**U.1. Individual Biographies**

**Interview U-0602**

**Emily Gordon**

**13 March 2012**

**Field notes – 2**

**Transcript – 3**

**FIELD NOTES – EMILY GORDON**

Interviewee: Emily Gordon

Interviewer Evangeline Mee

Interview date: March 13, 2012

Location: The Looking Glass Café, Carrboro, NC

Length: 78:17

THE INTERVIEWEE. Emily Gordon has been an activist all her life. She attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she got her graduate degree in social work. During her undergraduate years she was active with the Labor Movement and worked in factories during the summer. After she finished her graduate degree, she joined SNCC and went down to Mississippi to do voter registration during the Freedom Summer of 1964. She was arrested and placed in jail multiple times during this summer. She has continued her activism throughout her life both in gay rights and HIV/AIDS activist organizations in particular. She now runs an organization called “Still Living Still Loving” for senior citizens.

THE INTERVIEWER. Evangeline Mee is an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina majoring in Dramatic Arts and Folklore (Class of 2012). This was Evangeline’s second interview with Ms. Gordon, the first in Spring 2012. This latest interview was conducted as a course requirement for a seminar in Oral History taught by Dr. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. The focus of the course was the Long Civil Rights Movement, and Evangeline’s particular research focus was on the members of SNCC and their backgrounds in activism.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview was conducted at the Looking Glass Café, a venue that Emily Gordon suggested as her favorite coffee shop and the location of our last interview. Gordon and the interview ordered water and then moved to the back room at the Café, which is quieter than the main room. For the first half of the interview, Gordon gave a life history, starting with her childhood. Around forty minutes into the interview, there was an interruption and the recorder was turned off briefly. An acquaintance of both the interviewer and the interviewee, albeit from different contexts, walked past and stopped and talked for a couple of minutes. After Gordon finished her life history, she told the interviewer she would answer any questions. Mee asked specifically about SNCC dynamics, interracial dating, and the causes of Gordon’s lifetime of activism were. Similar to the first interview, Gordon maintained the theatrical and rehearsed style of narration. Gordon also mentions several times Cassandra, a young woman who has been in her foster care for many years.

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION – EMILY GORDON**

Interviewee: Emily Gordon

Interviewer Evangeline Mee

Interview date: March 13, 2012

Location: The Looking Glass Café, Carrboro, NC

Length: 78:17

START OF INTERVIEW

EM: I guess if you could just start with where you were born and any childhood

adolescent life history that you could share? That would be great.

EG: I hope this is relevant [*laughs*].

EM: [*laughs*] No, it’s totally fine! Anything!

EG: I was born in New York City at Polly Coney Hospital which has apparently disappeared because I did try to track it down when I got of that age. I was raised primarily in New York. My mother was married at the time but she pretty much ended up being a single parent. We moved to Detroit, Michigan. I spent quite a bit of time there. A city I am *not* fond of. At all. Never was even when I was younger. She worked as a housekeeper and [*speeds up*]she had some emotional issues which is being kind. So what happened was, we moved around a lot.

Interestingly enough, I got to live in Groves Point – briefly – that was probably the most affluent thing out there at that time. Stayed there and then we transplanted ourselves to Ypsilanti, Michigan, which I really didn’t like. It was way too small-ish. But if anything, I was very adaptable to meeting new people and, you know, I did nine schools in one semester, so I had to get an early adaptation program in my head going.

And we moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan. And we stayed – usually in apartments; occasionally she did the housework thing in people’s homes, and occasionally in new houses. And when I was fifteen, she became quite ill. She got hospitalized. [*Slowing* down] And since my father |– I’d only met my father a couple of times, neither of which was very – positive, since he owed her lots of money for, um, payments. And he never did come up with it.

Sooo I ended up with a friend who was about twenty-three at the time in this rooming house. And my mother, one her way to Ypsilanti State Hospital for an extended stay. And I asked Iris, “*Hm!* Fifteen going on sixteen. I have no idea what I’m supposed to be doing with my life!” *Especially,* how am I going to keep the roof over my head because welfare will not give young people money like that! And she went to a newspaper and found a nanny position. And I moved in. It was a very chaotic period in my life at that point. And I had been increasingly unhappy with my mother and doing the teenage rebellion thing. But my rebellion wasn’t that big [*laugh*] you know. So what happened was, I ended up living in one home that was more or less for the University of Michigan. The people that I lived with had two homes adjacent to each other and they rented out rooms when all the graduations and things came. And I lived in the second one – alone – third floor. Sort of like European maid style, I think. And it wasn’t working for me at all.

EM: You’re still in high school?

EG: Yeah, my sophomore year. Of high school. Soo, um, finally the system sort of noticed that I wasn’t supposed to be out on my own *quite that young.* Fifteen turning sixteen. And I was with a friendly social worker and I said, “Where am I supposed to be living? ‘Cause I don’t particularly like this job. The woman had a blind daughter and the daughter was about three. And I had never encountered anybody blind. And she would save all the dishes… and then she’d send me on to make up the beds, which came out to be like thirty of them. And then she would send me to my little maid’s garret. I didn’t like that at all. So I went back to Iris. After I talked to the social worker, I had no idea what to do. She said there were no foster families. They didn’t want teenage females because they were afraid of pregnancy even though I was *totally* a virgin at that time. And [l*aughing*] I didn’t have any career goals at that point either. I was sort of caught between, “Should I work in Woolworth when will I get a boyfriend?” You know, that kind of thing.

Uh, Iris came through again and she found me a nice university couple, and I moved in with them. They’d had students living in the past, but they particular pity on me since I was really lost for housing.

And the other family, they could have kept me forever, it was just too isolating. I couldn’t stand it. So I moved in with the Conburgs. And she told me, she said that she and her husband both had PhD’s she’s in music he was in electrical engineering. And she said that they were raising their children, Richard and Bobby, with the goal of going to college *or else.* So if I was going to live there, I’d better keep saying, “College college college.” And I said, “Hmm..food, college, yes!” [*laughs*] “Sounds good to me!”

She got me a job at University of Michigan Hospital. She helped me save money; I worked weekends and all summers. I came home directly from high school around three, and stayed with kids. Took them out while she did piano things. And shipman trips. And the problem was, she was young. And I was young, and she was maybe thirty-four at the time. She wasn’t looking for a teenage daughter. Annnnd, I was of course looking for a stable family, since I’d never really had one.

But when I graduated from high school, I had the strangest experience: my mother succeeded in getting permission from Ypsilanti State Hospital to come visit me, so she was upstairs with an aid on each side of her even though she wasn’t prone to any outbursts or anything, and my father had come and was sitting downstairs. And of course the Conburg’s were there. And it was a very uncomfortable graduation because I didn’t want the two of them to see each other. Cause I figured that would be the worst, and I had told her where I was living, but she was [*pause*] very uncomfortable with that too. You know, she felt like she really abandoned me. And she’d done the best she could, considering she’d a long-standing schizophrenia background – which was pretty much ignored by social workers and healthcare professionals.

So, I told Mrs. Conburg, “I’m gonna love the University of Michigan now that I’m starting college.” And she said, “Well, you’re really gonna love it because I can tell you where you’re gonna live.” And I was like, “I’m not living here?! [*laughing*] But I live here!” And she was like, “No, no, no, no more. You get to go into a co-op.” Which was a blessing because I really didn’t have enough money to do the dorms. And this was a much smaller setting. And they sort of finished, [*laughs*] you know, finished me growing up on a lot of levels because you had to do chores and you had to cook and clean, and I usually cooked.

And I every summer I went with the American Friend’s service committee. They had these projects. Now the project I *wanted* was to go to Europe, but unfortunately you had to have money for that, and I had to really work. I worked in college. At Libraries and bookstores, you know, whatever I could scrape together. And I don’t remember ever having any really difficult times with money. It was a different time. I remember getting very happy one time after the first year. I was getting ready to go on a work project where they would *pay* me. And I was waiting and I looked in my jeans pocket and found twenty dollars. You would think I found three hundred at that time. I was like, “I’m rich again.”

The awkward thing was that I had no family to go home with during vacations because they closed everything. So I went home with a variety of different people from the co-op. And that was very special because I think I’d overemphasized having a solid family. You know, people were not happy. They were not happy [*laugh*] in their family relationships. And I was sort of stuck in the middle, so I got over the little self-pity thing I might have been having, you know.

She eventually got out of the hospital and was sent to live with an older man and care for him. And that worked out pretty good. I visited her a couple of times. It was *totally* traumatic.

Uh, and I basically had no social life. Nothing.I tried but I – I was in one play! I remember I got permission to do that! But it was pretty much work, eat, sleep, study, work, eat, sleep, study. Similar to what most [mic.sic]

And the first project I went on was working in the health care, and it was very weird because I had never been exposed to any type of mental retardation – even though we’re not calling it that now – and I ended up at this Indiana Village for Epileptics. At that time – and we’re talking a *long* time ago – they had, if you had a child that had a seizure, you took them to this state run facility, and gave them sort of a death pack. …………..we had group homes, sort of on campus…….Newcastle, Indiana, was to drive around and look at the freaks after church. Umm, I lived with two black girls who were form Tuskegee University, and that was an experience I’d never had either, so we were all crammed up in one room with the beds just on top of each other and whoever got the earliest shift got the, you know, would be there one that was closest to the door.

They were amazed what I was telling them about the University of Michigan. All the activities, and the concerts, and the plays. We had formal dances bath then, and their thing was like you get to go to the club, or to church [*laughs*]. Or club, church. There was nothing too much where they were. There was nothing where we were either. There was no recreational thing. The aids hated us because they had just changed the minimum wage from seventy cents an hour to a dollar. And they thought we just – you know, this was their life – and we were just coming in. I didn’t learn that much, except for about myself, that summer. It was supposed to be a learning experience but we didn’t get lectures and things.

Then, the second year, I did this thing called Industrial Education. And they sent us to Philadelphia, they signed us up – it was very easy to get approved. You signed up. You had a group home, and you had to work in factories. And this sounded very appealing to me. You know, I wanted to learn about unions. I think I was always very left-wing political, even though I didn’t totally understand all of it at that point.

And I discovered [*voice gets higher with each word*] I can’t stand factories. And the first time three of us went out, we went out and we found factories, and we went to the top floor and each of us tried – three girls – to get a job. And after the first day when we realized no one was hiring us, we decided we better – shall we say – leave out part of our life history and stop mentioning graduating – toward college – or even graduating high school? So I got a job in a sweater factory. It was *mind-numbing*. I *totally* hated it. And it was very weird because you got to stand at a machine all day long and mark move the old-fashioned men’s sweaters that had the little buttons on them? You got to mark that. And I was bored. And they had music, and they played *My Fair Lady* every fifteen minutes. You know, they’d have it *on* “On the Street Where You Lived.” Then they’d have it off so you *always* knew what time it was.

People were very alienated, but I remember thinking, “I absolutely hate this job! People do this all their lives *thank* god, I will stay in college. [*laughing*] I *do no* want to work in this particular – I do not want to have to do that!” I had waited tables. I’d worked in *health* service and *food* service, and I didn’t have a problem. Maybe because I’m sort of on the gregarious side. But that particular thing was awful, and one day, I called my boss, I said, “I was just wondering if I could do what Carol does cause Carol gets to move around with bins of clothing.” And he just looked at me and said, “*Carol?* But you’re *white*.” And I was like, “Yuah?” And he was like, “No.” And I never realized that she had sort of a low-level janitor job, and here I thought she had the perfect job for that particular setting because you got to move around and talk to people instead of just listening to *really bad* music.

So, that summer, I – oh, we got another machine! The only thing that made palatable, was you got to do some things by hand. So I walked in one day, after being there about a month, and he said, “Ohemily, I’m so glad you’re here! We bought another machine just for you!” And I was horrified. And I quit right on the spot.[*laughter*] And then when I went back to the co-op – and at that point it was good because we had union people coming in to give us lectures and we were trying to get a flavor for industrial relations and moods and things along that line. The director of the program said, “Really, you quit, huh? So where are you gonna work because you have to bring in money that’s how it goes.” So I got the newspapers out. And I saw an add for door to door sort of sales people [14:24 goes into story about selling cemetery plots]. ….it was like developing leads for funeral companies…nobody goes door to door at this point…knock on doors for this phony survey…”Do you own cemetery property?”…So, this was good for about two weeks….It’s an amazing amount of people who own cemetery property…I was interviewing this woman in her home…and all of a sudden he rolls up and he says, “I know who you areee.”…”You’re trying to sell my mother a plot!”….

I left that job, and my final job before I went back to school – I was very happy to go back to school at that point. You know, it was a *long* summer. And I kept thinking, “*All* the people I want to be with are in Europe!” The way they structured it with Friend’s Committee was really nice. You had to get money to get over there, and then you’d maybe spend a month building a home or school or something, and then you’d spend two months going all around Europe staying for free at people’s houses. So that was just my ideal thing. But that didn’t work because you came home with no money, and I had to have money to start school again.

So I got a job in Campbell’s Soup factory. And it was located in Jersey. And really realized – I mean, I could have been a union organizer as long as I didn’t have to work in the factory. I would have been a really good union organizer, but not for that! I got hired easily. I had to go to Philadelphia to get a bus to go over to Jersey. I had the early shift which meant I had to be there at six which meant I was on the streets at 4:30 which was *very* dangerous. And I remember they had cobblestone streets in the downtown area. Cars would drive up over the cobblestones, “Heeey!” You know, that’s a dangerous time of night. 4:30, 5:30 when everybody is *really* drunk. So I would hop in a phone booth. Thank god they had them then. And I would – didn’t even have a dime – I would try to call a policeman or something because I was nervous.

So my first day went something like this. There’s this *huge* line, and I worked in the tomatoes. And way at the end of the line that was over by the windows, there’d be people with knives on both sides of the conveyer belt cutting up tomatoes. Then about three-quarters of the way through it, the really bad tomatoes came down to the new people. And I’m talking there was a juice thing and a soup thing. And you never threw anything away. And that meant there was a lot of white spots and a couple of worms. And the people opposite me were bored and they would eat some of the tomatoes and I was practically gagging [*laughing*] I was like, “I *really* don’t want to do this.” But more than anything else, I was throwing my tomatoes on the floor because why would you put them in something that’s going to be served on people’s tables? I never – I will never – I don’t drink tomato juice or tomato soup after that experience.

I asked them specifically, could I have the second shift, so I wouldn’t be on the streets, I’d rather be on the streets like 12 o’clock as opposed to four thirty in the morning. It was safer. And they did it one time, but then the next time, they wouldn’t do it. And I had maybe a week left, and I just couldn’t take it anymore. So, I thought I was going to be fired. I was the slowest thing in the world. I mean, we didn’t even have rubber gloves, we just had our little pairing knives. And these two things were you disposed of the tomatoes. And they would just walk up and down the aisles and tap people on the shoulders, and I was like, “Tap me! Please, tap me!” [*laughter*] For some reason they didn’t tap me – probably because they knew the deal I wasn’t going to be there very long anyways. It was a rushed thing.

So, one day I came in, I just couldn’t do it anymore. And we took a break, and I told this woman, I said, “I wanna quit!” and she said, “*Quit?* This good paying job? Why would anybody quite?” I said, “I just have to quit I cant be on the streets I’m gonna get raped I’ve never been raped I don’t wanna be raped this is a *bad* idea.” And she said, “well. You have to go to the supervisor.” So, I came back from my fifteen minute break, and I said, “Hi, Mr. So-and-so! I need to quit!” “*Quit? Nobody quits. You can’t quit.”* [*laughs*] “Oh my god! They didn’t tell me about this! [*laughing*] When they gave me the white outfit!” I was horrified! So what happened was, I just sort of wandered away and I started to cry! [*laughing*] and I was just stumbling along and I made it past the lentil soup and over by the barley soup and finally this woman who’d been there a while said, “Honey, what is *wrong* with you?” She said, “Are you *pregnant?”* “Oh, no no no no.” Not that I wasn’t trying to get away right about then but it wasn’t working out because we didn’t have any privacy in this cooperative house that we lived in. Everybody had the same idea. So what happened was [*crying voice*], “I just wanna quit!!” and then she said, “Oh, so simple. Continue down this path, turn right at the pea soup, go up three more flights” [*laughing*] I couldn’t make this up! “And then turn left at the vegetable soup, and then you’ll find the elevator to personal. And go down to personnel.” Because literally, you felt like a little rat in a maze, and I knew how I was supposed to get to where I was supposed to be but I hadn’t paid any attention to personnel. Because the whole thing was totally traumatic. It’s probably the crappiest job I’d had, and I’ve had some weird jobs. But what happened was, I got down to personnel, and I was still crying [laughing] and the guy was like – I was twenty what can I say? I thought I was trapped forever in Campbell’s, and I had a vision of never seeing a paycheck! And I hadn’t had any at that point; I was in my third week. So I went in there, and she said, “oh, really, he told you that?” I said [*mock crying*], “why would he tell me that? I hate it here!” [*laughing*] I couldn’t say I wanted to go home to my mommy because she was still in the hospital! “I wanna go hooome!” I had a thing for a guy named Bob. I said, “Just get me to Bob! their Everything will be good!”

So what happened was, he said that the supervisors could fire as many people as they wanted to at anytime. And they were just *happily* playing authoritarian creepy people and firing people everyday, but if someone tried to quit it made then look bad and it went against their personality. I said, “Well I want him to look bad. I really do because this is hell.”

So I came back to college. At that point, I said, “Social life be darned. I want to stay in college because I *do not* - I’d worked in donut shops, I’d worked in hospitals, I’d done some healthcare things – but that particular “learn about the labor project” was *just* not for me.

So that didn’t work out because I got involved in a relationship. He was a year ahead of me, and we met over the summer. And he was like, “I love my new job. It’s a shame I’ll never see you again.” He was in Texas of all places. And we met halfway in between, you know. And he said, “here’s the deal, we can get married now.” I said [*mock whining*], “I got another year!” And he’s like, “yeah, well? I’ve never asked anybody to marry me and I doubt I’ll ever ask anybody again.”

And at that point it was a big deal. And I had actually been asked to get married a few months before that by this *really* sweet Jewish guy. And Bernie just wanted sex, I mean that’s why that came out; Jerry already had sex. But Bernie was like, I said, ‘Honey, your family is orthodox. I lived with a Jewish family for three years, they don’t want a [mic.sic]” He said, “Oh, but I’ve got it all worked out. We’ll get married, you’ll have a baby, and then we’ll go home to my parents and they’ll be so happy.” I said, “Nooo, no babies, nooo!!” [*laughing*] So that was, everybody where I was living though, “Oh, my god! My god, she got asked to get married!”

My roommate was the campus whore at that point, and she was so far from ever – you kow- getting a proposal from anything other than “spread your legs and shit up while I puke on you.” That was the level she was operating on. And I had to go home with her family which was Catholic and I’d already taken her to have an abortion which was her third. And so it was kind of weird. I could do this for women’s studies too.

Anyway, so I panicked out and decided maybe I’d do better marring Jerry. Got married. Went to Texas. Hated it. Hated married life. He had been the folk song playing, good fellow well met person. He worked at IBM, no actually he worked at Douglas Aircraft first job. And I had to a year of trying to become a resident, then I started college at UCLA. We moved from Texas. I couldn’t *stand* Texas. So we moved over to Los Angeles. And I started making friends, and strangely enough, most of my friends were exceptionally left wing, and they had a peace group there, and it was like “stop the nuclear proliferation.” Forget what it was at this point. But one day I was on campus and someone said, “Oh, Emily, we’re gonna go demonstrate. Get in the car!” I said, “Great!” And we’re pulling up to Douglas Aircraft, and I’m in panic mode! And I said, “Oh my god, oh my god, I’m really killing this marriage very fast.”

And so we were outside the gate and we were demonstrating, and I ran back home and I cooked a decent meal, and I said, “How was work today, Honey?” and he said, “Oh, the communists came!” [*laughter*] and it was *so* funny! “And they were outside, but they took all of the engineers and they took us into an auditorium and they showed us what the communists did in San Francisco!” And I said, “You saw a movie?” and he said, “Yes!” I said, “Did it involve a long stairwell with cops dragging people down after they’d hosed them and bloodied their heads?” “Yeah! When did you see that movie!” And I was like, “Okaay.”

So in effort to try to make the marriage work, which should never had even been *attempted.* On my part. He made friends, of sorts, and he wants to go to this couples house and play endless monopoly and card games. It’s funny, everything’s coming back around again. What happened was, he said, “You seem to be political. I don’t remember you being political in Michigan.” I said, “That’s because I was working all the time. I was lucky if I had time for you and school! I have *always* been left wing political. Did you not remember Philadelphia?”

So what happened was, he said “There’s this political group that’s starting with Douglas Aircraft. My friends Rob and Mary are going to go.” And I said, “Oh, ok.” And I said, “Well, what’s the name of it?” And he said, “Oh, I don’t know! It’s next Thursday. Just be prepared for six o’clock. We’ll go over to somebody else’s house and we’ll talk politics.” And I was like, “okay.”

I’m getting dressed. And I kept saying, “Jerry. What is the name of the group.” He said, “Oh, you are such a pest. Let me call and find out. It’s the Birch Society, honey!” [*laughs*] and I said, “I’m not going!” [*laughing*] And he said, “Why? They’ll be very offended!” I said, “You don’t want to know why!” [*laughter*].

And it was weird because what happened was he had a high security clearance and the ACLU had already had a case where this guy had been married to a woman, and, after she was divorced, prior to the divorce she had gone to some kind of event and she had signed her name, and then they were divorced. But he was an engineer and he had this high security clearance, and there was power politics going on, so someone found this out and tried to get him to loose his security clearance, thus loosing most of his income. And I kept thinking, “Oh, god, this is going to happen to Jerry. This is so bad. This is so bad.”

So, I ended up graduating with great difficulty because I had to take *way* too many classes. And I really really didn’t want to—I didn’t identify with anything on campus. I just didn’t. And then I had my wild and crazy friends. And stuff like that, but I didn’t really *identify* with anyone. Oh, and we had a party one time and it was a nightmare – an absolute *nightmare.*

He had a few single friends, and I had almost all single friends [goes into description of party] ….so we had this party, and I was going to be the hostess…. “So, which one are you taking?”….”They’re scum.” …Then there were the married couples…and poor Jerry…it was too early to serve food…and so he said, “I’m working on this car.”….”We’ll all look at the car, Jerry.”…”If you touch me one more time, you will draw back a nub.” And he’s like, “What’s a nub?”…it was so bad.

That marriage did not last. We subsequently got divorced and it was *very* painful. Because back then you had to prove—you couldn’t just say, “We had a [mic.sic]” You had to prove that there was a reason. So, I don’t know how the first trial went, but I know we didn’t get approved for the divorce. So the second trial, I had this black friend named Clarissa. And she was just amazing, and she had this toddler. And I said, “Clarissa, will you just come and testify. You’ve seen us together. I mean, this is not working. His life is miserable; mine is miserable. We’ve got to move on.” And it was only—I think we’d been married that point four years, but it just wasn’t working. And she said, “Okay. I’ll do it.” And the day of the trial, she calls me and she says, “My baby just flushed my wedding ring down the toilet.” I was like, “Oh, god, so I ran in there and I told Jerry it’s off again.” He like, “[deep inhale].” So, the judge comes out, then he goes in the chambers, because he’s tired.

So the third time, I said, “Clarissa, we’ve got to make this work. We’ve just got to make it work.” She had a white husband, but nobody knew that. Okay. So she goes there, and I said—I mean, I lied like rug—I suspected he was unfaithful. Unfortunately, nobody wanted him. I would have been much happier if he had been unfaithful. But what happened was, she got up there and she said, “Oh, your Honor, I feel so sorry for my friend Emily. Because one time we had a party and he was just all over me.” And the guy had no idea that she had a white husband, and Jerry was like, “What the *hell’s* going on!” [*laughs*] Because she happened to be black and this was a racially weird time. The judge was like, “GRANTED! How *dare* he disrespect white womanhood!” You know, it was really that was his mindset.

So I had several relationships. None of which were great. I had several jobs. One of which was very weird because history sort of evolves again. They had the Birch Society at that time. I worked at the YWCA, which unfortunately had to share with the YMCA. [mic.sic] Okay. Santa Monica, California. I actually enjoyed the hell out of that job. So we decided—our director was way more progressive than the director of the YMCA was. They had the fireman and the policeman coming in and training and swimming and crap. She said she wanted to do a series of political lectures. One each month: Socialism—all you ever wanted to know about Socialism—and then the second one was Communism, and all you ever wanted to know about it, and the third one was Capitalism. Okay. Made sense to me: it was the right time, there was a lot of upheaval going on, civil rights was *sort of* starting. I was in therapy. I really wanted to go to the beginning of the Civil Rights thing. But my therapist wasn’t going with that program.

What happened was, the first one the Socialism one, it was attended but it wasn’t creepy. You could tell that people were resistant, but they weren’t creepy. The second one, the Communism one, oh my god! *All* of the Birch Society people came, and there were *lines* out down the block. And our secretary just come back from World War II and Nazi Germany and things and Helga took one look and she started to cry, and she went into the bathroom and she said, “It’s happening all over again. Those people that are lined up could have guns. They’re probably gonna hurt us. Just like storm troopers did. Just like everything else.” We had no idea what to do. We tried calling the police, but the police said, “As long as they don’t try to destroy the building, we’re happy. It’s pretty stupid that you would even do that anyway.” We said, “It was educational! The next one was Capitalism!” “You should have stayed with Capitalism, ladies.”

So they had stickers, and they put stickers up all over the building, which was “Kill the Communist.” And fun things like that. You know, it’s funny, the right wing thing is just sort of here, there, and everywhere. Nothing awful happened, but I decided thanks to a very creepy relationship and thanks to the fact that I realized I wasn’t going to be social worker with a bachelors because the jobs that were available to me were awful.

And I had one job with welfare. I had left the Y, when I graduated I put my name on a civil service list. I was going to be a social worker for the welfare department, what did I know? So I left the Y, and I got called because I scored high. That was my big thing. And I got a job and I had a six-month probationary period. Back then it was just insane. You have this huge office, and you had to see everybody that came in. If you got anyone new. Fridays and Mondays were the hell days. Because all the drama from the weekend came in trying to get money to have money on the weekends. Fridays was the issue. So I drew a Monday and I was given a huge book this big. And we got payed monthly which was insane. So I spent my whole month reading the book and trying not to starve while Jerry said, “Money money money money!” And he---[interruption]

EG: Ok, so what was the last thing we were talking about?

EM: You were still in UCLA, but you wanted to go back to school.

EG: Yeah, so I went back to graduate school in social work.

EM: Back to Michigan?

EG: Yeah. So at the end of the divorce and a couple of failed relationships—oh, I was at the welfare office. The bus fare at that time was fifteen cents. So if a family came in, and they needed bus fare to go to another bureaucratic organization, the social worker’s job was to enter this cavernous room and go to your supervisor and fill out this fifteen cents petty cash thing and then go across the room and get your fifteen cents. I guess I was always a little rebellious. Because that just seemed like the most gigantic waste of time ever. So I would fill them all out for a dollar. It never occurred to me—I was so not bureaucracy oriented—there is actually someone who added up all of those. So after about three months, I jump into my office and sit at my desk and it says, “Archer - $5.65,” “Baker - $6.75,” “Gordon - $60.00!” And that’s when they brought me in and put me on warning. I was like, “The man gave it to me. I didn’t know I wasn’t supposed to!” I mean, I had families with two or three kids that had been there all day, and I had a fantasy that might at least be able to buy them a hotdog. It was really bad.

So that was a definite mark against me. I had a lady whose husband had died of a tracheotomy and of cancer. And she had also had cancer and she had a trach, and she was about sixty-five and she lived in this crappy rooming house with her dog. And her budget would have been five dollars a week. But in order for her to have that budget, I had to detail every penny that came in, so she said, “if it wasn’t for my landlord, I wouldn’t be able to feed the dog. He buys my dog food.” And I said, “That’s really sweet.” Cause that was the last living thing she had, and she was definitely sort of scheduled to die. Then there was something else—oh! She had a neighbor who bought her cigarettes. There’s a plan. Now by rules, I was supposed to document all of that. I couldn’t bring myself to document it. “No problem.” I was out sick one day and she had to have the surprise surprise and ambulance, so that had to send out another worker because they didn’t have Medicaid. You had to approve each little thing. So they sent out this other worker and the worker met the landlord and he was coming up with cans of dog food, and she realized that the woman was really going to the hospital, and she didn’t die that day but it was pretty serious. And then the neighbor came and she said, “I guess she doesn’t need these cigarettes.”

So the worker that was experienced came back and told my supervisor, “That one is lying to the Los Angeles County Welfare Department!” And my boss said, “Your six months are up. You’re going to quit or be fired.” I was like, “What’s the difference?” Cause I knew it was over. And she said, “Well, if you quit you won’t have as bad of reference.” And I said, “I quit.”

That’s when I decided I should go back to graduate school because I wasn’t meant to do that. So I went back to the University of Michigan. Got into group work, and I worked in sort of a ghetto school. Opening a program to people in the evening because that was the only thing they could come to. So we had classes for adults in the evening and stuff. And then another time I ended with some psychiatric thing where I was doing group work. And all in all I was loving graduate school, but I was getting more into civil rights at that time. So I was sort of blending and drifting..

EM: So what was the cause of that?

EG: Well, on campus there were a lot of disruptions. We ended picketing one of my professor’s apartment buildings because it was all white. And so I’m out there, you know, “Equality for everybody!” and she looked down, and she said, “Ms. Gordon!” I was like, “Oh, hi, Professor So-and-so!” it was really awkward.

Then Dr. Rosenberg, he didn’t like my thesis. By that time I had already decided I was going to join in ’64. I was going to join the Civil Rights Movement. So I went and I said, “What did you think about the thesis?” and he said—and I knew he was going to say I had to stay that summer and rewrite it because it was bad. It really was.

EM: What was it about?

EG: It was about decisions teenage girls made regarding terminating pregnancy, but I didn’t do it the way it should have been done. I just threw it together. And so, my statistics were bad. Everything was bad. It wasn’t a big deal. Because my mind was already somewhere else.

So he said, “It was a good first draft, Ms. Gordon. However, we’re getting rid of the thesis requirement for next year.” So I inched through. That stupid thing is sitting up—it’s probably burned now—it was at the University of Michigan with all the other theses. It’s funny as hell.

So then I transitioned into civil rights and did my thing, and you’ve got all of that information. And then after that, I’ve been nothing but an activist the rest of my life. Probably one of the best experiences I’ve had as an activist was not Wounded Knee, but it was a very interesting period there.

I actually succeeded in getting married and ending up in Wounded Knee. I also, when I was in New York, I got involved with Act-Up AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. And it was kind of fun because I had clients that were dying of HIV and AIDS. And the focus had been on gay men so there was practically nothing for women and especially nothing for women and children. Which prompted me to start my own organization called Just Kids Foundations. Because their was a lot of discrimination going on against children with HIV. So I was very proud of that but more than anything else, I joined because they were the only way of getting AIDS information.

I went to a “Social workers get to get educated on AIDS.” They had a conference so wanted to make sure I would go. And we’re sitting there with all the nurses and the doctors and this great big thing. And we’re not getting any information. I mean, we’re really not. It’s just talking head time. And then this guy from prison got up there, and he had a question and answer thing. And they said, “Well, considering that we know how it’s transmitted—it is transmitted sexually—does the prison supply condoms?” “Never! They are weapons! They can fill them with sand and hurt each other!” I was like, “Well terminal illness is kind of hurting too when you think about it.”

So at the very end of that this gay guy, Griffin Gold my buddy, got up and he had a nice, little Levi outfit, and he was very flamboyant. And he said, “My name is Griffin Gold and I have formed a People with AIDS Coalition. It’s a self-advocacy group. And this group is dedicated to keeping everybody alive.” And it was such a breath of fresh air that I lept down there and I said, “Griff, how do you I learn more about this because I’m not getting it professionally.” And he told me where they were located which was in the Village. And I had been friends with this guy who was an attorney who was openly gay. And we sort of scooted around “are you positive” because it was sort of a freaky thing, but I figured if anybody would get it it would probably be Michael because he’d done peers and he’d done a little bit of everything. So he had it, and a friend of his, Dennis, was in the hospital dying, so I wanted to go visit Dennis with him because I wanted to learn more and he said that Dennis was very unhappy because Dennis was like the Sugar Daddy, and he just came out. So that didn’t happen, but Dennis died.

Michael was working at this law firm, and we were keeping up the friendship, and I told him, I said, “you really need to meet Griffin because it’s like about saving lives.” Because there’s nothing. I mean, AZT was almost impossible to get and that was killing people when they did get it. So I started going to all these meetings and learning as much as I could and demonstrating my ass off because I was increasingly coming up on more and more women and children who were positive. And what they did with the mothers was the mother would frequently get diagnosed through the child, and then the mother would be told, “You’ve murdered your baby, and you baby won’t live past two years, so have a good life.” There were no drug trials for kids, it was just really bad. Parents that had kids that didn’t know understand informed consent didn’t know that some of them were being given placebos when they gave them—there was a therapy called IBIG. Some of them were given needles every month or so, and they didn’t understand what informed consent was and they were in panic mode.

So I got deeply involved in Act-Up, and it was funny because I was straight, and I was definitely older than most of the people that went there. There were some lesbians there, but I had really not known to much of that culture. I was very comfortable with gay guys surprise surprise, but I really didn’t know too much about lesbian culture. I didn’t know about lipstick lesbians. My friend Maxine was more or less the same age and was in a relationship with a woman that was much younger, and I came early to a meeting and she was crying, and she was like, “Emily! You’ve never been hurt till you’ve been hurt by a woman!” I was like, “This is not a good advertisement for a lifestyle! I’ve been hurt by a lot of guys. And I’ve hurt a few.” But it was weird.

They invited me to Saturday morning lunches, and for some reason, my own ridiculous prejudices came out, and I would never go, and by then Michael and I were staying together because he’d lost his housing and he was very close to losing his job, and he kept saying, “Go!” And I was like, “I don’t want to go! I don’t think I have those feelings!” And he’s like, “Go, already, go!” I really thought it was a Saturday morning orgy. It really was just a breakfast, I subsequently found out.

I met a younger girl, Juny, who had come out when she was about nineteen. And she met gay guys and she said, “I’m pretty sure that I’m a dyke but I don’t know how to accomplish this so who do you guys know?” And they said, “Not too many people.” But I was living right in the Village at that point, you know, and we have the memories of Stonewall and things, and it was so funny. So finally, she met an older woman, and they stayed together forever and the adopted children together, and they had a pretty good life. But literally, by the time she was nineteen, she was committed to being a lesbian.

EM: What city were you living in at this time?

EG: In New York.

EM: And you said near the Village.

EG: Yeah, near Waverly place. It was off of 7th Avenue. It was between 12th and 13th. It was a great apartment. It was a block from the gay and lesbian center were we had all of our meetings and things. But what Act-Up did is, they didn’t just demonstrate. I mean we went to lots of international AIDS conferences and tings. They didn’t just demonstrate. What they also did was they allowed me to bring in some parents, and I had one guy who had lost his wife and the whole family infected. I had two families where everybody was infected. And it was really—Roger had just lost Maglina, and then he had Jeffrey, his son.

So I got very involved, and they gave me funds to take people to conferences and educate them. And it was really about self-empowerment. And it was great. It was really a good period. But no one told me that when I started—I was working full time for the health department at the same time—no one told me that when you start a non-profit, it is exceptionally hard to get funding. I missed that memo. So one person gave us $10,000. Each year she chose somebody and she gave it to us. And the group started bickering because these were people that—it was a very interesting group of people. Not everybody had had a substance abuse history. Some people had, some people didn’t. I had age range from twenty-three to forty-eight. Grandparents and people like that. But that little bit of money almost tore up the organization. We did however continue to meet once a month. We gave parties for the kids. We had a newsletter. That was a good period in my life, and I was asked in a job search group, you know, you have to start out strong. Because everybody was like, “I used to work for IBM. It was such fun. I was there twenty years.” I sat in so many of these meetings, I’m thinking about doing a job search class at the Seymour Center if I get them to pay me for it.

What happened was, I started off maybe a month ago, “Hi, my name is Emily Gordon and I save lives.” And the whole group would go, “Ah, at last.” And the people that are HR people that are cooperating with this guy that’s a career coach, they were like, “Hallelujah!” So that’s all I can think to say because it’s been a long interview but if you have questions feel free. It’s funny, this could blend into a women’s studies paper.

EM: Yeah, it really is amazing. I am so interested that you have such a history

and it’s still continuing. This might seem like a—

EG: I tried Occupy. I really did. I brought Cassandra to Occupy. I really tried.

It wasn’t working. It’s disappearing as we speak.

EM: Yeah. I mean what was the impetus—you said you were always kind of

left-wing. What do you feel like was the impetus for activism?

EG: Well that’s a very hard question. I think the fact that I was poor. You know, I was poor, and we moved a lot. I somehow—and I don’t know. When I was in high school, they made us memorize whatever we wanted to for a poem, and I don’t even remember the author, but I remember it was one of those weird things with “With fingers weary and worn, With eyelids heavy and red, A woman sat in unwomanly rags, Plying her needle and thread – Stitch! Stitch! Stitch! Would that its tone could reach the rich!” And I went, “That’s my poem!” I don’t even remember the rest of it.

I don’t know, there was something that—it was very hard to pinpoint, you know, but that poem spoke to me when I was still with my mother at that point. But I’ve always, always been an activist. And that’s what’s so weird now, because they have these older women, and I’m definitely in that category. They have the Raging Grannies. And when I came down here not knowing a soul, I ended up meeting them, and they said, “Oh, you’ve got to join the Raging Grannies!” I had just come from Act-Up. I had been to D.C. a million zillion times. I did not want to be a Raging Granny because a. I’m not a granny and b. I’m not even good at satire and making up lyrics and songs. And I was like, “if you change the name, I’ll consider it, but in the mean time, I”-- There was a thing that came down to campus in 2001, campaigned on the cycle of violence and against the wars. I joined that.

I’ve always been involved, and that’s why Cassandra saw a complete personality change when Occupy started. When it just ground into something. It’s just—I mean like—read a book. Get a life. Because they really think they’re reinventing the wheel. And that’s unfortunate. I mean, if I had been in New York, I would have been settled down at that point because I would have found my folks. In fact, there’s a lot of people that I worked with in Act-Up that are still alive which is nice. And I have kids that I worked with that have graduated college and gotten married. And these were kids that were told by doctors, “You’re not going to make it past age two.” It was really heavy.

But I do not know—there wasn’t one defining thing. I think it did have something to do with not having a totally structured family thing and being poor. I just felt like I was on my own early on.

EM: And do you that’s why you chose to do social work for your masters?

EG: Probably. Because my mother had been dragged back and forth through agencies with, I mean, let’s try it like this: when I was nine, I had an acute appendicitis attack playing in front of the house. And next thing I know, I had keeled over, and then I woke up in the hospital. And there was Mommy saying, “Oh, you need to have the operation tomorrow, but not to worry because I’ll be back in the morning when you come out of the anesthetic.” I was like, “Waaaa.” So I had my operation, and I had a kindly doctor because I was child. And I told the kindly doctor, “My mother needs help. My mother is crazy. She is one of those d words.” And he was like, “What are you talking about, little girl?” Delusional. She really was. And what happened was, he said, “Okay, okay.” Then he turned right around and told her what I said.

So considering the fact that I had stitched when I came home, she was harboring all this anger because, on a lot of levels, she had done everything she could to keep a roof over her head. She wasn’t working with a complete functioning brain at all. Everyone once in a while, she would self-medicate with alcohol, but for the most part, she didn’t take any psychanthropics, she didn’t take drugs. We just kept moving, and she kept losing jobs and wondering why.

But what happened was I had seen social work at its worst. Like having this really nice girl saying, “I have no idea where you going to live. Good luck with that! Try not to get pregnant!” I was like, “We’re not talking pregnancy. We’re talking room!” But I wanted to do it not on the traditional social work thing. Traditional social work thing in New York was, “Oh, I want to go into social work, and I’m a little neurotic, and I want to have my private practice. I want to talk to other people who are just like me and they’re just as neurotic.” And I was like, “no, I want to work with groups, and I want to work with substance abuse, and I want to work with pregnant, parenting adolescents and tings like that.” I don’t think there was one factor, but it probably was a life thing.

EM: You knew the system.

EG: Interestingly enough, Cassandra came from a really crappy home situation. Really really bad. I’ve been role modeling for about six years now, but she’s political, and she could be very good, but she hasn’t really found the right venue. But on the other hand, she counsels people, and a lot of people are telling her among her friends, “You really should –forget being a police officer—you should be go into counseling.” And she’d probably be good, you know, strong black female. Knows all the games.

EM: How old is she?

EG: She’s turning twenty-two. That’s why I was joking with John, she may never move out. It’s hard. What else?

EM: Um, well, I guess, kind of more specifically about your time in Mississippi, when you made the decision to go down, what were—I mean you said there was activism happening on your campus, so did you participate in that and think the next thing was to go down to Mississippi?

EG: I had been thinking about it for two years prior to even going for the master’s. But I was coming out of a creepy divorce thing, and I was in therapy, and I said, “Maybe I should do this!” and he’s like, “Oh, you want to be the white savior and go down and help the black people?” and I was like, “..No.” And he sort of brought me up to, you know, but he didn’t understand the movement either. I mean, the movement really was activism. I had that germinating for two years, but then everything especially the second year of graduate school was more and more things happening on campus. It was just the right time and the right place. Kennedy things, we had a Day of Pigs, everything was just sort of coming together.

I wanted to work but I’d already worked, and that was the difference. They took people right from the bachelors. I had worked in between. Maybe about three four years, but enough to be grounded. And I was like, “Been there did that.” Wasn’t all that great. I mean, a paycheck is a paycheck is a paycheck. When I finished, I went back to New York and did the War on Poverty thing, and I did some things there, but I was also in a relationship and moved around a lot and stuff like that.

But I don’t know. It just seemed the logical thing to do. Bob Moses put out the call. “Send us the white college students.” Maybe if they can keep us from getting killed. And everybody had to have $500 which was a big sum of money at that time.

EM: For bail.

EG: Yeah, you had to have contacts to get you out of jail, and at that point, I was going out with this guy, black guy, who was coming out of a bad divorce. And was a folk singer, and so Joe and I—he’d sing songs, and I’d collect money and stuff, but it just seemed like the exact thing I should be doing when I graduated: group work and community organizations.

EM: It was a no brainer.

EG: It wasn’t therapeutic social work.

EM: Could you talk a little but about how interracial dating was accepted at the time. What that was like?

EG: Uh, it wasn’t that well recepted. We almost got killed, and I also had black husband, and even then it wasn’t accepted. This is after the master’s and all that. But at that time in ’64 in Ann Arbor Michigan, there were very few couples that were visible. I mean, Joe was older, so we were visible, and he’d had a white wife.

It was a different thing. But we did do some things with upstate New York, and we went to a coffee shop after we did a concert. He sang; I collected money. I mean, I was not a singer. But there was a lot of tension and a car followed us, and I thought for sure we were going to die, but strangely enough we didn’t. They got bored. And they didn’t say like, “nigger,” or anything like that, they just: “Oh, my god, her? Must be the goddamn university folk.” You know, it was one of those. But we noticed that we left and they left, and they were right behind us for maybe about fifty miles. It wasn’t good.

And it was so funny, I think I may have mentioned when I was down South: prejudice goes both ways. There was a lot of problems with the black community accepting any kind of interracial dating because black women were shat over yet again. You know, it was weird.

And I had been with this one guy, John Arthur Handy, for five years. And after him, what happened was, I was out in California teaching, and after him, what happened is, I took a job in Veteran’s Hospital, and I met a Vietnam veteran, Lanny. And I think, I sort of had in the back of my mind, I’d been really into black culture for a long time now, maybe I should try marrying, and so. But more than anything else, I married Lanny because we were in Auburn, Alabama, at the time. Auburn, Alabama? I mean, it was a college town but it wasn’t that great a college town. And I just had that feeling that if we continued that relationship there—he was in school I was working. If we continued that relationship there, something bad was going to happen. It was going to be Jack Johnson revisited. So he wanted to get married; he’d never been married; to him it made sense. You know, “I came back from the military. I sort of half way survived that. Let’s get married.” And it was funny because his mother had had a stay at their house with her second husband and two and a half brothers, and I was very uncomfortable thinking “this is not going to work for surely at all, so let’s go back home. We don’t want to; we can leave George and go back to Alabama.” And he’s like, “Oh, no no no, it’s no problem whatsoever.” And he’s like, “Are you really sure?” You know, “You really sure?” Because he’s got the little boys in the house, and her second husband was military, and I was just uncomfortable with that.

The minute he said that he wanted to get married, the whole thing between her and I changed. I could be the white girlfriend; I sure as hell couldn’t be the white wife. And he was not John, and that was part of what the problem was. John was able to stand up to anybody at anytime. Lanny and I ended up in Florida, and it got tense in a restaurant, and I really felt like, he didn’t want to fight, but he was stuck with me. It was very awkward.

EM: What was John’s last name?

EG: [mic.sic] And, you know, it was funny because my best friend. Oh, god! Jesus. Fifty years? Ah! Linda lives in Selma, Alabama. Now, I had visited her in New York, and I always wanted to go back to Mississippi, and see it not lying down in the back of a car. Because a lot of cities I never really saw.

What happened was, when I visited her in Selma, two things have happened: the white community has moved further out, so she and her husband, black, were about to get a nice house. And she works in a little health clinic and has for some time. He is ex-military and he does a variety of things, but, you know, their ok. And—third husband actually—what happened was, there’s a lot of interracial dating there, and there’s a lot of interracial dating here. It’s almost like, this is what the civil rights produced? Mixed babies and interracial dating, and we think we’re doing something.

And one of Cassandra’s friends, Holly, you know, will go into exquisite detail about, “I will never ever date anybody but a black guy.” And Cassandra’s like, “Yeah, but they kind of hurt you don’t they, honey, because look at the last one. You were in depression for a week when you broke up.” “Only black guys.” So Cassandra and Holly’s mother, Tiffany. Tiffany went out somewhere and Cassandra said she was looking at this Spanish guy, and for her that’s progress, but she’s white. You know, this is like the way she identifies completely.

And, it’s kind of weird. I mean, in Selma what happened was economically *nothing*. Absolutely nothing. Montgomery? Nothing. Birmingham? *Yes.* You know, there’s real money there. But, you know, Alabama’s—Linda ran for city council. She tried everything to get involved. But, you know, it’s like “what did it really do?” kind of thing. And I never went to any reunions; I was always doing my own thing.

EM: Um.

EG: Questions?

EM: You talk about, last time, about kind of this interracial conflict between SNCC members. You know, between the white guys not wanting to go to this dance.

EG: Yes.

EM: And I feel like there’s a very definite SNCC narrative of the public story of SNCC and the students that went down to Mississippi.

EG: Yeah.

EM: Like what do think are the stories that aren’t part of that public face.

EG: If you dig there there. I mean, it was just a really weird time to be in an interracial relationship because everybody was going black militant. And there I was sitting up in New York with John, and I was actually going to these periphery black militant discussions and things. And you know, my-dashiki-is-better-than-your-dashiki period. And I went back to him, and I said, “You know, we’re in this long term relationship and I really still love you although I don’t know why.” Because it was getting harder because he was such a male-whore. And that’s all he felt he had to offer sometimes because he didn’t have a good education and things. But what happened was, I said, “Do you want to join Stokely and them?” And he said, “Oh, you’re crazy! I have no interest whatsoever in joining that college hypocrite.” You know, there was a class divide with a lot of the activists in Mississippi that ran programs and things.

And he said, “If I wanted to leave you, I would have been left you. You don’t need to give me permission to leave you for Christ’s sake.” And I said, “Well, I just wanted to talk about it because I don’t want to make your life any harder because you haven’t got a job, have you?” And nor did his brother, Richard-er, Robert was staying with us too.

It’s in the book sort of, but see SNCC was all over the place. They embraced white people, and they embraced Southern white people a lot. You know, there was this guy Bob Phillips that was just like really out there. But on the other hand, there was—not so much the Northern white people—but the Southern white people, but on the other hand, there was a lot of, “Fuck the white people. Let’s just go do our own thing.” You know? That was evolving and changing, and a lot of black women were being—they were coming into their own woman hood in a sense just like with the Panthers. The same thing happened with the Panthers. You know, “I’m a black woman. I want to be in this group. I want to make change. Make you dinner? That’s what I’m here for? And running to the store and Xeroxing? I want to be marching with guns!”

Angela Davis didn’t get caught up in that for a variety of reasons, but a lot of black women in SNCC were like, “Oh, great, here we are risking out lives, and they’re fucking every white woman they can find.” You know, “We don’t like this.” There was a lot of tension on a lot of levels. Less so probably with the college educated women that were in the movement than the community women. Community women didn’t play. You know, they didn’t want it. They did not want to see interracial *anything*.

EM: Did you feel like the kind of conflict within the group was more class based than race based?

EG: Pretty much. You know, it was say like, John had this—I don’t even remember if I told you this. I don’t think I did because it’s still a weird memory. Um, he was basically a male-whore. I mean, he was tall, thin, and light-skinned and very intelligent. But he was like the chick magnet, you know. So what happened was then there was this heavy-set woman, poor, you know, in Mississippi, Johnny May. And she decided she wants a piece of *that.* And she was on him like white on rice, and it’s really hard for a guy, you know, if a woman’s really—“You must be a faggot how come you don’t want my ass? Is it because I’m fat, I can roll you like you’ve never been rolled before.”

And you know, it was there, and we were at a meeting and I saw it developing. and on a lot of levels, there wasn’t shit I could have done about it. I mean, to go up and say something like, “Honey?” That would have just made it worse. I assumed that she knew that I was the main woman. You know, we were sleeping together for quite a while at that point, but she didn’t and more than anything else, if she had, she wouldn’t have given a fuck. You know, because she wanted to get laid! And he was cute. And he was different. And he was her joy for the day. So, what happened was, Robert whose brothers thought he started to go a little crazy, and he finally took me aside and said, “It’s going to happen. Whatever happens happens. It’s really nothing to do with you.” And I said, “Are you kidding? It has a lot to do with me!” And he said, “Get over yourself, Emily.”

So before it got really weird, they jammed into a big station wagon, and she was right up there holding on to him, and John was driving, and Robert was in the back, and Robert was like, “Bye, Emily,” and I *knew* they were going to go have sex. I was *pissed* as hell. And so I said, “Reality check. You did not come down here to get black dick. You came down here to do Civil Rights and you’re very good and what you do. So you need to not let that relationship overwhelm you, and let it go. I mean, you had black dick in New York, you can have it any time anywhere you want it. Get past it and keep your politics.”

So. That was good until about six in the evening, and they left around two. Seven o’clock. Eight o’clock. The insecurity and the jealousy was welling up big time. So nine o’clock. That was it. And I was calling around trying to see where they were, and I didn’t know Johnny May from anything. And so, finally they came back around eleven, and he’d been drinking. And I was like, “Don’t come near me you *dog*.” He’s like, “But baby.” And I was walking through this cornfield trying to get away from him. But I had no sense whatsoever where I was. And he was like, “But baby,” and Robert was like, “Let her go. She’ll be cool.” And it’s surprising that Johnny May wasn’t even part of that little “Emily’s drama cause Emily got jealous thing.”

Anyway, I came back on my own after realizing I had not earthly idea where the hell I was. It wasn’t a good idea at two or three in the morning to be on a Mississippi road wearing all those freedom pins. So I came back, and I got in bed with him. And it was kind of over. But the next day, I told him, I said, “This thing is over.” You know, “I’m loosing myself. And my woman thing is taking over my activist thing, and I don’t like that about me.” And he said he understood and wouldn’t do it again and blah blah blah, and that afternoon, Johnny May came up to me. And she said, “Come here, white girl!” I was like, “Oh, god! She’s gonna sit on me!” I mean, she was big. So I said, “Mm.” She said, “I had no idea you were fucking him. I had no idea—people have been telling me that you’ve been with him for three or four years now! You can *have* the uhn-uhn.” I was like, “No! Johnny May, you can have him!” And she’s like, “No, you can have him!” And John was standing over there going, “Oh, shit! My karma is gone completely!” It was funny. So, we sort of worked it out. She wasn’t going to have any more of him, and I was stuck with a dog. That’s what that came out to.

But there was a lot of class things. And Robert knew it. And if I had tried to intervene, it would have been very ugly.

EM: If you’d tried to intervene?..

EG: You know like, “Baby, don’t go. I know she want to fuck you, but I know you don’t want to fuck her.” If I’d tried to get on that level, it would have been ugly. She probably would have picked me and tossed me over her shoulder or something. I was much smaller then. I’m not answering this question because I’m sort of fading away. I have to meet Cassandra in a little bit.

EM: Oh, I’m so sorry it’s been so long, but it’s been—

END OF INTERVIEW