

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

**Interview U-0559  
Mandy Carter  
July 11, 2007**

**Transcript – 2**

**TRANSCRIPT: MANDY CARTER**

Interviewee: Mandy Carter

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge

Interview date: July 11, 2007

Location: Mandy's home in Durham, North Carolina

Length: 2 discs; approximately 1 hour and 56 minutes

**START OF INTERVIEW**

BB: Today is July eleventh, 2007, and this is the fourth interview in a series with Mandy Carter and we are in Durham at her home again. The interviewer is Bridgette Burge and this is part of the Heirs to a Fighting Tradition Project: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists. Just as a reminder, last time we talked about Mandy's work with Harvey Gantt and Jesse Helms senate race in 1990, your work with the different music festivals, Rhythm Fest, and just women's and lesbian music in general, the movement, some around the language of sexual orientation and identity and how its changed and the significance of that, your work with the Human Rights Campaign Fund from '92 to '95, some about the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and how that overlapped with the Human Rights Campaign, some about the Congressional Black Caucus and its relationship with the Human Rights Campaign, a significant amount of time on the importance of the intersection of oppressions and the tensions between multi-issue and single-issue organizing. You used the anecdote of the D'Amato campaign as a way to talk about some of that.

MC: You have a good memory. It's all coming back now.

BB: Yeah, is it? Good. Then we spent the last part of the session talking about song; so we skipped. So now I want to take us back a little bit and if we could start around—oh I'm about to sneeze, excuse me.

MC: Here's a napkin.

BB: Thank you, excuse me. Thank you. (laughs)

MC: Are you okay?

BB: Mandy hates germs. She's got all her little germ bottles.

MC: No, I just got over this cold thing and I'm thinking, "Oh, my gosh." Are you okay?

BB: I'm okay.

MC: Tell me if you need more napkins or anything.

BB: I won't touch you.

MC: You know what? Before we start, I'm going to get one more bottle.

BB: Okay.

MC: The humidity out here, I mean, I'm assuming you have air conditioning at your house.

BB: Yes, we do, central air and heat, which I didn't grow up and I tell you, it's an astonishing perk; it's a wonderful perk. On that note, we have two fans going here in the kitchen again. So there's a little bit of background noise, but we're just taking the privilege of having ourselves cool because it's July eleventh in North Carolina and we've had upper ninety degree days for over a week now.

MC: And how high the humidity.

BB: Yeah, just like you were saying. But I think it's not too loud at all. I think it's fine.

MC: Good.

BB: How about do you have any questions?

MC: No, and well, I mean, I'm around all summer. So I'm assuming that if we get done tonight, if we get done today, fine; if we don't, then I brought my calendar.

BB: Okay, great.

MC: So no rush.

BB: So are you okay with--?

MC: Oh, no, I'm fine, absolutely.

BB: Okay, good, I love it.

MC: Take as much time as we need.

BB: Great.

MC: As long as you're not feeling pressure, I'm not feeling none.

BB: No, no pressure at all. So soon after you became the founder, it was around 1993, right?

MC: Right.

BB: You had been the public policy advocate for the ten southern states, the congressional delegation of the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

MC: That's right.

BB: Then soon after that, you became the founder and coordinator of A National Call to Resist: Countering the Radical Right in Our Black Community. So tell me about that campaign and your decision to take that on.

MC: Well, actually, when I was working with the Human Rights Campaign, there was another organization called the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, which really was a way to focus more in on the African-American gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community and I was willing to be a liaison between the Human Rights Campaign, I was on their staff, and the Leadership Forum.

One of the most interesting and dynamic things that came out that starting in like the early 90s was groups like Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, groups like Focus on the Family, these are predominately white, very evangelical groups who had a very strong antigay positioning. What was interesting and fascinating, I remember waking up one day and NPR, National Public Radio, was doing a special about how the Christian Coalition had a brand-new initiative to do outreaches into black churches with primarily their antigay agenda. And one of the things they said that they thought they could do outreach in the black church so comfortably, because they said, quote, "Aren't we reading out of the same book? And the book that black folks read says gay is wrong; the book that white evangelicals read says gay is wrong. So why not figure out a way to do this outreach?" And one of the key people they had in their resource bank, if you will, was of all people the niece of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Alveda Celeste King, black woman, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, very antigay, and with her on board, they were able to all of a sudden gain this entree into black churches to really spread what was really sort of an antigay message.

And I'll be honest with you, I'm gay, no problem, but didn't quite see it as a critical issue in terms of my black community until I heard this story and then I said, "Wait a minute, let's hold up here and see what's going on." Because of this alarming kind of broad national sweep that the Christian Coalition was doing with this new program, outreach to black

churches with the antigay agenda, the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum called a special meeting and said, “What are we going to do about this?” One of the responses was I said, “Well, what about this idea of some kind of a call to resist to say, ‘Yeah, we know you’re out there,’ but what would happen if we say, ‘But not in our churches?’” And that became sort of the foundation of this idea of a call to resist, of countering the radical right in the black church community.

BB: Were you still in DC?

MC: Yes, when we started this campaign, but then when I left and moved back to Durham in '95, I just brought that work with me and continued on with that ongoing work. I must say during that time, also you have to remember during this time, it was early in the 1990s also you had things like these statewide antigay initiatives in states like Colorado and I'm thinking of Oregon. They were the two main states where you saw these huge big statewide antigay initiatives and part of their strategy was to try to engage the black church to be very antigay in their positioning. You almost got a feeling that the radical right had some kind of a meeting and said, “Hey, here’s our strategy: antigay statewide initiatives in Oregon and Colorado. And what happens if we go into the black churches and say, ‘We want to bring our message there too?’” So it was quite frightening, quite a major moment, if you will, and something had to be done and the black gay and lesbian community said, “We have to stand up and say no.”

BB: What kind of impact do you think you had, the group had?

MC: I would say sizeable. You know, one thing I've learned is that when you have opposition like the Christian Coalition, which accesses to millions of dollars, huge lists, people like Jerry Falwell with his group, you oftentimes wonder when you have practically

nothing, what can you possibly do with the machines they have, money, resources, media? But we thought that the audience we really needed to reach quickly frankly was more of the media who was carrying the story about all of a sudden, white right decides to go into black community. What was interesting, Bridgette, is that a lot of the black community and church were already very suspect, like why would Pat Robertson, who has been very anti-civil rights, this whole idea of ending breakfast programs, and very anti-affirmative action, why would all of a sudden they want to come to us about their antigay agenda?

So I think that even though they thought they'd have this main entree into the black church because of Alveda, well, Alveda Celeste King had her own issues as well. The media first asked her, "Why are you joining an organization when it's antigay and anti-civil rights? Isn't that what your uncle stood for?" So after awhile, all she could say was basically, "Well, the Bible says," and so on and so forth. I think that the media began to realize they couldn't say because one black church or one black person got involved that somehow the whole black community was doing it. So I think they got that message early and quite frankly what happened in the bottom line, Ralph Reed, who was a major, major player with the Christian Coalition in the beginning, ultimately said at some point after maybe a year or two of this campaign, "It's not going to work to keep on going after this very antigay agenda of the Christian Coalition." And essentially, the whole black outreach stopped. It didn't go on anymore in that major way.

So even though we didn't have a lot of money, meaning "we," the Black Gay and Lesbian Forum, white allies, it was interesting that they felt comfortable enough to attempt it. It's still going on in its own way now. Now it's around immigration; it goes from gay to immigration. But for me, it was a very personal challenge because I've never been a church

person ever and I found myself going into black churches and all of a sudden, I realized, “Oh, now if I had this when I was young to go it, I like it,” and it gave me a huge more respect for faith-based organizing. We’ve got to be in the black church, the black community if we, as gays and lesbians in the African-American, want to make some inroads, want to have a conversation. So even though it started out to be very negative, it was one of those amazing things that it turned into more of a positive because we had to response and it made us think about we are doing as a community as well.

BB: Are there some other groups that are doing faith-based LGBTQ work that you’re involved with now in North Carolina?

MC: Well, the one way that we certainly—when I say “we,” me personally—is that certainly it came out to play, because this was more on the national level when I was in Washington, DC with the Human Rights Campaign, we were monitoring all of the country, but when I moved back to North Carolina, the way it played out was around this whole issue of the marriage equality issue. We have a network of faith-based churches and what-not that support gay and lesbian rights, but with the whole issue of marriage equality, I think it ratcheted up the issue to the point where there was an actual group. We patterned it on Massachusetts. It’s called the North Carolina Freedom to Marry—I can’t remember the name of it now.

BB: There’s one called North Carolinians for Marriage Equality with Chantelle Fisher-Borne.

MC: That’s it, that’s what I’m thinking of. Isn’t it called the North Carolina something about some church? I can’t remember. Does it have a faith? In Massachusetts, it was called Freedom to Marry Coalition. No, it was called the Religious Coalition for

Marriage Equality. So I don't know if it's called North Carolina Religious Coalition, but that really ended up being more of a faith-based, very specific around marriage equality and related issues. So out of that, you do have an infrastructure that exists to this day based on that, yeah, and helped be in the formation. I'm not a part of it. I'm not really faith-based oriented, but certainly went to a lot of the early meetings and know a lot of the folk involved.

BB: So then beginning in November of 1995, you worked as the founder and eventually the campaign manager—

MC: Right.

BB: And eventually the director for the North Carolina Mobilization '96. Tell me about that.

MC: Well, North Carolina Mobilization '96 basically was a follow-up to North Carolina Senate Vote '90. It was just six years later. We didn't use the same name; we had a different name. But when I got back, I really thought that since Gantt was going to give it another try against the reelection bid of Jesse Helms, we thought we would try again to replicate what we did in '90. I'll tell you honestly, what we did in '90 with the Harvey Gantt that ran then, it didn't seem to be the same Harvey Gantt in '96. It seemed like he had hired a lot of these kind of high-profile types, a lot of them based out of Chicago, and went back down to his campaign headquarters, still had some of the same issues around whether gay and lesbian was a liability factor or not. And we're thinking, "Six years later, come on, what are you talking about?"

But also there was this whole campaign on the national level for schools called the Federal Amendment to—what was it called? My mind is going—a federal amendment to say that marriage is only between a man and a woman. And Harvey, without even being asked,

proactively said, “Well, if anyone asked me, I would support this. I think marriage is a man and a woman.” I remember thinking, “What happened to the old Harvey Gantt?” It’s almost like the invasion of the pod people or something, like the invasion of the body snatchers. It’s like, “Harvey?” We thought he might reconsider his position on a women’s right to choose and we thought, “Who is this person?” And so I think a lot of us, and actually there again, though, Bridgette, it really was more about building this wonderful infrastructure for North Carolina around the work of equality and justice because of this particular campaign, that it was still worth doing. And Harvey lost again. On a very personal level, I thought, “This is not the same person that we supported six years ago.” But it went well and we did a lot of good outreach, more people got engaged as before, but Harvey lost and we moved on.

BB: Last time you talked about leaving the Human Rights Campaign Fund and the story of that decision. Is that the same time that you moved back to North Carolina? Was it right after you left the Human Rights Campaign Fund?

MC: Yeah, it was '95 and so by the time I got back down here, I was ready to go ahead and start, because remember the election wasn't until 1996. So by coming in in late '95, I think it was mid-'95, after deciding to leave the Human Rights Campaign, then I decided this would be the next kind of step, is to get involved in the Mobilization '96 and then from there decide what I want to do next. But that was a combination of also wanting to get back home to North Carolina and Durham. It was great to have worked on the national level for three and a half years. I really got a great sense of that meant, but it was nice to “come home,” in quotes, and get back to local organizing and state organizing, and southern organizing quite frankly. Plus we had started SONG in '93, and '94 it was really up and running. It seemed like we had a lot of great work to get done back home.

BB: That was also the same year you won the Paul Anderson Stonewall Award, right?

MC: Yeah, I did.

BB: So that twenty-five thousand dollars probably freed you up to make some decisions.

MC: It did, twenty-five thousand out of the blue. I didn't know I was going to get it and I got it. And twenty-five thousand, that's enough to live on for a whole year, which I did basically. It also gave me a breathing space to figure out without a whole lot of pressure what I wanted to do for future organizing in North Carolina, in the South, and that was one of those wonderful things out of the blue, and thank you, Paul Anderson.

BB: So you received pretty extensive training from the Democratic National Committee because you were serving as a consultant to the office of Lesbian and Gay Outreach, right, in DC. So how did you connect with them?

MC: Well, actually, it's a two-part story. I was born a loyal Democrat all my life and when I was working and organizing out of the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, DC, the Democratic National Committee sits right there and it was easy enough to see what activities were happening. And the DNC, Democratic National Committee, has a lesbian and gay component of it just like it has labor organizing, there's a desk for it; lesbian and gay organizing, there's a desk for it, women, whatever. So as a black lesbian, whenever you're a Democrat and you join the Democratic Party, you can join whatever of your individual groups based on your identity. So I belonged to the Black Caucus of the DNC, I belonged to the Women's Caucus because I was a woman, and I belonged to the LGBT Caucus.

But within the LGBT Caucus, I actually got elected as treasurer-secretary for a couple of years in there and with that you got to go to the national conventions. You got to be very much engaged. So in addition to doing the DNC work, every year they would always support all the gay and lesbian prides. Well, one of the years, they were trying to piggyback the campaign work around gay pride so that they would have Democratic Party materials out and so they needed someone to coordinate that. I was asked to come up and I commuted between Durham and Washington and my job was to coordinate gay and lesbian prides across the country and that's what I was a consultant for. It was very exciting. Every day I'd get on the phone and, "I know you're having your pride in Cincinnati, Ohio. How many tables are you going to have? Can we have a table? Can we have a contingent?" It was great and so I did that coordinating. And in the course of that, it also meant that we got to do voter registration turnout for the Democratic Party. So that was a very exciting time, but it shows you part of the infrastructure though of how you do that work on a national level.

BB: How long did you that?

MC: It was only like a three-month because prides back in that day, most prides happen through the month of June. Now prides are spread all over the year. But it was like an intensive three- or four-month time and I'd go up and had a place to stay during the week, go up and spend all week, come back home on the weekends about three or four months. I worked out of the DNC office up in Washington for that length of time.

BB: After the North Carolina Mobilization '96, there were four months or so before you began work as the national field director for the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum in March of '97.

MC: Right.

BB: So during those four months, is that when you were doing the consulting work with the DNC?

MC: That was in '96. Now that, I think, would have been in '96. I have to get my years right because that was coinciding with an election year so we were trying to help turn out the vote for pride season '96. I think after the elections in November '96 for the Helms-Gantt race when Helms got another six years, I think there was a gap in time and I'm trying to remember what the heck I was doing then. Did I put that on my--?

BB: No, I just noticed that there were some months there where it wasn't clear what was going on. I was wondering what you doing.

MC: Well, I might have been doing nothing.

BB: Good for you.

MC: Yeah, because one of the advantages that I was always working out of my home is that there were times when I would get done with a project and before going onto the next one, I would think, I'd stop, take a breath, and see. Because I was trying to remember, short of looking at my calendars, '97 and '98 came along—no, that was all during '96 when I did the consulting for the DNC.

BB: And then how did you come into the position of national field director for the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum? This was in March of '97.

MC: Right, your memory is good. Because my good friend, Keith Boykin, who then became the executive director of the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, they actually set up an office in DC. They used to be out of LA and when he got up there, I said, "What's going on? What kind of help do you need?" He said, "It would be great if we had some field work going on, Mandy. Would you be interested?" So I contracted with them

to do that. I was up there a lot, always stayed in Durham, but went up there quite a bit and helped to do some field organizing for them and that's how that happened.

BB: What was the field organizing?

MC: It's interesting. I think the Leadership Forum, even though it started out to be very local, it used to just be called the Black Gay and Lesbian Forum, very LA-based, very California-based, but they did an annual conference and so many black gay and lesbians were coming from across the country to come to this conference. The realization was maybe the Leadership Forum has to think beyond the scope of LA and beyond the scope of HIV/AIDS in the black gay men's community. And we said, "Maybe it's about us thinking of ourselves as a much larger partner or player." So if we have groups like the Human Rights Campaign, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force national, but what was there on the national level for the black, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community? Well, a void was being filled by this group called the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum. Well, as a board member sitting on there, there was a decision made, "Well, what would happen if we moved, kept something in LA, certainly the AIDS/HIV office, but moved the office to DC and tried to be much more of a larger, visible, national player?" In doing that, a lot of my work was to literally go state by state and find out every single black gay and lesbian political group, social group, pride, to do inventory, and from inventory when we organize our national conference each year, try to come up with an agenda and see what we might want to do as a national organization. And that was the very early infancy of that work being done and that's the job I had.

BB: Wow. What was your technical process for keeping track, for making an inventory? Did you use a database? What did you do?

MC: It was a combination of literally phone calls, it was a combination of using all the different gay and lesbian guides that were out there, but also quite frankly, because we had, remember there was another group that was also coming along in its early formation, which ended up being the International Federation of Black PRIDES, and so it was started out to be just one major black pride in Washington, DC because DC has the highest percentage of black folk in it. So there was a natural outgrowth not to only have a white gay pride, but to have a black gay pride. Well, a lot of folks saw DC black pride and said, "Well, why don't we replicate that where I live," in Chicago and Detroit and wherever.

By knowing individuals or because I traveled I lot, we did create a database. We also created a database of individuals. There are a lot of black and gay lesbian folks out there that don't belong to a group, but want to feel like they're part of an infrastructure. So we said, "We're going to add groups and contacts," and then all of a sudden our list exploded because now you're talking about any contact who is a black gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender identified. And when we put this up on a map, we realized, "Oh, my gosh." It's one thing to see it on a piece of paper state by state, but when you put it up on a map and we pinned a map and we saw just how extensive the black LGBT community was, and at that point the only group that was functioning to help service them was the National Black and Gay Lesbian Leadership Forum. So it was a database, phone call, email, going to events, so on and so forth, and we realized we had something happening here. But we had little money, so unfortunately, it was a case of the haves and have-nots. We only could do so much because we had a very limited budget and I couldn't stay on because they couldn't afford to keep paying me, quite frankly. So I came back.

BB: What were the sources of funding?

MC: At that point, it was foundations essentially. Short of having to go back and look, I'm trying to think. There was a group, I mean, we had several: Gill Foundation—I'm trying to think of the group—Public Welfare Foundation. A lot of it was grant writing. We did some fundraisers, but to help support a full-time executive director, an office manager, a field organizer like me, unless you could raise that money in a substantial way, a lot of it was part-time, not full-time, but we managed. Even though the Forum ultimately closed, it did close its doors a couple of years back, the wonderfulness of that was that a lot of the infrastructure, the people, the networking turned out to be the foundation for what is now called the National Black Justice Coalition. So even though the Forum folded, it served in a very vital role when it was functioning. But rather than just have it close and nothing happen, we all said, "Oh, no, we'll just turn around and restart another organization," which is now the National Black Justice Coalition, very vital, very vibrant, staff back up in DC, four staff. In fact, even as we speak today, three of them are at the national NAACP convention and we've been going there for the last three years. So anyway, it was just wonderful to be a part of that and seeing its struggles and all the drama, but yet it happened. We've now taken that, reorganized, and now have a new name, but still doing the great work.

BB: What accounts for how the Leadership Forum wasn't successful and couldn't bring in funds, but the Justice Coalition is? What are some of the differences?

MC: I think sometimes it's all about timing. When the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum started many years ago, it was serving a particular purpose, but it was all LA and because of LA and that community, it really wasn't meant to be a national organization. But I think what I said earlier was that when you saw black folks piling into these conferences that were supposed to be just a local thing, people began to realize that

there was much more of a hunger, much more of a desire, but also much more of a tangible thing and what-not. So I think also quite frankly, a lot of funders were saying, "We're only going to fund the groups that we know that are viable," and rather than funding anything new. So money kept on going into the Human Rights Campaign or the National Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, established organizations, and then those groups oftentimes would form their own people of color stuff within the organizations versus just funding people of color groups by themselves. And I think the funders had to go through their own awareness education to understand it's good to have funding of both people-of-color-identified groups and your traditional gay and lesbian groups, but don't pick one against the other. And I think quite frankly also, the Leadership Forum, because it existed for all those years, had its own baggage in a way and by folding it and letting it do what it needed to do, then when a new group started, we had a lot of lessons to learn from that and said, "Well, first of all, we'll be national, truly national," a lesson learned from the Forum to go into the future. And also I think a lot of funders were prepared and ready to then say, "Let's fund the Black Justice Coalition because they need to have their own entity."

But the Black Justice Coalition is also very much a bridge-building group. We work a lot with all the gay and lesbian organizations across the board. So I think there was also a greater sense of cooperation. And it's the viability factor. You know what? The demographics have shifted. There's more black folk, not less, as this country gets more and more of color. There's more gay and lesbian black pride so people feel good about having their infrastructure in their cities, which means there's more visibility, more viability, and you have to network that. So they had more to work with, quite frankly in my opinion, and upped the ante in terms of what they could do and what needs to happen.

BB: Do you remember the first pride march or event?

MC: You mean in terms of black pride?

BB: No.

MC: My personal?

BB: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, it was here in Durham. Oh, no, I take it back. No, it wasn't. It was when I lived in San Francisco. I was out there again from 1967 to '82 and all I knew about pride was going to San Francisco pride. Well, you cannot think of a bigger pride, a more incredibly out, vocal, visible pride in your life. So my first pride was the San Francisco prides. But what was interesting was that again, I worked for those two lesbian bars, Maude's and Emilia's, and we were the first ones ever to organize a women's float. It's always been men bars and what-not.

BB: Oh, a men's float, you mean a parade float?

MC: Yeah. Very prides could support big floats because you had to have a city large enough and only New York could do it, San Francisco, LA. But historically, it's always been gay men bars and the clubs that would do them. So I remember one year we were all sitting around at Maude's and Emilia's at a staff meeting and said, "Well, how come we don't have a women's, like a lesbian float? That's never happened before? Well, gosh darn it," we said, "You know what? Let's make it happen." So we did. We had the first ever lesbian float in the San Francisco pride and it was an amazing thing. Our theme was "We are family." You know that song, "We are family," by the Pointer Sisters? But to go from that kind of pride and move to North Carolina, where there was no pride in Durham until we said we're going to start one in 1986. So my memorable first one would be San Francisco. The second one would

be when we did the 1986. I think we called it the Durham, Triangle, Durham—I can't remember—Pride up on Ninth Street, first time ever. That was quite the deal. Now in September, we're going to celebrate our twenty-something whatever. Pride is pride.

BB: Do you know the origins of pride?

MC: Yeah, I can tell you exactly. All because of Stonewall, the Stonewall Riots in 1969 up in New York at this bar called the Stonewall. People said on the anniversary of—I don't know, I can't remember. It must have been like the first year, second or third year, when someone said, "We need to remember Stonewall that happened in '69. What would be a way to do that?" And people thought, well, why not have some kind of a celebration, something that would acknowledge who we are? Certainly big cities like New York and San Francisco said, "Let's mark the anniversary by having a pride." It was just called "gay pride" and they were the first beginnings of what is now an annual event. I think I just saw Atlanta pride just had their thirty-third. It's amazing to me that these have become such institutions, but also a great way every year to underscore the importance of our community and of the contributions in either our cities or states or whatever. But yeah, they are all to mark the anniversary of Stonewall from 1969.

BB: And through celebration too.

MC: Yes.

BB: I think there's something very beautiful about that.

MC: Absolutely, celebration. You know, it's interesting. I remember when we started doing the prides. Again, I was there, moved there in '67. I remember the first ones we did in San Francisco. They weren't like they are now. They were very small and do you know where we did them? We did them up on Polk Street where the drag queens used to hang out.

So I think we need to remember, one thing sometimes you'll hear, someone will say, "Well, let's throw a pride, but let's keep it low-key about the drag queens. We don't want to be embarrassed or have that image." I remember thinking if it wasn't for the drag queens that were in Stonewall and the drag kings, we wouldn't even have a movement. So I get very, very concerned and not happy when people almost want to divorce themselves from that. But the very first prides in San Francisco were on Polk Street. Have you ever been to San Francisco? Now Polk Street, you can walk right down to City Hall and that's what we used to do with the first prides. And then all of a sudden, we moved them over to Castro Street because Castro is the gay community and then you went from Castro down to City Hall. Then they got bigger and bigger and bigger, and now they start down near the Ferry Building more toward downtown and they end up on the Embarcadero. But the very beginnings were small ones with drag kings, drag queens, and folk out at San Francisco, and now I think it's the largest moneymaker in the city of San Francisco. It draws about a million and that's a whole week.

BB: A million dollars?

MC: A million people for a whole week. So it's amazing and this has become such a moneymaker, but it also created such a viability factor that it's institutionalized now in a way like ours is here in Durham. The mayor now comes. The firepeople come. The police show up. It's in the visitor's guide, the Convention Bureau's guide to downtown Durham. You see just how incredible, this has just been such an amazing movement of understanding Durham is wonderful because of the diversity of color, of class, of race, and of gender and sexual orientation. It's wonderful.

BB: Tell me about the special assignment as program director for Equal Partners in Faith. It was a response to the Promise Keepers' Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men rally on the Mall in DC. So first tell me a little bit more about the Promise Keepers, what you know about how they were established, and then what year was that that you took on as director of the Equal Partners in Faith.

MC: I'd have to double check my calendar. Well, first of all, this continuum of monitoring the radical right groups has been consistent for me ever since I did my work in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1993 when they had a ballot measure there. The Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, the Eagle Forum, certainly Promise Keepers, these groups have always consistently been during their work ongoing all the time. Sometimes they come into view based onto what work they're doing or not doing. And if you remember, I made a reference earlier to the Christian Coalition doing to outreach into black churches around this whole concept of racial reconciliation.

Well, another group that was also doing that at the same time, but not as high profile as the Christian Coalition, is a group called the Promise Keepers. The Promise Keepers was a group formed by a coach out in Colorado. It's meant for men only and it's a very Christian-based men's only movement where essentially what they say is that it's a movement where they want to talk about men being the central focus of family and that women are partners, except the bottom line, when decisions are made about family or whatever, the men have the final say. And one of the unique things about the Promise Keepers, what they would do, they would do huge events in these massive statements. Remember I said it was a football coach. It's not a coincidence that a football coach understood the importance of putting men who normally come to stadiums for football or basketball or whatever. They started doing their

outreach to other men and they would set up these dates and they would do these huge outreach to men's movement called the Promise Keepers in stadiums all across the country.

At one point, they decided, "What would happen if we did a huge massive one where everyone came from all across the country from stadiums that we had touched on to come to Massachusetts," for what they called the Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men. When we heard that this was going to happen—when I use the word "we," a lot of the faith-based organizations, gay and non-gay, said, "We have issues," because they were very antiwomen, very antigay, and even though they had men of color very much visible in terms of the preaching and the outreach, it turned out to be, in our opinion, a very negative operation. So because DC is the heart of all the groups that are there, that are very pro-women, pro-equality, an organization of Unitarians were the first group that not only said, "We have to question the Promise Keepers, but we also have to figure out a counteraction that would be a faith-based counteraction."

So we thought, "What name could be something that we could use that would somehow have a voice of reason or a voice of peer?" They had a special outreach meeting held in DC to bring a lot of faith-based and grassroots folks together to talk about how we want to respond to the Promise Keepers, this particular thing. I was at it and at some point there was a decision to made to call the group Equal Partners in Faith, equal partners in faith, not men only or whatever, and they decided to hire. I said, "I have time. I'd love to come do it." I'm trying to think of the year.

BB: It's got to be '97-'98.

MC: I was going to say, was it '98 maybe? In fact, I have a whole three-ring binder on that. Can you wait one second or no?

BB: Sure, go get it. Let's just leave the recorder running while you get it.

MC: Here it is. October fourth, 1997. So it was 1997.

BB: Do you mind if I take a picture?

MC: No, not at all.

BB: I want to capture our little cozy kitchen where we've done this for awhile too.

Okay, so this is the--.

MC: This is the binder that came out of all of our work on countering and/or responding to Sacred Assembly of Men. You got it?

BB: Yeah.

MC: I must tell you that—actually, you know what was amazing? This is so amazing about, here we go. This is how much coverage they were getting. Look at this.

BB: Oh, my gosh.

MC: I mean, the Promise Keepers, they're still around, but they probably had one of the most high-profile years ever in terms of the work they were doing.

BB: Isn't this the same group, the "I love my wife" bumper stickers? Let me do it again; your eyes were closed. Do you remember those, the "I love my wife" bumper stickers? They were like a big--.

MC: With the Promise Keepers?

BB: I was wondering if it was them.

MC: Oh, I'm not sure.

BB: Yeah, look at that. So is this binder, you just put it together just as a memory of the work and a way to archive the work?

MC: Yeah.

BB: You did this yourself? This isn't something that the group put together?

MC: Oh, no. Well, as the coordinator of it, it was my job to make sure we kept everything. I put this together and it's going to go into the Duke stuff because it's all part of-- . But what was amazing to me was, you know what? When I do organizing, I don't know about anyone else, but if you do not keep track of what you've done, because now if this ever happens again, rather than having to reinvent the wheel, and thank goodness for computers because all of this is on computer. When we first started this project, we had no idea. In fact, one of the sad things was, and now this is me, when we were asking other communities of faith to speak up about the Promise Keepers, what we got was, "Well, we don't want to say anything about them and no, we're not going to go after them, and no." And we're sitting here and thinking, "But how do you have a faith-based response to a group that's using faith as a way to, in my opinion, really put women down and this male domination?" And they said, "Well, we don't want to get into that judging."

And if it wasn't for the Unitarians, they were, to my knowledge, the only faith-based organization that said, "We will speak up about this." My respect level for Unitarians and also for faith-based organizing went up sky-high because I'm a lay person and I'll admit it; I feel Biblically illiterate. But when you have the Unitarians who understand this, get it, and we were working out of the Unitarian office in Washington, DC for that time that I was up there, it was amazing. You saw a lot of the media was so, I thought, very pro-Promise Keepers. After all, what can you say? They do great work, whatever. But it wasn't until you had other voices of faith that said, "But let's challenge this."

And I remember one of the most important moments was that on Larry King, Reverend Meg Riley, who is a lesbian minister and a Unitarian Universalist, was on

television, and she was on there with the guy who helped found the Promise Keepers. I can't think of his name now, anyway it's in here. And to have her challenge the guy who started the Promise Keepers, asking him questions that were so faith-based, and no one else could have done it, and it rattled him. And at one point, Larry King finally said to this guy, "Well, let me ask you something. You talk about women and the importance of partnering and all that. But let me ask you this, if you and your wife have a disagreement, the bottom line in the end, who gets to make that decision?" And you know what he said? "The men do." 'Nuff said.

So I think that this whole idea about Equal Partners in Faith, we closed the doors on it, but for this particular moment to have this as part of the work that we did, huge amount of press. We organized a very respectable rally the day before they were going to meet. We were out there just to see. We did an interfaith worship service for unity and equality. The day before one of the events, we did a prayer vigil. It was an amazing event to be involved in.

BB: And did you advertise to have people come from across the country?

MC: Yeah. Well, no, we didn't because we were more of DC-based. They were getting people coming in from all over the country. But we certainly put the word out if you're around and you want to come when we did the unity rally and when we did the interfaith worship. Anyone could come, but it was pretty much mostly DC, Virginia, Maryland. It was a great turnout, got a tremendous amount of press. It certainly, I think probably for the first time in a way, elevated the idea that you could be of faith and not have anyone take the word "religion" and it's theirs to be used in a very anti- kind of way. Also we challenged a lot of the people of color stuff. They didn't have very many people of color there, but for the men of color who were there, we got into this question about gender

equality, race equality. Why are black men standing up and making these comments? And so on and so forth. But I thought it was a major challenge and I was proud of that piece of work that we all did.

BB: And so the Equal Partners in Faith, the prayer vigil for unity and equality was on October third, 1997 at the Capitol, the East Lawn of the US Capitol, and then the interfaith worship service for unity and equality was on October fourth at Saint Margaret's Episcopal Church in DC.

MC: Exactly.

BB: And this was a march and rally?

MC: Yes.

BB: Then on October fourth, 1997 on the Mall in DC, it was the larger march and rally.

MC: Right.

BB: So maybe after the interfaith worship service, it seems like, but that was at a different place.

MC: Right. Well, what we tried to do, because we know they were coming in on October fourth, so what we did is the night before, we held pre-event kind of activities so that we could have something where we got to talk about the importance of who we were, what the issues were. What we did, because we knew that the "Stand in the Gap" was going to happen on the Mall on October fourth, we held our prayer vigil not far from the US Capitol East Lawn because we didn't want to get on the Mall, but we wanted to be close by. But we did was that evening, the evening after the "Stand in the Gap" had happened, we had our interfaith worship service for unity and equality that evening following this event. And we

actually went on the Mall and watched and I must tell you, to watch something from afar, they're based in Colorado. They had all these events in stadiums around the country. And because we're sitting in Washington, DC in the Unitarian Universalist office, sitting on P Street in Washington, we knew they were coming. So a lot of our work had to happen in DC in terms of the local activities. We knew we were going to do the prayer vigil and so on and so forth.

But once they physically arrived, I mean, there were tons of them. Don't get me wrong. They had a huge turnout. They had these big—what do you call those monitors on the Mall?—video monitors and I must tell you, when we went around, and we were not being disrespectful, we would ask men, “Why are you here?” And there was a genuine sense that we are here because we do care, and I remember being struck by, it wasn't the men; it was really more the leadership. So the guy who started this, when he would talk, he's the one who was advocating antigay, he's the one who was advocating this sort of very antiwoman.

So the lesson I learned as an organizer: think about the leadership, think about who's really directing it, and be careful about going after the followers sometimes because a lot of them, they were genuine. They had their families there, they cared, and yet the leadership, who was sitting in this kind of coalition of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, this kind of intersection of all these white men, basically very antigay, antiwomen agendas. We had to rethink and restrategize about that. So when it came to doing a lot of the media and when they would ask us, “Well, what are your issues? What do you care about?,” and whatever, we'd have to draw a lot of the radical right and show where that was being played out in terms of some of the work that was happening around the state, and less around individual people per se. That was a big lesson for me and how it was so vital to have voices of faith

countering these other voices of faith that were very anti-, in my opinion. It was an amazing campaign and I learned so much, and here's the documentation of it sitting here in this three-ring binder.

BB: And a great deal of it in your smart brain.

MC: I hope.

BB: You have such a great memory for details and the lessons learned. At one point, you said something about the Promise Keepers being in Massachusetts. Did I miss--?

MC: Oh, I'm sorry, I meant to say Colorado. The only thing I was going to say, there was a little bit of a connection because the Promise Keepers are based in Colorado. Also, Focus on the Family is based in Colorado and when there was that antigay statewide initiative based in Colorado, it was called Colorado for Family Values. And when I was doing my work in Cincinnati in 1993, a lot of money came from Colorado into Cincinnati to support the very antigay proposition that was happening back in '93. But Promise Keepers, my assumption is that they have membership all across this country, but no, they're Colorado-based.

BB: Okay. In March of '98, so just a few months after this, you coordinated SONG's people of color LGBT leadership retreat in Little Rock, Arkansas. And I think we talked a little bit, we did talk some about SONG and the women who founded it and why and some of its evolution. But why did you all decide to organize that leadership retreat? What was that about?

MC: Well, actually, that was our second one. The very first one was done by one of the co-founders, Pat Hussein, who was also a co-director. And when SONG was first started and actually had two full-time staff, Pat Hussein and Pam McMichael, we wanted to figure

out how could we set up some kinds of ways where people could come together and talk, and one of them, we thought, was certainly when you think about the race, class, culture, gender, sexual identity, kind of the five points of SONG, we were doing a series of these sort of get-togethers, if you will, and we thought one of them would be important was to have people of color get together in terms of a leadership, like who's organizing in Virginia? Who of color is organizing in South Carolina? Who of color--? And find a way to bring folk together.

So Pat was great because the very first one she held a year or two earlier and by the time we decided it was time to do the second one, she was not available. So I said, "Well, Pat, can I fill in for you?" And so that became our second annual people of color leadership and we did it in Little Rock, Arkansas because we have a lot of folk down there, one of them being Suzanne Pharr, who's also a co-founder from Little Rock. We brought together people of color of different races, LGBT, lesbigaytrans, and we held it in this wonderful camp down there. It was held over the weekend and part of it was a combination of networking; part of it was to find out what people were doing back home in their respective states; part of it was kind of a wonderful way to support each other and socialize and just kind of build some community. Everything would be from talking about what's working, what's not working, how are you doing, what's going on. That was our second annual.

BB: So in the beginning of the fall, when you're in January of '99, you took a one-year sabbatical. Finally a break, Mandy Carter. And that was also the year that you were awarded the Bayard Rustin Award by the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum.

MC: Right.

BB: So were you burnt-out?

MC: I think it was a combination of, I hate to use the word “burnout,” but like needing a break and I think it was also coming after especially all that work with the Promise Keepers and Equal Partners in Faith and thinking about what I wanted to do next. As you can tell, I always keep myself busy, but a lot of that was spent there, some of it was spent out and around, but it was a break. It was a way to slow down, catch my breath, do some inventory, do some reflecting, and I think that was probably the first time in quite a while that I had actually stopped because I had been going nonstop since '68-'69, and that was like a thirty-year time. I said, “I’d better stop and think.” Yeah, so that was a moment to reflect, a moment to gather my thoughts, a moment to have some fun, a moment to stop and just think about what’s next.

BB: What inspired you? Despite the thirty years of work, were there other things that inspired you to do that then?

MC: I was pooped. I was tired, mental tired. Also, I just got done doing another one in 2006. I think it was a combination of realizing if I just kept on go, go, go, go, and never stopped long enough to think, “What have I just been doing? Where am I going?,” it just seemed like it was too easy to keep going if I didn’t stop. But I was mental tired. I was also, in terms of my energy and my excitement factor, really low and thinking I really need to recharge the batteries. That’s the best way I could put it, “recharge the batteries,” and that turned out to be a very important time for me. I had the ability and the resources at that moment to do it.

BB: How did you have the resources?

MC: Well, you know, I don’t make a whole lot of money, but I made enough to kind of get by, if you will. Where I lived (**54:01**), at that point, my rent was probably two seventy-

five or something, so it didn't cost a whole lot to live, but I think a number of the jobs that I was doing and I still had some of that Stonewall money, it was enough to kind of get me by. And that's kind of what I did was just to live off what I was making, but it doesn't cost me a whole lot to live. But it was vital that I do that because I was just tired.

BB: What were some of your favorite things that you did in that year?

MC: A lot of TV, a lot of TV. I think I mentioned this. I love Andy Griffith. TV, to me, is a place where you get to turn off your mind; you turn on the TV. I like a lot of old TV series. I don't know what else I did in '99. I'd have to go look at my calendar. But a lot of it was just a whole lot of nothing if I remember correctly. I don't know what's next on my years on there, but I think I did a whole lot of nothing.

BB: It seems like you kind of went back into organizing full force in August of 2000 as the campaign manager for the Miami, Florida—

MC: Oh, that's right.

BB: Equal Voice, so in between there.

MC: Yeah. But one thing I will stay, I was just thinking that—what was I going to say just before you said that about Miami? Oh, I know what it was. One thing I still grapple with today, and I wonder if activists do this and whether or not this has come up in other conversations, but sometimes I feel guilt-ridden. I feel like if I'm not out every day doing some piece of work, am I not living up to being a great activist? I think around '99, having been doing all the work that I'd been doing and all this stuff I love to do and doing all the work with people and groups, I realized maybe it's not about having to work every single day. There's got to be some way in which you value the work you're doing, you get to do inventory about the work you've been doing, you try to do a judgment on how you've been

doing it, and I was really going crazy because I didn't seem to have quality of life about what I was doing. I mean, I could work myself to death and then think, "But I'm not feeling good. I'm not feeling happy," or whatever. So I think that was a big moment of reflection and I don't know. I think about it today. I feel much better because of this 2006 sabbatical versus this time I took off in '99. But I think there has got to be some other way in which we as activists and as organizers really rethink or get better tools or in our orientation understand that we don't have to wake up guilt-ridden every day for not doing something for the movement. Because I wasn't doing anything for me, my social life, my personal life, I was just not happy.

BB: Do you feel like that's a bit of an epidemic going in the activist and organizing culture, to be in fifth gear for years and years and years?

MC: I think it is. I think it is and I think maybe it's a combination. Now I came into the movement through the whole kind of pacifist, non-violence work. It seems like we're always fighting something. When I first got involved, it was fighting the war in Vietnam. I was too young for civil rights. So that thing drained on every single year for how many years, and could we do enough and did it matter? Then that's over and then we go on to the next. So maybe do we have to always organize around just dramatic, like, if we don't stop it right now or something? And I've been thinking out loud about how can we get this group work done, but rethink how we get organizers to feel like if they're not on the front lines, on the jagged edge every single day, that that's the only way? And it can't be; there's got to be other ways. So one of the lessons I think I'm learning as an organizer and as movement activist, how do we talk to each other about this, have these conversations, and be honest about it and think are there different models of how we can do effective organizing, but with quality of life that

integrated into it, especially when you're up and coming? When I first started, I was like gangbusters. I think a lot of us are. You couldn't give me enough to do, and I think that's not healthy.

BB: Are there some organizers or activists that stand out for you, that modeled a better way of going about it, and what did they do?

MC: Now this is me, but I think people like Suzanne Pharr, who certainly has been out there for many, many years. She started in the anti-Vietnam War movement, the feminist movement, certainly the whole anti-domestic violence movement thanks to her down in Arkansas. And then she did work up in Oregon in anti-radical right and then she was at the Highlander Center for five years, but now she's working out of her home in Knoxville. There's a ton of us doing that now and I realize that might be a trend that means that, not that you don't go into a 9 to 5 job in the movement, because I did that and many of us do it. But I think the technology now allows us to work out of our homes in a civilized kind of way, I think the advent of email and internet and web, but also keeping in mind a lot of people don't have any of that. So you don't want to ever give up personal communication, but maybe it means that we can--. So she would be a model because she does great work, but she even said herself, "You know what, Mandy? There's got to be a way in which the things I believe in, the issues I get concerned about," and that "quality of life" word is what she uses; I do too. Now that might come with age too because when I was eighteen, nineteen, but now that I'm almost sixty, I'll be sixty next year, so quality of life comes up. Can we have that quality of life when you're eighteen or seventeen, rather than waiting until we're sixty? But that would model it for me and a lot of my peer group, people who are also like of the 60s, now

turning sixty. I think people are coming up with different ways. Some of them are modeling. I'm trying to be a different model for how I do my work.

BB: Great. Let's take a quick break.

## **END OF DISC 1**

## **START OF DISC 2**

BB: Okay, we just took a little break and had some wonderful, sweet, fresh, cold cantaloupe. So tell me about some other things that you did particularly around the year of the sabbatical in '99 to improve your quality of life? What does that mean for you?

MC: Well, because I was also working out of my house, I had to figure out how I could set my house up in a way that meant there was a work space that I would use and then there was my own personal space. You've seen the configuration of my home. I have a room that's my office that now has a curtain on it. I guess I figured at that point I was going to do a lot more work out of my home. How could I make my home--? Remember I said to you it was hard to figure out, if I'm not doing something every minute for the movement and when you have your office in your office, it was really hard to figure out dividing up that space, not just physical space, but mental space. I don't think it worked very well. I also had a phone that I didn't have a ringer on it that you could off; so I either had to unhook my phone or not. I mean, just these little practical things.

In '99, I don't know if I did any camping. I can't remember. I certainly didn't solve it back then. It took another couple of years until 2006 to get more clear about it. But I think the quality of the life things were I had friends, but a lot of the friends I had were friends because of my work, not because I had a separate, non-movement-type friendship. I can't remember when I started going to Duke women's basketball games. That certainly was a nice

thing. I think I might have started going around then just because it had to just not be just work, work, work, all the time.

BB: It's been my experience that a lot of activists in movement organizations and non-profits, there's almost a competitive culture of workaholism where people stay late and work hard and write bigger and more complicated brochures and research projects and work on weekends and go to every event. It's been my impression that it almost perpetuates this unhealthy pace and culture. Have you seen organizations that have done it better, have been healthier at that, in all your years of working with different groups?

MC: I think there's more examples more recently than in the past because I think there's such a work ethic. I mean, if you think about it, people who self-select out to become activists full-time, whether they're getting paid or not, that is such a thing in your blood, that you find yourself either engaged in or pursuing or if something new comes up, you want to feel like you're a part of. Because I do think people feel like me. I want to feel like every day I'm contributing to making change or impacting change. Then models that I only know, what I got introduced to was American Friends Service Committee. They have a Monday through Friday kind of mentality. War Resisters League is probably more every weekend, you're out somewhere doing something. But I think it's gotten more. When I realized it was okay, after I got done in 2005 working for Southerners on New Ground and ended up coming back and deciding to work out of my home and taking some time off, that it was okay not to be every weekend going. It took me a long time not to feel guilt every weekend if I wasn't going somewhere and doing something.

It is such a culture. It is such a culture out there. And there is so much to be done and there is so much to be done all the time. I think the question is just how do you balance that

out with each person's individual life and life circumstances? I'm finding more balance now. I'm still not there. I'm trying to get there. But I think in '99 and even taking that break after thirty years after nonstop was like a major, "Whoa, Mandy. You've got to stop and then you've got to figure out what's going to happen."

BB: So tell me about getting back into it, organizing in August 2000 as the campaign manager in Miami for Florida Vote/Equal Voice. Were you actually in Miami?

MC: I actually was in Miami. It was great. You know, I think one thing nice about 2000, first of all, let's look at the historical context of 2000. George W. Bush running for the US presidency and I'm sitting in Florida working with groups like People for the American Way Foundation. I'm working for groups like the National Association for the Association of Colored People. The reason why I was in Florida is that because of the 2000 elections, Florida has one of the highest black population voter registration counts, but such a low number of those who are registered who turn out. So People for the American Way Foundation said, "What would happen if we took Florida, understanding the importance of Florida in the whole 2000 election thing, and partnered with the NAACP to look at all the black registered voters and how do we turn them out to actually vote?" The campaign was called Florida Vote/Equal Vote and I was hired on as the campaign manager.

BB: Is it Florida Vote/Equal Voice?

MC: Oh, I'm sorry. Florida Vote/Equal Voice, thank you. Yeah, that was it, right. But the other dynamic of Florida was that—my memory is going so bad—the guy who started out doing these color-blind initiatives state by state based on education—what's his name, out of the UC-California system, I can't think of his name now, anyway—he was doing a whole campaign in Florida to try to get a statewide initiative to say that no longer would race

ever matter in some kind of education system out of Florida, and a lot of us were opposed to it. But the energy that came out of 1999, in a way, I felt so rested. I was ready to take on something. So this opportunity to work in Florida, work with the NAACP, People for the American Way, with this campaign called "Arrive with Five." "Arrive with Five" was this wonderful campaign in which you would go out and get five people committed to not only say they'll turn out to vote, they'll go vote, but they'll bring five people with them. So this wonderful "Arrive with Five" campaign is what I was the campaign manager of.

I was first working in Tampa area, but then I ended up working in Miami, specifically in Little Haiti. Little Haiti is where all the Haitians who live and it was one of the most eye-opening, heartwarming, frustrating things I ever did because in Florida, in Miami, if you're Cuban and you escaped from Cuba and you hit the shore of Florida, you get welcomed and you are accepted. If you take a similar boat coming in from Haiti and you arrive on the shores in Miami, you get sent back. And that is such a major political, demographic, and emotional, social thing going on in Miami and you're sitting there watching it unfold and you cannot believe it. How is it possible that poor people from two different countries get treated so differently in Miami? It's all because of the history of that city and because of Cuba, because of Haiti.

I got the good fortune to work in Little Haiti with the Haitians and my sense of being an American was so humbled because they believed in the power of the vote. It was African-Americans who seemed to say, "Well, what's the point of the vote? We can't do anything with it." For right or wrong reasons, Haitians were just the opposite. The power of the vote was amazing, and I went to meetings and all the meetings were in Haitian. So for me to be sitting there as an American having to have someone translate what they were saying and this

is like a black community, right, but it was amazing and I got to do that and watch what will probably go down as the worst election in the history of this country, the selection of George W. Bush, all because of what happened in Florida.

BB: The what election?

MC: He was selected; he never was elected.

BB: Oh, selected, right.

MC: He was selected, and to sit there and watch that and be a part of that, I'll have to say, was a momentous moment in my life. Remember, this is the Al Gore versus George W. Bush. It all came down to Florida and I'm sitting in a state where the governor is Republican, his brother, Jeb. The General Assembly is predominately Republican. This is a state back in that day in 2000 where county by county, you could have Republican-controlled election boards or you'd have Democratic-controlled, depending on what county you lived on. Worked with "Arrive with Five," because I worked in Little Haiti, showing up and hearing stories. We had set our office up on election day, "Arrive with Five," to take any complaints from voters who had issues. The polls opened at seven in the morning. At 7:01, the first calls came in and it didn't stop for the entire day. We couldn't even handle the calls, there were so many. The NAACP had to go on and nationally tell everyone. I mean, in Florida statewide, they had to set up an 800 number.

The kind of voter disempowerment that went on, I could not believe it. And to watch three black women who voted in the same precinct, all of their time ever being registered voters, showed up at the polls, the poll location had been moved, and they had no indication of where it had been moved to. It was close by. It was a high school. They finally found it. They find it. They're calling me telling me this. They finally find it. They show up. There are

so few voting machines and they said, “Ms. Carter, we want you to know that we asked the person who works that particular polling location, ‘Why are there so few machines in this polling location?’ And she said, quote, ‘We didn’t think that many people were going to show up to vote that day.’” Now they know how many people registered to vote that day, but that went on. You had police doing car stops and inspections, just happened to be outside of where people were going to go vote that day.

But the most horrific had to be in the Haitian voting poll locations where they were promised they were going to have bilingual voting ballots and interpreters. They show up. There is nothing. While they’re standing in line, people who spoke Haitian, it’s Creole, would come up and say, “Hey, are you voting today?” “Yeah.” “Well, don’t you know Democrats don’t vote today? They vote next week.” And people believed it because they didn’t realize that, not speaking English as their first language, they were told that. You wouldn’t believe the unbelievable numbers of the voter disenfranchisement things that went on in the state of Florida.

BB: So it was clear to you that this was a coordinated effort—

MC: Absolutely.

BB: From the level of the governor to the police to the poll workers?

MC: I can’t say it’s governor. I think, well, first of all, you had the NAACP come in right away and they did all kinds of filing of actions and what-not. We found out later on there was a coordinated—I can’t say the governor was a part of the coordinated—but there was a coordinated statewide voter suppression, particularly of the black vote around the state of Florida. No doubt about it. It’s been proven. It’s been in the courts and what-not. But to sit in your office and take these calls and hear this stuff. And we had just spent the last how

many months and months trying to turn out the vote and it turned out to be one of the highest black voter registration drives in the entire state of Florida ever, and then to watch this vote be so suppressed, and then to watch this craziness of the US Supreme Court getting involved and then them making the decision. When George W. Bush says, "I believe in state rights," of course not when it didn't favor him. But to see the US Supreme Court come and say basically, "Stop the vote count. This election we're basically going to say the count is where it is," and therefore Bush was never elected. Al Gore got the popular vote, but they got the US Supreme Court to say, "Nope, sorry," and he got selected. Now we're living with that legacy eight years later.

Anyway, but that was a powerful moment for me in Florida and Miami and I'm telling you, I'll never forget those days as long as I live. And the Democratic Party, they don't get off the hook either. The party that I was working with in terms of Florida and Miami was so dedicated in terms of who they were going to vote for. Now we were doing a non-partisan voter registration drive. We had to be careful we're not telling people how to vote. But to hear stories from people who were with the Democratic Party smack dab in the middle of Little Haiti, no money, no nothing, and then you hear things like, "Well, who else are they going to vote for? Of course they're going to vote for the Democrat. Why do they need money? We know they're going to turn out the vote for the Democrats." I'm thinking, "How jaded can the party be when this is how you behave?" The Republicans, they set up a Republican office in Little Haiti because they wanted to turn out the Republican vote. They had all kinds of money, all kinds of resources, and finally the Democratic Party, thinking of the folks up in DC, came them some phone lines. But how pitiful is that? I just couldn't believe it. I don't know. But you know, lessons learned.

BB: Tough lessons learned.

MC: And was it a coincidence it happened to be people of color? Hello?

BB: Yeah. Anything else about that time?

MC: Well, you know, I'll tell you what was neat was I think I had a greater appreciation. There's only been three moments in my life that I had a greater appreciation of what it meant to be a black woman living in the United States of America. It was during then because black skin, people would see black skin and they would think, "Oh, there's a black person, but these are black folks speaking Creole. They're from Haiti," but there's black Cubans too. So to be sitting in an audience where you're immediately recognized, immediately accepted as being black, but not African-American, but Haitian or Haitian-American, and seeing this incredible connection or something. And the food, oh, my gosh, the food was amazing. I don't know how many pounds I gained down there, but the food and the culture and the love, I was so blessed to be able to work there and I would go back in a skinny minute if I could. But also to see this wonderful bridge-building. People for the American Way, founded by Norman Lear, who does Archie Bunker and all that, is predominately white, but a very white progressive, but very much into bridge-building. They have a wonderful relationship with the NAACP. They founded an African-American Ministers Alliance. There was such a connection of understanding. That social change and progressive organizing, really that multiracial, multi-issue piece was so dynamic, so great, and to be there.

So that was one moment, to be in Miami and Little Haiti, but also when I went to Zimbabwe when we went to the World Council of Churches that happened. To be an African-American going to the motherland, being in Africa, and then going to West Germany

and seeing what the heck that was like as the US Army is such a predominate force there. So you almost have to put yourself in these extraordinary situations to really appreciate you and your organizing in the context of something beyond just you and those were three instances that really made me proud to be an organizer and guided about the connections.

BB: Give me just a minute here. So it seems like when you came back from Florida in 2001, it almost looks like over the next couple of years, there's this shift from you being a full-on organizer, campaign manager, to a public speaker. Was that an intentional shift?

MC: I don't know if it was. Well, it was a combination of intentionality, but it was also a way for me to make a living and not have to work as hard. It also gave me a chance to do a lot of talking about the stuff I was doing. So I think it was also maybe a way of kind of catching up with people who were inviting me to speak at all kinds of different places.

Remember I said I took that break in '99, getting a chance to rethink or think back on what I was doing, that I really felt more in position, quickly frankly, because I've always had offers to come speak here or there and I would turn it down because I'd be doing this campaign or that. But I thought, "Why not? Why not go out and have a chance to really talk about what's up, what I'm doing?" So I think it was more of the combination of that and also because I would be able to make larger chunks of money in shorter periods of time. In a very practical way, it made a lot more sense because I was ready to do that. After the 2000 elections, like everyone else, I was totally depressed. I mean, this idea of Bush for four, let alone eight, totally bummed me out. I thought it would be a good chance to also maybe slow down and not have to work like running around.

So I don't even remember what I was charging for that back then, but it could have been two hundred, four hundred, whatever, but it meant that I could go and do some public

speaking and also go in front of an audience that was basically very accepting and you knew you were there. But it gave me a chance to also do some workshops. I really liked that, taking the experience of being an organizer and being able to not only do a public speech, but then always offering to do a workshop or a panel or whatever, and having the chance to interact with other organizers or people interested. That was neat. I really enjoyed that; so I did a lot of that, quite a bit of it.

BB: Well, let me read a few of the things that you did and then if there are some workshops in any of these that really stand out for you, that you want to talk about, that'd be great. So you were the keynote speaker at Northwestern University's LGBT week in Evanston, Illinois in May of 2001. You were a presenter at the National Center for Lesbian Rights Twenty-Fourth Anniversary Dinner in San Francisco, in California. I bet that was fun for you to get to go back to San Francisco in June of 2001. Then you were a facilitator for the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence conference in Orlando also in June of 2001. Wow, that was quite a month for you. And also a panelist for the National Association of Black and White Men Together in New Orleans. So do any of those--?

MC: The interesting thing in Florida, that was actually a SONG event that Southerners on New Ground was invited to. That was extraordinary because it meant I got to go back to Florida. It was 2001, right? I got to go back to Florida, but what was interesting about that was the reason why SONG was asked to participate in that—it was myself, it was Pam McMichael, it was Kim Diehl, who came on staff, I guess it was 2001, yes, was she among staff?—and they were asking SONG to come because this whole concept of domestic violence in the state of Florida, like North Carolina, they have chapters by county, and they were trying to find out what's the connection the kind of violence against women

individually, but then violence against women in terms of institutions, and because SONG had this connecting of these kinds of issues, that they thought it'd be interesting to come in and try to do a day's worth of workshops and integrate some conversation and some dialogue about what is violence against women? And then when we really began to make the connection that economics has a lot to do with violence against women, especially if you're either poor or lower middle-class, because if you're living in a household and you're having family disputes because of money, which ended up being a lot of what it is, then maybe we should be looking at why aren't women making money. So we were trying to make it institutional economic injustice, the way that institution violence against women injustice, and it was just fascinating.

What I found, and this happened in North Carolina too, getting real about it, a lot of women of color were sitting in that room who were working in the antiviolence movement, but almost ninety-nine percent of the directors were white women with degrees. So one of the issues that came up was how do we begin to be more honest and more real and more equal about the very people who are actually more impacted by domestic violence being the faces and the voices of those who are running this movement? And that has been out there for a long time and once again, we saw it in Florida and not long ago I did it over here with the North Carolina Coalition, same thing.

BB: Against Domestic Violence.

MC: Yeah, same thing. It goes to the heart, I think, of this issue of either the professionalization of organizing in terms of the antiviolence movement and we're all of a sudden, either because of contracts or you're going out to get funding and then one of the requirements is you have to have a degree to be a director—well, who does that leave out?—

versus peer or who knows realistically could be sitting in those positions, so how that impacts certain of these movements that we're involved in for equality and justice. But look at the have and have-not based on the criteria and who's making those judgments in terms of foundations and where the money's coming from, state agencies or private funding. So that was great. We had a great time doing it, but it was like one of those "hmm" moments.

BB: Then the National Association of Black and White Men Together in New Orleans, tell me about what that group is. In 2003 in fact, they awarded you a lifetime achievement award.

MC: Yes, they did. This is a great group. Well, what's interesting, I think I said way early on in my interview, I love this concept of "Don't mourn, organize! If there's a need, fill it." The reality is that with gay men, there's black gay men and there's white gay men, and there's black gay men and white gay men who want to be together, and so the idea of forming an organization, a National Association of Black and White Men Together, literally says that this is an organization of white and black interracial couples. They said, "Why don't we find some infrastructure that allows us to be an organization?" It started out as a very kind of social organization, someplace where interracial couples could meet and at conferences and whatever they would do. Maybe they didn't realize it, but the fact that they had an interracial setting meant that a lot of (24:07) came with that, not only gay men being gay men, but black and gay men together, come on.

BB: Black and white gay men.

MC: Black and white gay men together, yeah, so it loads up all kinds of issues and concerns. What I loved about it, they invited me and I said, "Well, I thought you said this was black and white men together?" "Yeah, but we invite everyone." "But your name doesn't

say that.” I remember I said, “But your name doesn’t really imply that.” They said, “Well, yeah, we need to be implicit or explicit when we say ‘black and white men together.’ Anyone is welcome to come. This just happens to be the focus of what we talk about and we’ve invited lesbians before, but Mandy, you’re the only one who wants to keep coming.” I had been going for years and had loved this group because I said to them—the first year I went was down in Dallas, I’ve got something. Do you have a picture?

BB: Yeah.

MC: I want to show you something.

BB: Sure, I’d love to.

MC: This is amazing.

BB: I’m taking a picture of Mandy’s meticulously organized kitchen.

MC: What I’m going to share with you is an example of how personal friendships turn into amazing alliances. I know a lot of people because of my organizing and one of the people I met was out of Dallas, Texas, and this guy I met as a gay man who was active in the National Association of Black and White Men Together. And he said, “Mandy, our local chapter is going to organize this year’s convention. Would you like to come down?” And I said, “Yeah, I’ll be more than glad to come down to Dallas.” They do these conventions where there’s workshops, there’s board meetings, and on Saturday night, they always hold this big annual banquet in which they award people for different things, and when I walk into the room, these were on the every single table and I said, “I’m bring this back home. I’m going to keep it forever.” This is the very tabletop thing they had, cowboy hat, whatever, and I can’t remember what year that was I went. Every year I go, on certain memory years, I’ll

bring this with me just to remind people who are new to Black and White Men Together. I've been going all these years. But this is it.

BB: Describe it.

MC: It's a cowboy hat combination fake plant. What are these things? I don't even know what these are. But there is a purple flower with green shoots coming out of it. It's a beautiful not-real plant, but it's a very fancy kind of hat made out of, I don't know, what is this?

BB: It's like ceramic.

MC: Ceramic, yeah, big D Dallas. Anyway, when I went to the first one, all of a sudden, because I kept on coming, some guy said, "Well, Mandy, you've been coming every year for all these years. Have you thought about maybe wanting to become a member?" Saying that to me kind of off-the-cuff, because they knew they were going to award me my lifetime membership. I think it was in Key West maybe, Key West, Florida. I haven't gone the last couple of years, but I love this organization because I said to them, "You are sitting in a room which people have been striving for." Every group I go to, "How do we get more people of color?" I said, "You're sitting here with it. It's built-in: Black and White Men Together." I started crying because I thought, "And you're all sitting here kind of fretting about who we are and what we're doing and I'm saying, 'Look around the room, look at y'all.'" And they have issues, but I'm thinking, "You are just being honest about who you are, what you want, and what you're trying to get accomplished." Now I think they just had their twenty-fifth anniversary year and they're still going. It's amazing.

BB: And you started crying.

MC: Well, because I was just overwhelmed because I'm thinking, "All the work that a lot of us do to strive for this sort of multiracial, inclusive work and visibility and because of the sheer nature of your organization, Black and White Men Together, it's just right there; I'm looking right at it." And I'm thinking, "How many groups would just give an arm and a leg to be sitting in a room with this much diversity?" It happens so rarely and yet I know that there are issues, but I'm thinking, "Sometimes it's right in front of you and you don't realize it and maybe someone else from the outside has to come, a black lesbian, and say to you, 'Thank you. You're doing great work and look at you, look at the stuff you're doing.'" And it's just a great organization. I love this group.

BB: It's like, "Here's a mirror and you're beautiful and I'm moved. Here you are."

MC: Yeah. So that's my other show and tell.

BB: Yeah, show and tell time. Then that same month, good grief, Mandy, that June of 2001 was a kicker for you—oh, no, this is 2003 now. So you were a panelist for the fifth annual National Organizers Alliance conference in Sonoma, California. Can you tell me about NOA?

MC: Yeah, here again, "Don't mourn, organize! If there's a need, fill it." This concept, first of all, is you think about this moment, one of the major dramatic shifts happened when a lot of people who were now being willing to fund people, individuals, organizations, to do work. So this idea of volunteerism moved from that to let's get around full-time. It made a huge impact. What we realized was a lot of us as organizers didn't have any health care, didn't have health insurance, didn't have any pension, and a lot of us are individuals not working in businesses. So a wonderful woman out of DC who's connected with labor, Kim Fellner, put the call out and she was trying to gather up people she knew to

think, “What would happen if we could find some way to bring a lot of organizers together to have a meeting to talk about some kind of a national alliance or a national network or something of all of us who are individuals, and pool our resources and see what would happen with that?”

Well, I happened to be one of the people she called and a number of southerners, in addition to all people from around the country, we had a meeting up in DC, in her apartment up in Washington, DC, and that became the basis of what is now the National Organizers Alliance, whose main purpose is to network organizers, but to have a pension fund because if anything happened to us as we get older, where do we go, what kind of money? And they started pooling their resources and it has raised quite a bit of money. They don't have collective or group health insurance, but it was a way to bring a lot of organizers together. They do an annual conference every year. They have a website. They have a publication called “The Ark,” like NOA, NOA's Ark.

There again, I was in on the very beginning of that. While she's no longer connected with it as a staff member, she was one of the one's who was instrumental in getting it started.

I can't remember how old it is now. So that was the beginning of it and there's been conferences, gatherings. They've done a lot of research, background, whatever, but it's a great option for people who don't have individual pension plans. I wish they would get on some kind of health care thing. I think I want to talk with them about that, but they do have that. And Cathy Howell, who used to be with the AFL-CIO here in North Carolina, is working as their field staff and she's out there living in Wilmington, North Carolina. They still have an office in DC. So I was glad to be a part of that, the beginning of that, as well.

BB: When you say you want to talk about the health care piece, do you mean you want to talk about it for the interview or you want to work on issues—

MC: I would like to think if NOA could find a way, because apparently to get health insurance there's all these different rules and regulations, and I don't know if Noah, the National Organizer's Alliance, would be in a position where they could maybe be able to offer low-cost health insurance for a lot of organizers. I can't afford it; I have none. When I left Southerners on New Ground, I have no health insurance, and there's a lot of us out there like that. I, for one, would like to get involved in some activism around that. So if NOA had its pension plan, could NOA even think about or I'd like to have a conversation, could they be involved in some kind of a health care situation in which people could sign up through them or something. I don't know if it's even doable, but that's what I meant. I'd like to talk to NOA about that possibility.

BB: What would you do if you were to get really sick?

MC: I don't know. I'd be like everyone else. I have no idea. All I know is that up here at Durham General, which is now partnering or I guess really tied in with Duke—you know what the sad reality is? People, first of all, they wait until they're so sick because they can't afford to go. By the time they go, sometimes it's either too late or you're too far gone. And I don't know what I would do. I had to go up there when I did have health insurance for a finger that I cut, but if anything happened to me physically, that'd be the only place I know is to go to Durham General Hospital, but that's connected with Duke and they're not free. But I mean, I don't know what I'd do. Or a clinic. I don't know. I have not a clue and that scares me. I don't know what other people are doing. I'm a single person. What if you have kids? I

have no idea how people are surviving out there, none, but I want to be more involved in this health care issue, definitely.

BB: So are you doing okay?

MC: Mmm hmm.

BB: In September of 2001, you became a consultant for the Freedom to Marry Project in Boston, Massachusetts. Who did you know and how did you get connected to that?

MC: That really all circled back around to my work with the Human Rights Campaign. Evan Wolfson, who at that point when I was working with the Human Rights Campaign Fund and being the liaison with the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, Evan Wolfson at that point was a lawyer with LAMDA Legal Defense and Education Fund out of New York. It was he who was one of the early, early on pioneers of this whole marriage equality discussion. In 2001, he set up a meeting at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, invited other groups from DC to come to hear some initial conversation about the fact that marriage was going to end up being a major front-burner issue in the gay and lesbian movement, and I went to that very first meeting. I've known Evan. I went to the first meeting. I remember sitting down and telling him, I said, "Evan, I'm with you one hundred percent because you know why? When you talk about marriage equality, who is dealing with this before you all, meaning us, gay? It was called interracial marriage." So a lot of us got it really quick and I said, "That's why I'm sitting at this table, because the parallels between the struggle with interracial marriage and the arguments they used about that are the exact same ones they're using around marriage equality. So I'm on board with you," and that's how that all happened.

Well, years later on, Evan left LAMDA and started his own group called Freedom to Marry and said he was trying to find a state with any pending legislation and/or stuff around it, and the only state that was doing that was where? Massachusetts. So he said, “Mandy, you’re not doing anything after the 2001 elections. So would you be willing to come up and do some work specifically around people of color and try to do some bridge-building between the different groups that were working on marriage equality up in Massachusetts?” So that’s what I did. I got signed on and was a consultant for him up there. It was great. It was wonderful.

BB: How long were you there?

MC: I think I want to say I did it for like five months, five or six months stretched out. One of the first things that really caught my eye, because Boston was the only one, I mean Massachusetts was the only one, but another organization that was wonderful to work with was GLAD, Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, a statewide legal organization who had seven defendant couples that were going to test whether or not they could have full marriage equality in the state of Massachusetts. Fortunately, to their credit and they knew it, they had two interracial couples. So I knew there was a black lesbian and a black gay man and that was the basis for us to have our first ever people of color meeting around marriage equality in the state of Massachusetts in Roxbury, which is predominately black, Roxbury, Massachusetts. And I was honored and privileged and whatever to have played a role in that.

You might have heard that a couple of days ago, the state of Massachusetts, the antimarriage force has tried to push to see whether or not they could challenge this. It had been on the books for three or four years now and the antimarriage folks failed and now marriage equality sits full force in the state of Massachusetts.

BB: It's legal for gay folks to get married.

MC: It's legal, yeah. So to have been there for those four or five months, to have played a role in that, was great. I got to work with groups, like I said, the Massachusetts Religious Coalition for Marriage Equality, Freedom to Marry, MASS Equality. Then, we didn't know what was going to happen. We just knew we needed to do that piece of work and I was willing to help do it with Evan. And five years later, I went up and picked up my Spirit of Justice award from GLAD and got to say to them, "I was just here five years ago and now we're sitting here celebrating this amazing event. I just feel honored that I was able to play a little role in that." It was cool. That's the thing, you never know.

BB: Yeah. Well, so you were in Massachusetts on September eleventh, 2001?

MC: No, actually I wasn't. What was happening, because I was doing consulting work, I had come back down to Durham from one particular thing I was doing up there and I was about ready to go up to New York for a meeting with Evan at his office, and I had just come back down from Massachusetts or somewhere and I walked into my house on September eleventh. It was going to be a meeting that weekend. I turn on the TV and I'm watching the horror of what happened on September eleventh. I couldn't believe it and I couldn't reach Evan. He was in San Francisco. Because the meeting, I think, was going to happen that upcoming weekend and I said, "There's no way I'm going." And he said, "Well, no one's going to New York." But I couldn't believe it on September eleventh and it was all tied in with me doing that work up in Massachusetts.

To this day, I couldn't believe it and of course, I'm saying, "Evan, all the people I knew in New York, you couldn't get through." All the lines were down. I'm sitting here watching in

absolute horror and I never did make that meeting. The meeting never happened because of September eleventh. Yeah, unbelievable.

BB: In what ways did September eleventh affect your work most blatantly?

MC: Well, if I'm not mistaken, other than Pearl Harbor, it was the first time this country ever had been hit here. But the thing that got me was when I walked into my back room and I turned the TV on, I was wondering, "What am I watching?" And I saw the first building get hit and I thought, like everyone else, a plane had just strayed or something. But then the more I watched, it became very clear and then that second one hit and then when the first one went down, all I could think about was all those people in those buildings. I had never been in the World Trade Center. I had walked by it, under it, near it. Everyone's seen it. And I couldn't believe it. I was crying. I was just beyond--. I was calling my friends. I was commiserating. I was calling folks in Boston. Because when we found out that the first plane had flown in from Boston, I was calling Sue Hayden and my friends, "What are you hearing up there?" Because I was just up in Massachusetts; I mean, that was the other thing. I had just been there. I didn't fly in, but--. I think it took me a couple of days to really understand and grasp it, and then when you heard that the plane had gone on into the Pentagon, then we heard it was going to go--. I said, "Is this the world coming to the end right now?" I was stunned.

Then the next thing I remember is George W. Bush all of a sudden talking about going to take care of this situation and now we are five years later in the fucking Iraq War and all because he had misinformation, they purposely did it. But at the time, I don't know what was going on. But look what's happened since then. It's an outrage. Yeah. That blew my mind. It sure had to blow yours.

BB: Yeah. Did September eleventh have anything to do with why you took a sabbatical in early 2002, in February 2002?

MC: No, not really. I must have been going through different phases of what I was doing and also I think I had other options. I was doing more consulting stuff and financially felt that I really had more money or enough money to not have to feel like I had to go to a “job” job at the moment. I think I was doing a whole lot more public speaking then too. It wasn’t that. I think that 1999 break really helped me more than I realized, really had me thinking more carefully and more thoughtfully of my future work and when I could take breaks, take breaks. Also financially, there’s other ways in which I could make a living and not have to do a 10 to 5 job. I think that really had more to do with it than anything else. I’m trying to remember.

BB: In your consulting, what services have you provided? What do you focus on?

MC: The stuff I like to do the best when I was doing my earlier consulting was literally taking on positions of either campaign manager or director or coordinator. I felt very comfortable to go into a short-term, it starts here and ends here, here are the things you need to do. And because I love to, I’m a very people-oriented person, it didn’t bother me to pick up the phone and call and do meetings and what-not. So more than likely, I guess the kind of people who were calling me would call me on that level. So it would be like, “I want to give you a permanent job.” So when Evan said, “We want you to come in and help coordinate this for five months,” I said, “Not a problem. I feel good about that.”

BB: So you’d be an independent contractor for a lot of campaigns?

MC: Yes, absolutely.

BB: And then when did you found Mandy Carter Consulting?

MC: It's after my 2006 break because—one quick (43:14) thing. After I did 2001, 2002, somewhere in there, I took some time off, but also then I was also getting a little frustrated about being the only person in my home. I like to work with other people. So I was kind of getting to that point. “It might be neat to get a regular ‘job’ job,” I thought. I was ready to kind of rethink that and fortunately, I got the word that SONG, Kim Diehl was ready to move down to Miami with her partner to take a job, and they had a position opening at Southerners on New Ground, which was a walkable distance in downtown Durham. So when I heard that, I said, “Ooh, that'd be great. I've never worked at SONG; I've been a founder of it. And it's downtown. It's perfect. I'm ready to take that kind of a local thing.” So I applied for it and got it in 2003. So 2002 was a combination of I'd like to go maybe work again locally, whatever, and the opportunity just happened to present itself and I got the job. But after doing that for three years, being the only person there for that long, that turned out to be the case, and it was just every day. It was like three years, we did a tremendous amount of work, but I said, “I'm tired,” and I got pooped again and decided in 2006 to take a year off. That's when I decided, in 2006, because other friends of mine were doing consulting now, independent contracting. I said, “Well, let me try that.” So this is my second year of trying that—first year, 2006.

BB: So to wrap up and do a final piece here, give me a minute to get to the-- I just love this, that you really are a living legacy. I know that's probably embarrassing to hear—

MC: Yeah.

BB: But it's just so funny to, well. You've been mentioned in a lot of books, mostly related to lesbian and gay people of color in the United States. I just want to read a few of them and I'm going to ask you: are any of these particularly meaningful or is there a story

that's fun for you behind one of these? The book edited by Phillip Sherman and Samuel Bernstein, *Uncommon Heroes: A Celebration of Heroes and Role Models for Lesbian and Gay Americans*. That's in '94. Gale Publications in '95 published a book called *Contemporary Black Biographies*. In '96, Keith Boykin, your friend, wrote a book, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America*. In '96, *Off the Rag: Lesbians Writing on Menopause*, what a great title, edited by Lee Lynch and Akia Woods. Then Suzanne Pharr's '97 book, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*. Then a book called *The Reader's Companion to US Women's History*, edited by Barbara Smith, Gloria Steinem, William Mankiller, and Gwendolyn Mink. That was in 1998. Then in 2000, *This is What Lesbian Looks Like*, edited by Kris Kleindienst. So any stories about some of those?

MC: I actually have all of them. I actually have to update that now because I have like four more. I've never written a book because I'm not a writer, but I've always either been added, like when you write a piece and it gets in, what do you call that?

BB: A contributor?

MC: Yeah, a contributor or when people focus. I don't know what happened, but all of a sudden, I think because I was out there, I started getting calls from people and I think this happens naturally: "Well, Mandy, we know you've been out there doing this work and we respect your work. We're going to do this book. Would you be interested in--?" Every year, there seemed to be someone else calling like that and at first I was kind of shy about it: "Well, what can I tell you? What do I know?" But the first one, Sherman, what was neat about that is that was in '94 and I don't know what the particular reason was, there was something about that year being an anniversary of something, and I got to know Phillip and so we did the book and then from there because people saw that, it was almost like a—

BB: Snowball.

MC: Snowball, someone saw that, then they saw that, whatever. But I know everyone on there. I think the two that really mean the most to me, not that any of them don't, but the ones that I would say there's stories, let me put it that way, is the *Contemporary Black Biographies*. That one is pivotal. There used to be a book that would come out every year that would focus on individuals, groups, anything black, with Gale Publications, and I got in there because they wanted to make sure they wanted to include gay and lesbian activists because they were covering the black community. So I was honored when they called and said, "Can we include you as a list of one of the people we can highlight?" But there's people like Barbara Smith, I mean, there's a huge number of them now, Keith Boykin, whatever. The good news is I'm still in it. I just recently did Google it because actually next year is my fortieth anniversary year of activism, so I'm going to do a huge big thing around that, including updating my bio, but also going on the road and organizing, and I wanted to see what was around and it's still there. So to have that be a book that includes myself as this growing number of black gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender activists is unbelievable. It says it all.

I think in Keith's book, it's neat because he did this, and I have it, this book, when he was trying to write about people who were instrumental and/or pivotal in terms of organizing and his work. It was just nice to be acknowledged because he's a writer, he writes books; I'm not. But to have been included in that, I thought was like, "Oh wow, this is cool." So anyway, those are the two stories I can share.

*Off the Rag*, I think Lee, she's a great writer, has always been a great lesbian writer, and she is just doing something that really indicated the changing dynamics or demographics

of the lesbian community. More of us were turning older and having menopause. So she said, "Can I share your experience as a black lesbian?" I said, "Absolutely," because I knew her. So a lot of these are all because you know someone who writes and therefore blah blah blah.

BB: And then all these magazines, *Ms. Magazine*, *Essence*, *Out*, *The Advocate*, *Etcetera*, *Third Force*, (49:42) magazine.

MC: Well, a lot of that also came because all these are regular publications. So oftentimes I would list those only because they would carry a story about story something I was doing or something SONG was doing or whatever, and that just meant there was visibility that way. And of course, the gay papers, you're in there just because you did something.

BB: Good stuff.

MC: Now the one TV thing I'll say that I will treasure forever, there was one radio and one TV thing which I loved, the Phil Donahue Show, which used to be like everyone was on the Phil Donahue, and because he wanted to do a particular story about this idea of being gay in the black community and gay people coming out against you, fortunately, myself and Nadine Smith, who is a black lesbian out of Tampa, Florida, got to be on the show because it was on the heels of Cincinnati, Ohio in 1993 when we had that campaign and the show didn't happen then, but we were talking about that. And I got on the show and I got to meet this black minister who was in the pocket of the white right and I remember Nadine and I were in the green room back at the Phil Donahue Show and they do serve you food. It's not green, that's not the room; it's not green, but anyway. So we met Rev. K. Z. Smith from Cincinnati, Ohio. He was sitting in there with his Bible and Nadine and I walked in and we introduced ourselves and I said, "Reverend, you need to know that my name is Mandy Carter. I was

sitting in the city of Cincinnati when you played such a vital role—and I used the term “disappointing vital role”—in what happened with that campaign.” And he refused to shake my hand or Nadine’s, he wouldn’t touch us, but he did say, “The Lord (51:30)” or whatever it was.

BB: The Lord what?

MC: Like the Lord forgives you. And this is a black minister and I remember Nadine and I said, “We want to be respectful,” but I said, “Do you have any idea what you’ve done?” So we were all on the show, but I remember that and that was one of those moments where at least for the first time I remember, on the Phil Donahue Show, a black lesbian standing up and saying, “We challenge the minister,” the black minister, and also made the point that not all black ministers are antigay, whatever it was. But I remember that. That was a highlight for me, being on the Phil Donahue Show.

The other one was being on C-SPAN. C-SPAN has this show, it’s on still to this day, it’s all about youth. I think it’s called Close Up. My friend, Alexander Robinson, who is now the executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, at that point was with the ACLU. He was scheduled to go on and he called and said, “Mandy, I don’t want to go on this show. Do you want to go on C-SPAN and talk about what it means to be gay and youth and all that?” I said, “Sure.” And I got to go on C-SPAN and I got the mug to prove it.

BB: The mug?

MC: Yes.

BB: Coffee mug.

MC: Yes, they give you a C-SPAN coffee mug. And I was on there and I was on with, of all people, it was going to be the head of what’s the group up in DC? It’s Family

Research Council. I was going to be on with the director, but he backed out, so they got a replacement for him. I can't think of his name now, but he and I were on there for like ninety minutes. It was great. I have the tape of it too. I remember thinking, "So this is what this is about." It's not only doing those individual get out there and do all this organizing, but it's also understanding the role of media, being poised, being okay about saying what you need to say, making your points, that's the opposition, and the importance of a show like C-SPAN, and thinking media does have a role. And I ended up doing a lot more of that, but thinking those were the two memorable, "yeah, okay, this is good, learn how to do this" kinds of thing on C-SPAN and Phil Donahue.

BB: It seems like you're just a natural at it. You really are cool as a cucumber. I'll never forget this time when we were holding a press conference with the North Carolinians Against War in the early days of what became the Peace and Justice Coalition. We're in Raleigh. We're holding a press conference about the march and rally on February fourth.

MC: That's right.

BB: And Chris Kromm is leading it from the Institute for Southern Studies and you're there and I'm just in the audience during the press conference. And at one point, one reporter says, "How will you respond if the weapons inspectors do find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? Will it change your opinion?" Everyone was kind of quiet for a minute, a bit of a tough question, and Chris goes, "I don't know. Let's ask Bridgette Burge."

MC: (laughs)

BB: Of North Carolina Peace and Justice Coalition. First of all, I can't do the media. I'm awful at it. So my face turns bright red and I was like, "I don't know." That's what I said: "I don't know. I don't know what Peace Action would say." Then you jumped in and

saved the day and you were just cool as a cucumber, said, “Well, I’ll answer that.” I felt this huge gush of love for you. (laughs)

MC: Good old Chris: “Let’s ask Bridgette. Bridgette, what do you think?”

BB: “How about Bridgette Burge to talk about this?” So the damn television cameras turned. “I don’t know.” I was just so mortified, but there you are saving the day with your excellent media skills.

MC: Yeah, it’s a trip too. Wasn’t there more? Were we not announcing the fact that we were--? I know Rania, wasn’t Rania a part? Didn’t we two of them?

BB: Rania Masri was there, yeah. We had a couple of press conferences.

MC: Right, and it was before we did the big action on the State House.

BB: That’s right, with The World Says No to War, February fourth, I guess.

MC: I still think that was one of the best actions to this day.

BB: It was, eight thousand people at least in Raleigh. Let’s talk about that next time.

MC: Okay, let’s do it.

BB: That was really powerful.

MC: That was. But you know what was funny? I just saw Patrick—

BB: O’Neill?

MC: Yeah.

BB: Well, let’s stop for today.

MC: Okay, yeah, let’s stop for the day.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

Transcribed by Emily Baran. January 2008.

