either when you saw how they were trying to keep them on a path way, way far from whatever. I said to Leslie Cagan, who was one of the coordinators, "One of the smartest things we did was to make a decision to coordinate with the day, but to hold it in the State Capitol of North Carolina." And I said to her, "That was one of the best things we have ever done."

BB: So this is a very broad, heady question, so shifting gears. What's your vision of a liberated world?

MC: World? Well, to me, a liberated world in the biggest sense is where capitalism and the idea of money profit over people is not what the priority is, and the people are first. And also this whole notion of nation-states and loyalty to nation-states and how oftentimes we get in problems with that because I remember when I was first working with the War Resisters League, one of the issues that came up was, "Why do we have wars?" We have wars because countries go to battle. Countries go to battle over what? Nation-states go to battle over "it's mine, I have it, I want it," the colonization by countries that go out. But what would happen if you had less focus on individual nation-states and everyone having vested interests in protecting their little piece of whatever, but a broaden sense of a world cooperative or an international sense of each individual people being sacred and how you provide for the basic needs of foods, clothing, shelter, health? If that were to become the priority, because there's more than enough to go around, no one should ever be starving in this world, it's ridiculous, no one should, never. So I guess liberation in that sense of people, not profit. And I think being a United States citizen,

thinking of the unique role that this country has been so bad on, that I think being one of the quote, unquote “most powerful countries in the world,” the role that we should play in this notion of—did you say world liberation? Is that the word you used?

BB: Liberated world.

MC: Liberated world, yeah. And owning it and saying we should be able to do something about that since we are US citizens.

BB: Where do you fall at the moment on the optimism-pessimism spectrum about achieving that?

MC: My optimism is why I’m still doing this work after all these years. It’s sky high. I can’t imagine if I wasn’t optimistic. Why would I bother? And my personal angst is to hang around organizers who have such a negative view, to be sitting in a meeting where someone says, “Why bother? It’s not going to make a difference.” I won’t go to that meeting ever again with that person in the room because there’s such a negative vibe. And when people organize around the idea that it’s not going to really happen, right. So my sense of optimism and my sense of possibility is sky high because I think it’s all doable. I have a feeling that the majority of people in this country are good, decent people who want to just good, who just want to do the right thing. Unfortunately, there is a smaller number on both sides, those who want to change and those who want to make things not good, that oftentimes get to be heard more, seen more. But if I believe that the basic human being has the potential for making change, wants change, wants to be equal, wants to be fair, then the possibility is very great, in my opinion.

And what about the children? Because when kids are being born and depending on what they’re being culturalized to or for, that, to me, is where the hope and/or

pessimism lies because I think the kids really are the ones who can really make a difference, children.

BB: How would your answers to those questions have varied from time to time, your idea of a liberated world and the spectrum of optimism-pessimism?

MC: I would say that when I first got involved and it was back in the, like I said, early 60s and especially thinking of my involvement with groups like the War Resisters League and the Vietnam War, I think that probably had to be one of the most pessimistic moments for me, but I think for a whole generation, because it was hard to believe that you could even end such a war and when you think about how long it took and the number of lives that were lost and/or destroyed because of it, I probably was more pessimistic then because it was hard to believe you could do anything to stop this thing that was happening.

Most recently, one of the things, I had a personal epiphany not long ago. When the Vietnam War ended in 1973, I said to myself that when the Vietnam Wall went up, I could never bring myself to go to that. It just seemed like such a—and I think there was a lot of people who worked against the Vietnam War who might have had a similar thing of not being able to walk near that wall, and I kept on wondering, what was the emotional thing that kept me--? I remember, I just happened to be going up to a trip, to some kind of meeting not long ago with my friend, Bob, and I said, “Bob, let’s go to the wall.”

And the reason why I could almost say that then after all those years, it was almost like, this is a funny thing to say, but so many people that were engaged in the Vietnam War, from the soldiers to the activists who were trying to end it, there never seemed to be closure, like the war was over all of a sudden. We never had any kind of

conversation, especially those of us who were trying to end it, with the guys and women who served in it. And because there was such a culture of service men and women who didn't want to acknowledge they'd even served in it because it was such an awful kind of, "If you've served in there, you're a baby killer," whatever. We hadn't reached that point of understanding. You have to separate the person from the policy and I remember that a lot of people in the antiwar movement talked about being in solidarity with the people of Vietnam, but very rarely talked about solidarity for the military and look at the difference in terms of the Iraq War. It almost went the complete opposite where I think one of the biggest lessons we learned is you can not sit there and berate and point the finger at service men and women and say, "You're the reason." No, they're not. It's people sitting in Washington who make the policy.

So the day that I went and saw that wall—have you ever been to the wall? It was such a great stroke of genius that it was done the way it was. The enormity of it is unbelievable: fifty-eighty thousand names on that. And the way they've organized it, they don't organize it alphabetically; they organized it by year. So there's this book if you want to look someone up. But I know there's several names on there that are people I know that were killed in Vietnam that were in the same orphanage that I went to. Because they had a draft and if you're a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old coming out of that home, the first place you went was the military, the Army, and I had friends of mine writing to me; they were sitting in Vietnam. And I had to really find them on the wall. I know they're there.

Look how many years that took? '73 to 2007. How many years is that? Whatever years that is. But I think there was a whole generation of us that were anti-Vietnam

activists and we never had a closing conversation with anyone else that was involving in that whole anti-, especially the military. I was telling a friend who just was here with the War Resisters League National, Matthew Smucker—I don't know, does it ring a bell for you? Have you met him? Have you talked to him?

BB: Just in the meeting right before this one, his name came up.

MC: Yeah, because he's down here doing a listening project. Anyway, I said to him was that one of the things that would really be neat and I don't think it's too late is to almost to go back and revisit the conversation. It's like it never got finished. I thought a lot of us were vets, if you were want to you that term for who were trying to end the war, but we never had any conversation or dialogue with the very men and women that served in that. And what about the whole Vietnam Vets Against the War era that happened? Now we have Iraq Vets Against the War, Military Families Speak Out. It's so profound for me to see the difference in terms of how we organized the anti-Vietnam War movement and how we're organizing the anti-Iraq movement. Look at the difference in terms of just how things are so different in a very positive way.

But I never felt closure after we did all that anti-Vietnam War stuff. So seeing the wall to me was just, I don't know how to describe it, you just don't know how. To see these little names on this thing that goes on for—it was just mind-boggling, absolutely mind-boggling. And you could understand just why that thing just brings out such emotion for people. Now I think they've created a whole new building. The new building has everything that people have been leaving at that wall since it got built and so that's a major deal up there right now.

BB: So bringing it back down, it's still a bit of a heady question, but how have your—

[break in the conversation]

BB: How have your feelings about your body image changed over time?

MC: My body image? Well, you get older, you get a little whiter, you get a little heavier, but I'm cool with it. It's like it goes with the territory. Is that what you mean? I feel like I'm just the same as I was all these years ago. I'm just getting greyer, a little whiter, a little heavier, but healthy. I'm much more concerned about what I put in my body and what I do with it. Is that enough?

BB: Has your body image changed over time? Did you struggle with how you felt? Have you always felt comfortable with your body?

MC: Oh yeah, yeah.

BB: So you feel like you somehow managed to escape the oppression that so many women feel about being objectified and how their body looks?

MC: This is me, but I think this whole 60s generation, I keep on thinking that this is a unique generation that happened because the same group of people that were trying to end the war in Vietnam, especially through groups like the War Resisters League, were the same group of women who were more likely to have a feminist perspective. So when we were doing our work, it wasn't about how we—and this was also an interesting generation where people began to get paid to do the work. So for me to have gotten the job in the movement in 1969 and a lot of women did—why? Because a lot of the men who were running these organizations, who were organizers, resisters, they were going to jail. Who was going to take the positions of them while they're sitting in jail? So I almost

think that in a way, the number of women that were working with men in the anti-Vietnam War movement, with more men going to jail or some men going to Canada, you almost saw this interesting demographic of the shifting number of women who were not only active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, but with groups like WRL, it was much broader anti-militarism, pro-peace, pro-justice, pro-equality, were more likely to be women who didn't have issues around, "What do I look like? Do I care what men think about me?" You know what I mean?

So with that, and a lot of women who also were in the anti-Vietnam War movement that was so male-dominated, I know a lot of women said, "Forget this." They ended up joining their own feminist movement because they felt so slighted and/or not being paid attention to. So in a way, the birth of the feminist movement kind of came out of neglect because men were just being so, even movement organizers, were being so sexist. So women were meeting with women and then the feminists went even one step further and said, "Well, wait a minute, maybe I'm a lesbian feminist." So this whole issue of women's image in the movement, at least I can talk from my experience from where I did my travel, was not on the agenda. Did anyone even care? I don't remember. But anyway, so I've always been comfortable with what I look like, what I do, and I still feel comfortable with it now.

BB: So who have been some leaders or mentors for you over the years that really rise to the top, and what is it about them that stands out?

MC: Well, here's some names I'll throw at you and some of them are people that are not well-known, but they were important in my life. I was looking at my 1966 yearbook and I remember there were a couple of teachers at my high school, Mount

Pleasant High School, that probably, I didn't know at the time, ended up being real instrumental in the choices I've made and one of them was for the worst reason. She was a Spanish teacher. I'll have to get my yearbook out and bring it in and give you the names. But she flunked me in Spanish and when she flunked me in Spanish, because this is out it worked in high school, in order to get a high school prep academic, you had to take at least one language and pass it to get directly into a four-year school and also I was on the cheerleading squad. If you got an F, not only were you taken off the cheerleading squad for a short time, but it guaranteed you, you were not going to get into a four-year school. Well, I flunked Spanish and I thought, "What the hell am I going to do with Spanish? Why do I even care?" I couldn't get it. I didn't care about it. Her name was Mrs. Armstrong. She flunked me and without realizing it, because she flunked me, I was so depressed around not being able to get into a four-year school. I was totally bummed about losing at least a couple of weeks on the cheerleading squad

And the timing of that happening when this guy came into my social studies class and talked about the American Friends Service Committee in Non-Violence, I almost feel like that was meant to be because I was thinking, "School? I can't get into a four-year. I got into a two-year." But that moment, I was just so bummed, it was like, what's the point, why bother, and then in walks this guy from the American Friends Service Committee. It sort of filled that void and if Mrs. Armstrong had not given me an F, I wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation with you. So little did she know, that F in Spanish went so far for what I ended up doing; so she would have to go down in a weird way.

Another teacher of mine—I don't even know if they're alive anyway—was a social studies teacher named James Hickey. He's the teacher who brought this person into the social studies class and I didn't realize it, but for him to have brought someone in from the Quakers into Mount Pleasant High School in 1966, that might have been even an interesting, like, how did that happen and why did it happen? But certainly, him doing that had a profound impact on me.

A gym teacher named Marsha, again, I'll have to get the yearbook, but anyway, who didn't know that gym teachers were lesbians? Come on. So we had at least two of them in our school, Marsha and then the other one. We never talked about it, but the fact that they were there everyday and you interacted with them in gym class, it must have been some kind of subtle, "They're here, they're teaching. I'm here. There's something going on." So they played a role in that they were two people that I looked at and I had such respect for, but of course, they were both lesbians, but they weren't out.

We had so few black teachers. Almost everyone I met early on were all white, which is one reason why I think I do bridge-building because I really believe in the idea of if someone has a gift to share, you take it. So after that, who else? And then I had an English teacher. I can't think of her name, but she was great because at the end of my senior year, she sat me down in one of the classrooms and said, "So Mandy, what are you going to do with your life now?" And to have someone ask that question the way she did was so neat. She said, "You know, you don't probably realize it, but you have such an energy about you." And of course, I'm thinking, "What?" But I remember that conversation and she said, "You know, you should think about what you want to do. You have such gifts." I just loved life, I just loved people. So I remember that conversation

and thinking, "That was nice to hear that from her." So her, I'll have to get that from the yearbook.

So that was my high school. After that, then I think certainly bumping into people like, I'm going to give you some names. These are women that were connected with the War Resisters League and these women were New York, white activists, "don't take shit from nobody" kind of women that showed me that you could be a woman and strong as could be. And here are their names: Irma Zigas, she's with the WRL. She ended up being one of the WRL chairpeople, certainly had a major impact on me. I'm trying to think of the others. Some of these I might have to find and email you, but Irma Zigas is certainly. Another woman named Norma Becker, another WRL, dynamic, just amazing. These women were just so powerful and when you thought about WRL with at least three gay staff, gay men, and the role of women. What a model to see of how you could really be a great activist and as a black woman activist, lesbian, feeling comfortable in a movement that said being gay ain't a problem, and look at the impact they've had on the institutions of war. I thought, "That's why they have such a role in my life to this day." The gay men were David McReynolds, another gentleman by the name of Igal Roodenko. They'd be the two gay men that I remember. So they were influential. I'm just trying to think as I keep on going.

BB: And people who really rise to the top as specifically mentors, even a step between deeply influential, are there people?

MC: When you use the term "mentor," what do you mean by that?

BB: Maybe not "mentor." Let's see, I guess that's the word I've used, but some leaders or mentors over the years that really rise to the top and what it is about them that

stands out. I guess I'm looking for in that question people who really had a strong influence on shaping you in a specific way as an activist and organizer because you learned a great deal from them and admired them.

MC: Oh, I see, not necessarily anyone who's impacted me generically in that way.

BB: Although that was good too. We can keep going with that.

MC: Then it really did kind of move. Well, certainly, I have to put Joan Baez down when I think of her. It wasn't like we had a relationship, but when you think about someone who exemplified and certainly in the heyday of the folk music era, who still does its work to this day, she'll have to go down as an exemplary person. I would say her sister, Mimi Farina, who I actually did a lot more work with, I'll have to put her down. I wouldn't use the term "mentor." I don't know how to describe it. She was a pacifist. The whole family was a pacifist family, Joan, Mimi, and her sister and her mom and dad, but Mimi created this organization called Bread and Roses. It was about groups that would send performers into institutions and I remember helping her when she was first starting out getting going. We did a lot of interacting with each other in a way that we both helped each other in a way in our respective work, even though she had more of a cultural thing around pacifism and I was doing more direct stuff with WRL. But because we talked to each other a lot and kind of bounced each other's ideas off, I would have to put her down.

Then, and this is not a mentor, but I must tell you another important black couple, the only black couple that I've ever met in the peace movement, and do I remember their names? I'll have to find this out. God, what are their names? They were tax resisters, a black couple. They were really instrumental because when you're in a movement that is

so white and you look at black folk and wonder, “Why are you here? What’s your commitment?” And they were so committed to non-violence. In fact, we had a lot of conversations with each other. There was only about a handful of us, but them as a couple was so instrumental. I’ll have to get their information and sent that to you. I can’t think of their names now.

After that, I don’t think there was really any one particular person per se, Bridgette. There has just been people who have bumped into my life that certainly have--. I’ll tell you one person I wish I had met that I never did was Bayard Rustin. How is it possible that I never met this man? I’m just like, what’s the possibility of that, but I never met the gentleman and yet he has such an influence on me and will continue to. I’ve never met Audre Lorde and she’s another one who I’d put down as how is that possible that our paths never crossed. So in terms of that level of people, I think that’d be about it.

BB: In our interview in July, you mentioned that you were sixty in 2008.

MC: That’s right.

BB: And it’s also the fortieth anniversary of you working as an organizer. You mentioned something about planning an organizing tour around that. What’s the status of those plans?

MC: Well, since we talked about that, there’s been a little bit of a slight change. I still want to do—I changed it from an organizing tour to a national speaking/reunion/organizing tour because I was trying to think, “How can I go out and celebrate my years of involvement?” But it’s not just me. There were tons and tons of people and/or organizations that have come up and gone. So I was thinking of how to create, if we go to a town and say, “Well, I want to come here, but I’m going to set up a

speaking gig and I'm going to invite ten more people and these ten people are going to represent either the forty years or the span of these forty years. And we're going to talk about what have we learned and what happened and where are we going?" It would be much more exciting and dynamic than me getting up there yakking for an hour.

So I'm interested in that, and the other thing I want to try to do is this is another major piece that I've added since then because I do have a new contract job with the group called National Stonewall Democrats. It's the only national LGBT Democratic club in the country and they're prepared to do a fifty-state inclusive US territory state-by-state outreach to LGBT Democrats in terms of the 2008 elections and beyond. One of my specific tasks is to make sure we do specific outreach to LGBT of color. So one of the things I said I raised my hand up to do was to do one of the most thorough, inclusive, comprehensive inventory of every LGBT of color anything in this country. So whether that's an organization or a group or an activist, I'm going to do that in addition to creating a 2008 calendar of any and all, every single LGBT of color activity in the hopes that not only will it help with 2008, but more importantly, that will become the ground and the foundation for looking ahead to a national infrastructure network.

Because, Bridgette, in the year 2007, with the exception of any LGBT group that does any AIDS and/or cancer organizing, there's only one LGBT of color group in this country—this is criminal—and it's called the National Black Justice Coalition. With a country that's becoming more of color, not less, I am outraged, I am upset, I'm disappointed with a lot of the white LGBT groups who don't get it and/or are trying to find ways in which they try to incorporate people of color organizing rather than realizing there needs to be a wonderful partnership or collaboration because you don't have this

many people of color LGBT being ignored. To have one group, it's just like a sin. I cannot believe it and when you have funders who continue to put money into the same groups they've been putting money into over and over and over and over again rather than investing in what I perceive to be a vibrant, vital element of movement organizing that gives you the autonomy and the independence of being of color LGBT that then works with and collaborates with the white LGBT movement. If we don't get that, we are in some serious trouble.

So I think that I'm hoping that with this contract job and also by doing this kind of calendar and inventory, as someone who believes in racial bridge-building, I think we can really get in some good direction with what this could really create. I'm excited, like unbelievable, I'm so excited about it and being able to use the fortieth anniversary, 2008, as kind of a hook, if you will, only adds to the possibility. So I'm just thrilled like crazy about this. So that's what I'll be doing.

BB: Another small project you're taking on.

MC: Just a small one, but what the hell.

BB: Have you heard about the Cabinet? Caitlin Breedlove, I was just in a meeting with her and Paulina and (**track 18: 1:02**) and Manju, Tema, and Chantel at Chantel's house right before I came over here. We were talking about funding and Caitlin said, "I just learned about this." The Cabinet, I think, is these seven, white, gay men, all very wealthy, Gill Foundation, I can't even remember some of the other foundations, but they literally get together, meet, strategize, and set the agenda for national spending on funding and a big push is around civic engagement and you and I know this because of the list enhancement work that they're so brilliant about. But in terms of those questions

of power and leveraging power around that, I think that's a structure to really understand and you've got relationships with some of those folks. Maybe there's some potential to leverage. Like Caitlin was saying, "We need to know this stuff." If that's true, then there's a sphere of influence there.

MC: Now, you know, I'm wondering when she uses the term "cabinet" because I also know that what also exists out there and this is controversial within our movement, within the LGBT movement, because this whole same sex marriage continues to go, and I know that there's a national Freedom to Marry Collaborative that groups like Gill and Hoss are pumping millions of dollars into. So the question would be, and with the exception of the Black Justice Coalition, who sits on that? It is, it's all the major national organizations. I know them all, they all meet: Center for Lesbian Rights, Human Right Campaign, the Task Force, (**track 18: 2:40**). You name the national organization, they're at that table, freedom to Marry Collaborative, and they're not going to stop; they're going to continue to do it. The critical, I think—and this might be why when I was doing these calls—is whether or not there's a way in which you can still dump millions into the same sex marriage issue, but at the same time, dump millions into something else. In other words, why is this only it's this or not?

I think the challenge would have to come, in my opinion, from straight allies and from people of color. I think the only people, those two groups, to me, are the only ones who could probably grab the ear of sensibility and/or let's just rethink about this for a minute, in my opinion. The fact that you have only one group of color, I think a lot of people go, "Well, see, what else is happening?" I don't think they're realizing what I see

is that state by state, around this country, there is a huge network of color. It's massive, but it's not—what's that word?

BB: Cohesive.

MC: That's got to change, and I think Gill, by having this African-American leadership meeting they had and they're about ready to do one with the Latino/Latina community, is really getting serious. I tell you, I think it's because of Tim Sweeney. It's one thing for Tim Gill to have his millions and I can believe they're sitting around having these discussions. That's what they did when they had gays in the military. Gays in the military became an issue because a bunch of white guys got in a room, whipped out their checkbooks, and said, "We're going to make this happen because we could afford to," one of the worst mistakes I think ever made in this country, so similar with rich guys who have a lot of money. But you get someone like Tim Sweeney, who's a white gay man, who is so committed, in my opinion—he was on the Hoss Fund. He's now their new executive director—is so committed to diversity. But I think you have to find white male allies like that, that also can be in there to shake it up.

Because this agenda-setting thing, you know what really struck me as to something that showed that it was being challenged is this recent thing that happened with ENDA. Did you see how many groups? Have you been watching that, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act? I don't know if you're watching it, but one of the big things that happened, Bridgette, was the Employment Nondiscrimination Act has been out there for years. It's been something that the Human Rights Campaign has been trying to pass forever. Basically it's a federal nondiscrimination ordinance and just a little quick history. The Human Rights Campaign intentionally left out transgender because

they said if you include transgender, we'll never get it, but that was the same rationale when white women got up there in Seneca Falls and said, "We're not going to include black woman because it's going to be hard for us." Well, they made that decision, but there was such an outcry of people thinking, "How can the Human Rights Campaign, who believes in this, not include transgender?" Ultimately they changed it, not because they wanted to, because there was such an outrage, there was such a backlash, that they said, "Okay, okay, we'll include transgender."

So now they have it, right. Within the last couple of weeks, Barney Frank, the lesbian legislator—God, what's her name, from the Midwest. My mind's going. I'm trying to think of her name—and then with Nancy Pelosi, finally, the most exciting thing is that the House side is going to say that we have enough votes not only to bring this up and pass it, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, which would be historic, but you know what they said?: "You know what? You've got to take the transgender out." And Bridgette, I'm telling you, this entire country, every single group with the exception of the Human Rights Campaign, said, "You know what? If we can't include transgender, it ain't worth it. So let's just drop it." I have never seen that in my entire lifetime, to see that level of solidarity, because people said, "We're not leaving anyone else again." And Barney Frank, in all due respect: "Yeah, but this would be the first time," blah blah blah. It ain't going to go nowhere. Who's sitting in the White House? It was going to be vetoed. It ain't going to happen in the Senate. And Equality-North Carolina joined in.

I was so proud and I said, "Do you know what message this is sending to the richest organizations and the ones who think they have the power? What you're hearing from the people is, 'No, no more. Include us and be inclusive or don't bother.'" And they

went ahead and did it anyway and HRC sat there and once again, “We’re going to go ahead and support this thing?” What the fuck? So I think that was one of those, count that and remember that, because I think that will go down as one of the days in which this movement finally said, “We’ve found ourselves. Yeah, you can go ahead and it’s not going to go anywhere still because he’s going to veto it.” So that to me was one of the wonderful challenges to this idea of this, if you use this term “cabinet,” not white men, but the white groups that think they can just do whatever they want. So now you do have this issue of a lot of rich white guys, but I think what’s happening now is that sometimes you can’t buy stuff, it’s not for sale, and I think that’s the lesson that we’re learning. And they need to be challenged. If this is happening, I’m just done with this. This is ridiculous. What is that? That’s one of the most undemocratic, sexist, classist things you can do and I’m not so sure they’re being able to set the agenda even if they want to. So what did y’all decide on that? What was there after you had that meeting?

BB: The meeting was actually about SONG, doing some organizing institutes, and then the vision for the Speak Your Truth institutes with this Heirs Project. What’s the history of them both and where might they overlap and how can we just make sure we’re communicating so we’re not ever in a position of competition? We can share skills, things like that, just a solidarity movement-building kind of conversation. This was part of it when I asked how funding was for them and then we got into the conversation about just foundations and money and funding and so it came up in that way. But ask Caitlin about it more. It’s interesting. That’s a great story too. That’s really powerful.

MC: I think we still haven’t seen the reverberations of just what that meant to have that happen that way and especially around transgender because even that was just

hard even for the movement to wrap around, let alone buy. To me, this movement is just so fascinating, where we started, where we are, how far we've come, inclusion, and when you say LGBT: "I know it says transgender. Yeah, you just say that, but you don't mean it." But this probably had to be one of the most amazing examples of, "We mean it. We're serious about this." Don't bother. What's a group doing with all those millions. It has more than any other group. What the fuck is HRC doing? I'm so beyond.

And here they do this dinner down here called the HRC Carolinas Dinner. How much money does Equality-North Carolina get out of that? Not one penny, not one. I said, "Ian, why did you sign off to let them come in and do these dinners and then what do you get out of it? Nothing." That has to change, man, and whoever donates to that needs to rethink about why they keep on giving, what is it, a hundred and seventy-five to go to that dinner now, and they give these scholarships basically to poor people and people of color and now they're saying, "Why bother to go? What's the point?" And I worked there for three and a half years. What is going on? Now I'm thinking it's not so much about trying to shut the HRC down. It's coming up with wonderful options and places where people can go and take their energy and make something happen. I don't want to get negative, but it just pisses me off that people can just say, because we can afford to, we can do it. But I think they're starting to pay the price for these bad decisions. Anyway, that's me.

BB: So what was involved in establishing Mandy Carter Consulting and what services do you focus on?

MC: You know what? When I got done, I worked at SONG, let's see, 2003-2005. Around October, I couldn't do it anymore, no windows, sitting in that office for three

years. I wasn't burning out. I don't know what was going on. So I said, "Alright, I'm going to--." Then thank God, Caitlin and Paulina got hired and that was one of the brightest decisions. And I remember thinking, I thought my work at SONG was really being a placeholder. I always say that it was like SONG was going through another transition and if I could just make sure we kept the doors open and kept the phone on and got the bills paid, whatever, and that's what happened. So when Paulina and Caitlin came along, it was like, "Okay, y'all, here it is, go." And thank God for Suzanne Pharr.

I said, "I'm going to take a year off," and when I too took the year off, I thought, "When I come back to do work, I want to figure out a way to do it that I don't have to do another ten to six, like a movement job." I knew someone other friends of mine who were doing consulting and they said, "Yeah, this is a great way to do it, Mandy. You set your time, your hours. You can work out of your house, the internet, whatever." And so I said, "Okay. I'm just going to try it and what am I going to call it?" You know, I got inspired because of you, quite frankly, because I didn't want to come up with a name that was like some weird name. Everyone knows my name and I thought, well, Mandy Carter Consulting. But I think you had Bridgette Burge Consulting. I said, "Yeah, that's what I'm going to go with too."

So that's what I've done. I've only been open for last year. Money was not coming in, but I had enough gigs speaking; that really made a difference. But the profound thing was, certainly this most recent transaction with Hass Jr. was my biggest scale, where I got a hundred and twenty-five dollars an hour and then I realized, "This could really be something good." Then once you've got one job interview, you can then go out and take it out. So that's it.

BB: Congratulations. Do you have a specific area of focus?

MC: Yes, people of color, LGBT people of color particularly. I want to be a bridge-builder between of color and non, I think LGBT of color, bridge-building between white and people of color, not just gay, whatever. I'm really interested in teaching. I would love to be able to do—which is exciting about SONG—I'd like to be able to do organizer trainings, that excites me, and strategic planning. but I've been so young at it, who knows what else might come along? But those things are the four that I feel like if I were to say, "Here are the things I—" And of course, public speaking and doing that, lecturing. That's it.

BB: You probably can't remember everything we've talked about since we started this process in February, but is there anything that comes to mind that we haven't touched on, that you'd like us to talk about?

MC: Yeah, getting older.

BB: Yeah, what's that like for you, besides a little more beautiful gray—

MC: Oh, yeah, right.

BB: A little more beautiful width to your beautiful body.

MC: Well, you know one of the things I've talked about, the demographic, is that the 60s generation, I think if you look at anyone born post-World War II, so 1945 and up, 1945-1955, that ten-year span right now means, anyone born in that ten-year span, we're all turning sixty over the next ten years and so a lot of us of that generation are asking, "Where am I going to live? I don't have enough social security. Is there an idea of maybe we do more cooperative living or cohousing?" There's a lot of conversation about collectively thinking about living out our lives and also as someone who has no family,

am I interested in--? What happens when I die? I don't want to be buried in some ground, I want to be cremated, but what do I need to know to do that? It's almost like thinking of my latter number of years where the quality of life, getting older, and doing that, but doing that in a sense of community and this wonderful kind of peace and social justice backdrop and there's a lot of people who are on the same wavelength. And health care, health care is a real concern. I have none. That's ridiculous. We need to find some way that there's universal health care.

BB: Yeah, who was the civil rights activist, John, where he died and his community was sitting around, saying, "Okay, we've got to raise money to pay for his funeral"? Who was that?

MC: I can't remember. I was just talking to someone about that. I know exactly what you're talking about.

BB: Kathy Howell from NOA mentioned it.

MC: Yes, she mentioned it, exactly. How is that possible? How is that possible? But we're now at the age where this is more and more reality. She also said, even with NOA, that they're getting calls from people asking about—I guess when you join the pension plan, you can borrow so much money—"What about my burial? What about my final taking care of things?" Because there's people in that age group. What is that?

BB: Yeah, and haven't we learned---I don't mean to put it all on us. I think a culture and a society where people that can't afford the basic human right of health care is pretty wacked.

MC: It's also you can't afford to die. You can afford to be born; you can't afford to die. I also think of your children, Bridgette. I'm also thinking of like, who are the kids

coming up now, your kids, their kids, and what's going to be there for them? That's on my mind as well.

BB: Who would you interview for this Heirs collection of North Carolina social justice activists?

MC: Who would I interview? Like people you haven't done already?

BB: Yeah.

MC: Like Ed Whitfield, of course, you've already done Ed. He intrigues me.

BB: He intrigues you?

MC: Yeah, Ed's great. You know who I'd interview? Ashaki Binta. Have you ever met Ashaki? She'd be great just because I've known her and I know she's lesbian. I don't know if she self-identifies that way or not, but all her work with the Black Workers for Justice, she's just been on it. Ashaki Binta would be someone I'd be interested in. He's died, but Joe Herzenberg would have been a great one when you think of the work he did and for the role he's played. Who's out there now? I don't really know a lot of people older than me. I'm kind of sitting here thinking about who would be older than me in North Carolina political work that I would want to, that's not gay. There would have to be, I think, some of the women, some of the black women, but I'm intrigued now by the number of Latina women. The woman who was the first executive director of El Centro Hispana would be interesting.

BB: Zulayka Santiago.

MC: Yes. Something in the other way of who's around now, Dani Martinez-Moore. She intrigues me when you think about what she's been doing and her work.

BB: She used to be the associate director of Common Sense Foundation and now she's at the Justice Center working on the immigrants' rights and immigrants' advocacy. I can't remember her specific title.

MC: Is Ajamu Dillahunt already on your list? Okay, John was on your list. That's about as far as my mind can go.

BB: Last question.

MC: Oh, good. What time is it?

BB: This is exciting. Four twenty.

MC: Okay, we're going to drag bingo tonight.

BB: Nice. Where is drag bingo?

MC: Drag bingo is down at the Durham Civic Center and they've actually remodeled the entire armory and all the money goes for the, what's it called, the North Carolina AIDS—it's the infrastructure of all the AIDS groups in North Carolina. And I went for the first time. It is a hoot. Not only do you play drag bingo, but they have these entertainers and you get to eat food and it's just great and it was packed, great fundraiser.

BB: Is this once a year?

MC: They do it once a month.

BB: Once a month, that's great. Everybody has to dress in drag or--? No, it's just some of the entertainers.

MC: Yeah, no, you don't come--. What it is, drag bingo is the people who put it on and the people who perform, but also you know how someone: "B-18." You go check the cards. So a lot of drag—actually it's drag kings and queens. No, I think it's mostly drag queens. Was there a drag king in there? But they're the ones who run it. So you

don't have to come in drag, but they're the ones who run it. But it's a great fundraiser and they've been doing it for years now and like I said, the place is packed; it will be packed tonight. It's one of the biggest fundraisers I've ever seen and they get a lot of bang for the buck because what you pay for, you get so many of those little card things, but then you can earn money and then they sell food and drink and all that. Then they have people who sponsor, like Sharon Thompson's a sponsor and some other groups. It's a great effort. I think it's one of those creative things that our movement has come up with.

BB: Sharon Thompson?

MC: Yeah, Sharon Thompson Law Group. Have you heard of it? Yeah.

BB: Well, how was this process for you over this year?

MC: It was good. I think your project is a great one. I think when you think of the state of North Carolina and the folks and this concept of the Heirs, I like that, project, it's a great one. I feel humbled that I'm a part of it. I think it was a good process, having your tape recorder and asking these questions. It took us, what, five times to get it done, but that's okay. And you have some great questions. I don't know, like I'm curious if I can ask you this: when you first started out doing these interviews, like the first crop—I remember we went and I saw them down at the Hayti Center—how many of the questions you asked on that first crop are still there, how many you dropped, how many you added. I'm just curious with your own growth, not about you, but you know what I mean, and how deep you get into people to realize that there are some questions like, oh, I never would have thought of asking that, or whatever; I'm intrigued by that. I think it's a wonderful thing to have happen because I just get so worried we don't remember who

was there before, who did what before, and the legacy of don't ever forget. You can grow on it and build on it. No, I think it's great and thank you very much.

BB: Well, thank you, Mandy. I feel at a real gut and heart level that it's important work and that's it's a real privilege to do it. It's a real privilege, that first person's lessons learned that I get. So I feel like I'm receiving and learning so much in the process. You know how sometimes when you're doing something at a real instinctual, gut level, you're like, "Yeah, this is--." It's not often that I feel that sure about something.

MC: But with this, you do.

BB: It does feel right.

MC: Exactly. How long has it been now?

BB: In late 2005, I came up with the idea and then, of course, a year off, almost a whole year, with the baby. So it's a slow process, but that's okay too. You all have taught me that, that some of the most important stuff is the long-term. Go slower. We're all busy. Just take our time. But yeah, the questions have evolved some. It'll be neat to show you that process. We've got some core questions. I wanted to ask about organizing in the South. I wanted to ask about how issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, class, age, shape who we are and why, how we are as activists and organizers. What sustains and nurtures you? What shuts you down? Who've been mentors for you and why? What are some key lessons learned from different pieces of work? You can apply that to just different groups, people they've worked with, campaigns they've been involved with, so trying to draw out issues around strategies and tactics of organizing. Is organizing different than activism? And then people have asked some questions. Would there other questions you would ask? So some have been peppered on because of that.

MC: Because they would come up with, right.

BB: And I didn't ask you that, but I should.

MC: I can't think of any now.

BB: Then Russell Herman has offered some brilliant ones that I've loved a lot.

The question about body image is a newer one.

MC: Yeah, what was the genesis, what was that about?

BB: I'm not sure what his thinking was, but it really resonated with me as a really important question because so many women, and it could be generational and there are definitely differences generationally and there are also differences racially about what is considered an ideal body type—

MC: Oh, that is interesting.

BB: For women of color and white women in the United States. There's a lot to unpack around that, but a lot of women particularly have suffered a lot in their struggle with the image of their body and eating disorders and sexual abuse and survivorship.

MC: There you go, right.

BB: And those sorts of things and does that come out because, of course, all of that's part of who we are as activists and organizers. Then this question about the vision of a liberated world and the optimism/pessimism spectrum, that was also a later question that Russell offered. So it's just been you and, I think, Tema that I've had the chance to—

MC: Pose that to.

BB: Yeah, pose that to. I guess Teresa El-Amin too. So that's a long-winded, but--.

MC: I'm just curious, what there any—because I've always been intrigued with people who do either archiving or this kind of oral history. Over at UNC-Chapel Hill, they have that Southern Oral History Project and then whatever they're doing over here at Duke archiving. Was there any one time when either an answer or something out of the blue, sort of like, "Wow, where did that come from?" Have you ever when you were doing any of your interviews? I was just trying to think. I don't know if that's the right question to ask. I don't know if I'm asking it right. Like if you ask a question, I shouldn't say was there anything that really surprised or shocked you, but you know when you do these things, something just comes out of left field, like, "I never would have thought about that"? Did anything like that ever happen in terms of the work.

BB: Gosh, there are so many examples even just in the first seven or eight that I've done with you all. For example, today, I think in some ways there are things that we kind of know instinctually, but when someone frames it the way you did, for example, one of the reasons why you thought that the Raleigh anti-war, "The world says no to war" march was so effective was because people had built relationships for a long time beforehand. So there's this level of trust that's already established. So sometimes we can say it's a loose network and all that, but it's also based on pretty strong, firm relationship ties for a long time. I think that's a key organizing strategy. It sparked in my head to think, like, wow, even if we feel like a specific campaign or effort might not be so effective, to remember that there are all these things happening beneath the surface in terms of relationship-building, bridge-building, and bridge-burning that can damage the movement for the long haul, not just personal relationships. Those kinds of "aha" things or the way you all present things.

So for me, the trick is how do we offer these stories in digestible format, in public forums, so that people have the opportunity to have those moments like I have when I listen to you all in the interviews. How do we use them as a teaching tool? How do we be clever about the podcast excerpts of interviews? The new direction we're moving in is some study questions on the podcast, like readers' circles questions. At the end of a book, they have questions that help a readers' group or a book club to dig deeper. That's our next piece of work that we're fundraising for now and we've got a good work team of people who are working with some of the audio documentaries to edit some of the audio and to get those podcasts up on the website.

MC: Very good.

BB: Yeah.

MC: Very, very good, intriguing.

BB: Well, thanks so much, Mandy.

MC: One other quick thing I just realized: if you can remind me who I need to make sure I send you information about, I don't know if you do. I have to be careful about when I mentioned the two gym teachers at Mount Pleasant. We can take that out because they might be dead or alive, I don't know, but I don't want to make any assumptions about that.

BB: I'm still recording. Should I stop?

MC: No, as long as we don't reference them. But I'm going to go get my yearbook to give you the correct spelling of Armstrong, the English teacher, and James Hickey. Can I give that to you?

BB: Yeah, let's do that, yeah. And if you can think of the lesbian senator from the Midwest.

MC: I'll think of it in a second.

BB: And then the black couple's name.

[break in the conversation]

BB: I like your ribbon: "All love is divine."

MC: Where'd I get that? I can't remember.

BB: Your ribbon magnet. This is your yearbook.

MC: Yeah, and there's me.

BB: Is that you?

MC: Yeah, that's me as a cheerleader.

BB: You were a baby, Mandy.

MC: This is a kid. So here are the teachers that I was talking about in terms of who really impacted me. This is my 1966 class. I actually did it on purpose, like I knew I was going to say.

BB: What's cut out?

MC: I don't know. My original yearbook, I can't believe this, friends of mine, I had them in San Francisco and they threw them all way; I couldn't believe it. So I had to go and scrounge up the ones they still had left over and unfortunately, they had taken some pictures out. I have no idea. But here she is, Mrs. Marie Armstrong, who flunked me in Spanish. She's the reason why I'm an activist. This is one of the gym teachers. Doesn't she look like she's a lesbian? Anyway, but we can't mention her. Marie Armstrong is one of them. Oh, here she is. Eleanor Friedman was my English teacher.

She's the one who said to me at the end of my senior year, "Mandy, what are you going to do with your life?" I'll never forget that conversation as long as I live. Then James Hickey—oh, here's the other gym teacher. She looks like she's a lesbian too, Marcia Carr. I have to find James Hickey. Where is he? I don't know why he's not in here. Anyway, and that was the social studies teacher who brought the person in from the Quakers. So they were the ones that I wanted to make sure you knew, that I had their names right. But I remember them to this day. Alright, so you if can remind me, like if you send me an email and say, "Mandy, make sure to remember the out lesbian congresswoman, the black couple who are from Vermont." Was there a third thing?

BB: Well, that was it.

MC: Oh, Tammy Baldwin, that's who it is. It is Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin from Wisconsin.

BB: Okay, great. Well, you want to stop?

MC: Yeah.

BB: Wow, what an accomplishment. Thank you, Mandy.

MC: Yeah, no problem.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran, December 2007.