

This interview is part of the **Southern Oral History Program** collection at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. Other interviews from this collection are available online through [www.sohp.org](http://www.sohp.org) and in the **Southern Historical Collection** at **Wilson Library**.

**U.16 Long Civil Rights Movement:  
The Women's Movement in the South**

Interview U-0473  
Betty Anderson  
15 August 2010

Abstract – p. 2  
Field Notes – p. 3  
Transcript – p. 4

## ABSTRACT – BETTY ANDERSON

Betty Anderson grew up in Scott County, Tenn. in the 1940s. In the 1970s, she became involved with Save Our Cumberland Mountains, a social justice organization that addressed strip-mining and other community issues in Tennessee and Kentucky. She became a leader in the organization and eventually served as its president. The interview begins with Anderson describing her childhood in Smoky Junction, Tenn., where her father was a coal miner and her mother was a homemaker who ran the farm and raised eleven children. She then talks about her siblings and children and provides brief biographical information on each of them. Anderson tells the story of learning about strip-mining and the environmental justice organization Save Our Cumberland Mountains. She then describes various campaigns and memorable meetings that she participated in. She discusses how she became a politically-minded person and the influence of her father's union activities. She discusses her career path, her job as a secretary, and how she perceived the women's movement. She then talks in depth about the important roles that women played in Save Our Cumberland Mountains. This interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program's project to document the women's movement in the American South.

## FIELD NOTES – BETTY ANDERSON

(compiled August 16, 2010)

Interviewee: Betty Anderson

Interviewer: Jessica Wilkerson

Interview Date: August 15, 2010

Location: A nursing home in Huntsville, TN

THE INTERVIEWEE. Betty Anderson grew up in Scott County, TN in the 1940s. She graduated from Norma High School in 1953, and she attended Berea College for two years. She worked for many years as administrator for insurance companies. In the 1970s, she was involved with Save Our Cumberland Mountains, a social justice organization that addressed strip-mining and other community issues in Tennessee and Kentucky. She became a leader in the organization and eventually served as its president.

THE INTERVIEWER. Jessica Wilkerson is a graduate student in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill, currently conducting research for her dissertation which will explore social justice activism in southern Appalachia, with special attention to women's activism, from the late 1960s through the 1990s.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. When I arrived at Ms. Anderson's room in the nursing home, she first wanted to show me the big billboard of family photos that she has posted. She told me about each person on the board, including her father, her two sons—one of whom passed away in 2007—her grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren—one of whom passed away in a tragic accident this year. We then made our way into the physical therapy room, where it would be relatively quiet. A door to the courtyard was in this room, and the door squeaked badly, so that may be a factor in the recording. Also, there were a couple of interruptions, one from another resident and one with the nursing home aids, with whom Anderson needed to speak. There is one last interruption when I had to reload the recorder. After the interview, Ms. Anderson talked about her relationship with her sons' father, she discussed her health problems and kidney dialysis, and she shared that she thought people had particularly liked her as a leader in SOCM because she was a single, working mom who stood up for herself. Lastly, just before I left, Ms. Anderson said, "The one thing you didn't ask me is how I like living in a nursing home." We talked about how she is on the residency board, as well as some of the problems she has with living there.

Interviewee: Betty Anderson

Interviewer: Jessica Wilkerson

Interview date: August 15, 2010

Location: Huntsville, Tennessee at the nursing home where Anderson lives

Length: 1 disc, approximately 90 minutes

Jessica Wilkerson: This is Jessie Wilkerson, and I'm with Betty Anderson in Huntsville, Tennessee. And the date is August 15, 2010. So Betty, I wanted to start by asking you about your childhood. Where did you grow up, and what was your family like?

Betty Anderson: Okay. I grew up in Smoky Junction, lived there till I graduated high school. I was the oldest of eleven children. My daddy worked in the coal mines, and my mother was a homemaker. She married very young, had me the next year after she was married. So we lived on a small farm, and we had the usual animals: a cow and a horse, chickens. From time to time, we would raise a hog to have. My mother always had a big garden and she canned a lot, and later on when we got electricity, to Smoky in the mid-fifties, she was able to have a freezer. And so it was easier, you know, to freeze some of the stuff that she grew. My daddy became disabled and had several ailments. The main one is emphysema brought on by smoking and black lung working in the coal mines. And he died in 1968.

My mother is ninety, be ninety-one in December. Still lives by herself. We do have a person who goes in and cooks for her, and cleans now, during the day. But she stays by herself at night. She's quite independent. And she's beginning to break a little

## Betty Anderson

bit; she's getting pretty forgetful. That's why we have somebody because we're afraid she'll set the house on fire. 'Cause she's, a couple times she left things on the stove, forgot about them. And so that's when we decided to have somebody go in and help her. And I've always been real close to all my family. There's only four girls left now. All the others have been deceased. There was seven boys and four girls. And so [pause]. I guess that's about my childhood, that's probably about the only thing--.

JW: What was it like growing up with eleven children in the family?

BA: It was very interesting. I was always known as the lazy one. Because I played basketball, started playing basketball when I was in the seventh grade. My mother said she learned her lesson with me. She had worked real hard in her home. She had a bunch of brothers to wash clothes for her on the washboard. And she always said in her mind, if she had a child, she would not make it work like she had to work. But she learned her lesson real fast with me. When she started having other girls, the other girls came, there was me and then two boys and then Fay, my first sister. And by the time Fay came along and got to be a teenager, she was taught how to cook and how to clean, [Laughter] and how to do all sorts of things. And I never did learn that at home much.

Now I was a pretty good babysitter. I would take care of the smaller ones while she went and worked in the garden. The biggest thing I ever did on the farm, I think, was pick blackberries. We all picked blackberries every summer. And of course my boys went to work--my brothers went to work very young. Charles was sixteen when he started driving a truck. But all of us graduated from high school except two. And they quit in junior year, something like that. For whatever reason, I don't know.

## Betty Anderson

All of us did fairly well, education-wise. One of my sisters became a beautician and she was her own boss until she got tired of it, got burned out. And my baby sister went to business school in Knoxville. Atrice went to business school and then went to Maryland and lived with Fay and her husband, worked for Nationwide Insurance. And she didn't like that at all, so she came back to Knoxville and lucked up and got a job with the state, and worked there for thirty-four years, did quite well.

And Ellie lives in Georgia. And she worked in one of the carpet mills down there for twenty-seven years. Then she got real fed up with it, and so she quit. She went to work, at the urging of my sister Fay, as a caregiver for elderly people. And loved it. But four years ago, she fell and hurt her back. She hasn't been able to work since. Of course Fay is now dead, but she did that for a number of years. She was an excellent--. She was the one girl that didn't finish high school. She married young, had three children, and she began, I don't know how many years ago, working with the elderly. And she was marvelous. She worked with mostly Alzheimer's patients, and did a super job at it. At her urging, Ellie started working with the elderly down in Georgia, and really enjoyed it. And said she wished she'd have done it years earlier.

Joan, the baby, went to business school. Then she married right out of business school, and she and her husband spent twenty-two and a half years in the Army. Half of that time in Germany. And then they came back, and he went to work when he retired for the service. He went to work for the state of Tennessee at Brushy Mountain Prison. And he lived ten years and he died in heart surgery five years ago. She works down in Harriman for a company--I don't know what it's called now. It used to be Chase. They make medical files for hospitals and doctors' offices and that sort of thing. And she is

**Betty Anderson**

their purchasing agent; she purchases all their supplies. She got this job because of her employment; one time he was in the service, she worked for the government. Like on the base hospitals, and learned how to buy supplies and that sort of thing. So she's got a pretty good job. We've always been real close, the family has. We've gone through a lot of hardship, a lot of sickness, but we always bounced back.

JW: So what was Smoky Junction like?

BA: It's a very rural area. When I grew up, we had two little grocery stores there, and the Tennessee Railroad goes up through Smoky to haul coal out of that region. Goes on into Anderson County. [Of] course it's not being used now, but from time to time they'll open up some coal mines up there and they'll haul coal out. We played softball, always very active. We had two churches in the community. There was many more people there when I grew up than there are now. Because all of the young people have had to leave in order to get jobs. So there's not a third of the people there now as there was when I was growing up.

JW: So did most of the people rely on the mines for their work?

BA: The mines. A few of them worked in Oneida, but even most of that is gone now. Scott County has the highest unemployment rate in the state. It's running about twenty percent. And a lot of people go from here to Anderson County and Industrial Park--I know I have a nephew or grand-nephew, a couple of them, that works over in that area--for Food Lion and some of those different companies that are in that Eagle Bend Industrial Park. There's just not much to do around here now. If you don't work for the county political system and the courthouse, or the school system, there's just nothing to do.

**Betty Anderson**

My boy Randy works for Mayfield's Dairy in Knoxville. He's in his twenty-seventh year. He came back over here and bought some property in Smoky, because he always said he wanted to come home. His wife's from Minnesota. And Mayfield's has a station up near the Kentucky border, in Winfield. So he drives forty-five minutes to work, and he delivers milk in the city of Oneida, and he goes to Williamsburg, Kentucky twice a week.

And Scott came back over here when he was eighteen, right out of school, went to work in the mines. Worked in the mines for twenty years. And then he started driving coal trucks, and that's what he was doing when he died. He had a massive heart attack four years ago, and died four days later. They both have done, did quite well, you know. Even though they--.

Randy has animals. He has horses, goats, chickens, ducks, dogs. They've got some cats at the barn I think, now. But [his wife] loves animals. She was raised on a farm in Minnesota. She came from a fairly good-sized family. Her daddy was a truck driver, and her mother ran a restaurant. She worked on a turkey farm when she was in high school, in order to buy her school clothes, she said. She is one of the most talented women that I've ever known. She loves animals, and she has two sons. Now she has a grandchild, one little girl. She came to Knoxville with her husband that worked at UT [University of Tennessee], a hospital in some research, technical thing, I don't know exactly what he did. But that's why they came to Tennessee. And her boys were raised up in Knoxville. One went back to Minnesota, and the other one now lives in Harrogate, works in Morristown. And he's working to become a commercial helicopter pilot. That's what he's studying and working to. And his wife is a RN nurse. And the reason



**Betty Anderson**

they're back in Harrogate, that's where she's from, but they came back. She's going to go to nurse practitioner school at LMU [Lincoln Memorial University].

Both of my boys did quite well. Scott has two sons, and then the two stepdaughters. One of his sons is about to become a daddy, so the Anderson name will continue. And the other one, he's not married. He lives with a girl that has three children that he has sort of adopted. He works over in North Carolina for a trailer company. And Jeffrey is working in Washington right now, for a contractor. They're doing something to a sewer project at that Army base right behind the White House. He has worked on railroads for years, but he just took this job, said he'd been trying to get it for three years. So I don't know much about it. Their next job is going to be at the tunnel going under Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. They'll be working on that, redoing that tunnel. And the guy that's the supervisor, he's from Scott County. I don't know how he has known him, but he said, "I've been trying to get a job with him for three years." But he has worked all over, and he likes that. I don't know how he's going to be after this baby comes. He makes good money, and I don't know whether he could settle down to less money, coming back and working in Scott County, or not. We'll see.

JW: So how did you learn about Save Our Cumberland Mountains [SOCM]?

BA: Well, I came on a Friday night to my mother and stepfather. My mother remarried, five years after my daddy died, and she married a retired coal miner. Marvelous man. I went to school with his children, and knew him all my life. His wife had been dead for three years. My daddy had been dead for five years when they married, and they lived together I think nineteen years before he died. We all became quite fond of him, and the grandkids were all crazy about him, the great-grandkids. I

## Betty Anderson

went to a meeting at the Norma school where they showed a film that had been done about strip mining. [Of] course I knew about SOCM before that time, because I'd read about the work they were doing in the *News-Sentinel*. And I had two brothers; my two brothers next to me worked in strip mines. And I hated it. I was very much against it. I remember the first strip mine I saw was when I was living with my uncle and his wife in Oak Ridge, not too long after I graduated high school. We came down to the southern part of Scott County quite often, because that's where my aunt was from. And we visited her relatives down there at least one Sunday a month.

My uncle stopped the car one day down in the Coal Hill area, and he said, "I want to show you something that's going to ruin this country." And we walked maybe three hundred feet off the county road. And all of a sudden there was a fifty-foot hole in the ground. And that was the first strip mine that I had ever seen. [Of] course, that was before my brothers ever went to work in strip mining. This was in 1953, '54, somewhere along there. This hole was high full of water, and any child could have--. I remember thinking, "Any kid could run through these woods and fall in that hole and drown. And no telling how long it'd take to find them." It was my first thought of what the danger was.

Anyway, I went to a film with my stepfather. A group of miners was showing this film--well, SOCM staff was showing it, but it was being shown to a group of retired miners, UMW [United Mine Workers] workers. And we went to see it, and it was *The Stripping of Appalachia*, I think was the name of it. Billy Christopher sang a song in it. It was done by a British network. John Gaventa was involved in it. We had a discussion about strip mining after the movie was shown, and so SOCM staff, it was two women,

## **Betty Anderson**

Melanie Cook and Jane Samples, I think was her name, invited us to a SOCM meeting at Rosedale, up in Anderson County. Up near New River. We went to this meeting, it's in March of 1974. That's when I was elected secretary. I was invited to play basketball, and we had this meeting, and that's when I met Maureen [O'Connell] and several other members.

So I became secretary, and at that time we met in different communities every month. Of course we would vote on different issues, and one community heard all the details. And we voted based on staff recommendation, or discussion that came up that day, or whatever. And we might find out two or three months later that it wasn't the smartest thing to have done it the way we did; we were very unorganized in those very early days. Everything was done by the seat of our pants, more or less. [Laughter] But J.W. Bradley was the first president, and he was president for five years, and was very much opposed to strip mining. And educated himself--he was an electrician at K-25, Oak Ridge. Very smart man, very much against strip mining. He still is; he just had his eightieth birthday.

So then I traveled around to different communities every time we had a meeting. And it was places I'd never been as I was growing up, but this time I was in my thirties, I guess. Let's see, it was [19]70, say thirty-six. I was in my mid-thirties. And I went to communities that I'd never been to in my life. Like Clairfield, Elk Valley. Well, Elk Valley I'd been to because I had an aunt that lived over there. But all different communities up New River, and we had several meetings.

I remember we met up in Ford Mountain area. Two or three times, trying to get some swinging bridges that had washed out on New River, and kids couldn't get across

## **Betty Anderson**

the river to go to school. We ended up getting the National Guard from over in Knoxville to come over there and build these swinging bridges back. It only took \$1,200 worth of material to build this swinging bridge, but Anderson County couldn't find time to do it or wouldn't do it, but they did finally buy the lumber. And the Army National Guard built it. So that was a big project; it went on three or four months. Just fighting all the different permits that came up, and the overloaded trucks on all county roads. And all the counties involved, was a big project. There was pot holes from one end of the road to the other, brought on by overloaded trucks. And that was a big problem up in the area where I grew up. The roads always got real bad during the wintertime. [Of] course it was mostly deep mining when I was growing up. All the strip mining came later, after I was grown.

Getting involved with SOCM was one of the most educational things that I ever did. I had a job where I had to deal with the public, and I loved that, and I was good at it. But the things I learned working with SOCM was, you know, it was just--. Not everybody gets a chance to do that.

JW: What did you learn?

BA: Well, I learned how to facilitate meetings, I mean all the different workshops that are offered and that sort of thing. It doesn't bother me to get up and speak before a group. But I'm not good at writing things. I never was. And that's always been one of the things that I was not good at, was writing. But I just, they would give me a job to do. If they would write the materials I would memorize it or whatever. I would learn it, and I would get up and talk about it. I never had any problems with that. But just the people

**Betty Anderson**

that I met, friends that I now have that I didn't know until I was involved with SOCM. It's just invaluable to me.

I mean Mo [Maureen O'Connell], Boomer Winfrey, he was a SOCM staffer, and he's a geology major from UT, but he's never worked as a geologist, I don't think. He lives in Lake City. And he now does media consulting, and he used to be a writer. And he may still have it, I don't know if he's still doing that now or not, writing for the Lafollette Press. He lives in Lake City. That's where Maureen does her garden. He uses his garden space; it's close to the SOCM office. She lives in Jacksboro now. They're real good friends.

JW: Can you describe what it was like to be a woman, you come from a coal mining family, you have brothers who were involved in strip mining. What was that like to enter an organization that was fighting some of those issues?

BA: My oldest brother would talk to me; he and I could talk about it. He drove the big bulldozer that dozed all the coal out. That's what he did, and he was very good at it. And he and I could sit down and discuss it. In fact, he would tell me a lot of things that were going on. And my second brother, he always felt like that we were trying to take their jobs, destroy their jobs. And in a way, we were. But he and I would argue. Every time we got together it was a fight. Even though we were real close and everything else, we fought about this. And so it was [pause]. Let's see, I didn't get involved with SOCM until after my daddy died. My daddy would've been much against it, had it been going on. Well, I guess it had started some before he died. But my brothers weren't involved in it. We didn't know as much about it.

## Betty Anderson

But it was pretty hard. Some of our family fights were. And we disagreed on it a lot, and of course Charles is dead now too, but when the clear-cutting started, just a few--. He died in '96, but I remember him telling me, he said, "Sis, you thought the strip mining was bad, just wait till we get through with the clear cutting in this part of the country." He said, "It's going to be much worse than the strip mining." And it's turned out it has been, I think. Because if you go up through these woods are just stripped now, and when there's a heavy rain, the water runs down and fills the river up, fairly fast, and it didn't used to do that. See, there's nothing to hold it back now. And I remember holding that conversation with him. Not too awfully many years before he died.

And that was true with a lot of families. It was easier for me to speak out against strip mining because I lived in Knoxville. I wasn't here, where it was actually going on. And I know a lot of people resented--. I have people that don't talk to me today because of SOCM. I had one person tell me, at the funeral home one night, that he knew that SOCM had knocked him out of his \$28,000 a year job, and that he felt like I was part of it. And now he was an employee of the local funeral home. He came from a family that I had known all my life. He just didn't understand what the harm was. And strip mining did not give that many local people jobs. They're just not there. But the coal industry hands out all this information about all these people they've got working for them. Well, they don't say that half of them are in another state. Even now, there's some stripping going on on Umstead Mountain, which is maybe ten miles from here, up thataway. And I'd say that ninety percent of the employees probably come out of Kentucky. And there's very few local people. There's some local people that have trucks that haul the coal, and that's the biggest part of it. Most of them come from out of state. And it just, you know,

**Betty Anderson**

people will not admit that. When you look at where they're coming from, that's where they are.

I guess the biggest thing is learning all the things I learned while I was working as a volunteer for SOCM, was how to deal with people more. All of the public meetings we had, public hearings, always had to participate in those. And then the people I met throughout the years have really meant a lot. That's where my closest friends are now.

JW: Had you been very political before you got involved in SOCM?

BA: No. I had always--. I started voting when I was eighteen. I have missed one vote in my lifetime. And that was in Knoxville. I don't remember what year, but it was probably in the late seventies. I missed a vote, it was when Leonard Rogers was mayor, and I don't think he had any opposition. But I served on the Mountain People board, that's a local health clinic, and I got involved with that through SOCM also. And I came to Huntsville to a board meeting one night and missed the vote in the Knoxville city election. And that's the only time I missed a vote since I started voting. But my daddy was very political, and we used to discuss politics all the time. So I was always involved that way. But it was mostly from within the family, discussions.

JW: Was your daddy in a unionized mine?

BA: My daddy was a member of the UMW, Mine Worker. Very active, and he was very much a union man. And his brothers were, also.

JW: Do you think that influenced you at all, seeing--.

BA: Well, you know, I think that I learned from an early age that you had to be involved politically, or you should be. During those years, there was not much that women could do. Other than go vote, it just wasn't done. I know my mother always

**Betty Anderson**

voted. We had these political discussions; my daddy always said, he was the only person that I knew of who could read a paper and watch television and listen to all the kids around him all at the same time. [Laughter] But he was pretty good at it. He always worked in county politics. On Election Day he would work at the polls. My mother didn't, but he always discussed politics with us. The first time I remember us really listening to a presidential election was when Thomas Dewey and Roosevelt, was that who it was? Was when Roosevelt became president, and Thomas Dewey--. Was he the Republican that ran? I forgot.

JW: Yeah, I can't remember.

BA: Anyway, that's the first national election I remember. And that was about 1945. Because I was born in [19]36. But I remember hearing the discussions about when Roosevelt was elected. I think when the papers were printed that Dewey won, but actually Roosevelt did? Is that right?

JW: I vaguely know that history.

BA: Well, anyway, that's the first national election that I remember hearing talk about.

JW: Were your parents supporters of Roosevelt?

BA: Yeah. My daddy, in his early years, was a Republican, but he became a Democrat. And my mother was. This was the first time that she didn't go vote this time. She said there was so many people running, and she didn't know any of them, and that she was not going to fool with it. And we didn't encourage her to, because she's getting rather forgetful, and she's getting feeble, and we didn't push her when she said she didn't want to go vote. We just didn't say anything. But the whole family, my father's parents,



**Betty Anderson**

were politically involved. My grandfather was a deputy sheriff one time in Scott County, he and his oldest son. And my daddy was the baby of two families. My grandpa Anderson had one family; he had six kids I think. Of the first one. And then he married my grandmother and they had three children, and Daddy was the baby of all of them.

I wouldn't take anything for my SOCM education, I call it. Learning the things that, you know, we made trips to Washington. The first time I ever went, we went to lobby on the national strip mining bill. Which was finally passed in '77, but it had a lot of stuff in it that we didn't want. But we lobbied for it, and that was one of the things that I did. Then we made countless trips to Nashville over the years. We have a lobby day down there every year. And we have SOCM bills. We find sponsors for, and when we lobbied for them, that sort of thing.

JW: So what did you think you would be, when you were young, or a little girl? What did you imagine you would be in your life?

BA: I can't remember. I was real into basketball in high school, and I didn't, we didn't have enough money for me to go to college. I worked a couple of years. [Of] course, Berea is a school where you work your way through. I found out that I wasn't prepared for college in a lot of ways. Our high school was very limited; we could only offer what the state required because we didn't have enough students and enough teachers. So I only took the basic courses. So I had to take some remedial classes when I went to Berea. And of course, I--. Are you going to edit this? Do you edit it?

JW: Yes, we can edit it.

BA: Okay. I got involved with my children's daddy, and so that's what brought me out of college. And I was involved with him for about ten years. By that time I had

**Betty Anderson**

started working in an insurance office, and I learned it rather fast. And I came back to working that. And I was constantly taking insurance courses, for a number of years. I loved the work. I loved working with people. And then, too, it was a little bit of a conflict. You know, insurance is very business-oriented. And some of the things I was doing in SOCM was right opposite that. I had some bosses that didn't approve of SOCM. So that was a little bit of a problem from time to time.

But I guess in my early days, I really wanted to be a top-notch secretary, like Della Street, you know, working for a lawyer. That was intriguing to me. But after I had my kids, I had to raise them. And I got so involved in insurance. And I really enjoyed it. I didn't look for anything else to do. But I've always regretted that I didn't graduate at Berea. Because it is an excellent school. And I have one or two good friends from there yet. I haven't heard from them in the last five or six--. Well, since I retired, [we] sort of lost contact, but I know how to reach them if I was able and had time. But I'm still real close to my insurance women friends in Knoxville. And my SOCM friends, that's the two main bases of my main friends that I have.

JW: And can you describe your experience of civil rights, the civil rights movement?

BA: I actually did not work in the civil rights. Even though I read about it, and I wish that I had had nerve to gone out and carry a sign. 'Cause my daddy couldn't stand racism. In his early days, he had worked with a carnival, and he had traveled all over the United States, or the eastern part of it. As a young man working with the carnival. And this was before he went to work with the mines. I guess he had three or four kids before he went to work with the mines, and he worked there probably twenty-five years, I think.

**Betty Anderson**

See, we were never around any black people when we grew up. Because none lived in Scott County. There's a few here now. But in those days there were none. But my daddy always taught us to respect the black people. He was very much--. But now he had a half brother who was as racist as anybody who ever been. And that was the one thing that they were really different in. But my daddy would, he would never allow us to talk against black people or anything like that. He just wouldn't allow. I think all of us in our family have a pretty broad knowledge of the problems.

My sister Fay lived in Maryland when they had some of the riots up there. I remember her telling about, not thinking anything about it, she went to the shopping center and had her kids with her. And her car had a Tennessee license on it, Scott County. Scott County's always been a county that black people didn't come to, or were scared to.

JW: Why were they scared?

BA: Because of the county. The county was just very much against black people. And I really don't know how they knew that much about it.

JW: So like the police?

BA: Don't know the history behind it. But she came out of a store with her kids one day, and it was right during those riots. And the blacks had surrounded her car in that parking lot. She said it scared her to death. She didn't know what to do. So she went to the store manager. It was a grocery store. And he got the police to go out and get the people away from her car. They sort of escorted her to her car. And she got, she said, "I got out of that parking lot very fast." And she said, "I did not go back to that grocery store during this time," when those problems. And that was in what, '63, something like

**Betty Anderson**

that. And she said, "I stayed away." "Because," she said, "We had those Tennessee license plates on our car." And she said, "I was scared." And so that's the only experience that I ever knew of. That anybody in the family had. But no, I didn't go. I've often wished that I had, because I very much supported these people sitting at the--.

JW: Lunch counters.

BA: Lunch counters, and you know marching and that sort of thing, but I guess it was an in-between period of my life. I didn't belong to SOCM then, didn't belong to anything except the Baptist Church, and the insurance. I hadn't even joined the insurance women then, even though I had worked in insurance for ten or fifteen years, I did not belong to the--. There is a national association of insurance women. At one time, when I joined in 1975, it was the largest women's organization, or maybe the second largest women's organization, in the country. We had twenty-two thousand members.

JW: And what was the function of the organization?

BA: It was to promote insurance education. Fellowship among our members, and mostly education. But the United States is divided up into nine regions. And our region had six states in it. And so I finally joined in 1975, and I became the president for three or four years after that, and was real active until I retired. And enjoyed, did quite a bit of traveling within these six states. We always had three conventions a year. State, regional, and national. I went to two or three national conventions, but most of them was in the six-state region. We always had the same group, traveled together. Really enjoyed that; I'm real close yet to these women.

JW: So as a working woman in this organization, did you consider yourself at all a part of the women's movement that was going on in the seventies?

**Betty Anderson**

BA: A part of the what?

JW: The women's movement?

BA: Not anything other than the insurance women, being active in that. And of course I didn't--. During that time we had a lot of sickness in our family. For about fifteen years. So I was running to Scott County every weekend and I just didn't have time. Even though I was very much for the feminist things that were going on. In fact, I think I did join NOW [National Organization for Women] at one time, and got their magazine. But I never actually did anything. Maybe wrote a few letters, occasionally.

JW: But in a personal, individual sense, you were for women's rights, and--

BA: Yeah.

JW: Did you consider yourself a feminist?

BA: Well, I guess so. In a way.

JW: What did that mean, to be a feminist?

BA: A lot of women I knew and grew up with didn't believe that a woman should go out and get a job and get as much education on her own. But that brings you back to the area that I came from. Where women were considered, they thought they should stay at home, raise a family. And that's about as forward as they were willing to do. But I've always felt like a woman should do as much as she wanted to, and could. Everything for women's rights. We just elected our first woman to the county commission. And I was thrilled to death. I don't know her very well, but I was bragging about it to all these people around here. She was not even in my district, but I was campaigning for her. Because I said, "We need a woman on that board." So I'm very much for women doing anything, and I was for Hillary for president.

**Betty Anderson**

JW: Were you?

BA: Yes I was, very much so. And my son, Randy, he's a Republican. So conservative, oh my lord, we fight all the time. Well it's come to the point now that we don't discuss politics very much. Because we're so different about it. Randy works hard. But he is so conservative. And selfish. I mean, that's--. Well he knows I think that, so I don't guess it's no secret. [Laughter]

JW: But why is he conservative?

BA: I guess he saw how hard I had to work to raise them. And he started working when he was fourteen. During the summer. And he and Scott both started working as soon as they could. They used to work as bus boys at the Quality Inn. Do you remember Malfunction Junction? In Knoxville?

JW: No.

BA: It's right where [Interstates] 275 and 40 comes together. There used to be a motel there called Quality Inn. And they both worked as bus boys when they were in high school. And I don't know. He's just, he's very--. He won't get involved in politics at all. He goes and votes, and if you ask him he'll state his opinion, but he wants no part of it. But he's very conservative.

And he has come up with this idea. He told me the other day, he said, "I was mowing my grass," and he said, "I have decided, the best thing Scott County can do is to buy a laptop computer for every student in this county, put them online, and let them be homeschooled." I said, "Randy, half the parents wouldn't make the kids get their lessons. You know that." Scott County has got a big debt. I think they owe somewhere between forty-two and fifty million dollars. That's a big debt for a county this size. And he said,

## Betty Anderson

“It’s no telling how much they’re going to have to raise taxes.” They’ve had to build two new schools, and one is just opened up, and then they’re adding a big addition to another school. Then with the Oneida school district, they’re coming up with eighteen million dollars additional debt, and so they’re going to have a big property [tax] increase; there’s just no way around it. And so he, that bothers him.

(57:24) in Knoxville, that had a child. And then they had Erica. Now that’s his only biological child, is Erica. And he raised Robbie from the time he was six, he’ll be thirty-five in October. And he’s a very bad diabetic. He lives in Knoxville. And then this wife, Susan, Erica’s mother, died when Erica was nine. With cancer. And then two years later, he married LaDawn, his current wife, and she had two boys. And they were, I think one was in the eighth grade and the other one was a freshman, when they got married. So he helped her raise her two boys. He’s got three stepsons and one daughter.

And he’s always had to work hard, you know. Of course Susan worked at MPC [Metropolitan Planning Commission] in Knoxville. She had a good job. Actually, LaDawn was a friend of Susan’s, and they had worked together at MPC. And LaDawn had several good jobs in Knoxville. She has fibromyalgia. And she has a lot of medical problems now. But she’s still one of the hardest-working women I know. She loves fooling with those animals, and she paints, and she is a computer whiz. She puts videos together and all that stuff. She worked for Pilot Oil in Knoxville; it’s where she learned a lot of her computer knowledge that she has. But he’s always had to work hard, and puts in a lot of hours on that job he has. And so he had hoped and had planned on retiring when he was fifty-five, and living on his savings until he got to Social Security age, and he wanted to buy a bigger farm and farm. He loves it. But with her medical problems,

**Betty Anderson**

he's not going to be able to do that, because of insurance. She cannot get medical coverage without it costing an arm and a leg.

JW: Right.

BA: So he's going to have to work until he's at least sixty-two. And he hadn't planned on that at all.

JW: Can I ask you a few more questions about SOCM?

BA: Yeah.

JW: Can you say a little bit about the role of women at the grassroots, working in that organization?

BA: Well, before we became chapters, I believe that women more or less let the men be the spokesmen. There was a few of us that was pretty outspoken. But most of the time, it was the men. But then after we organized into where we had a chapter system, I believe that if you went and looked at a lot of these chapters, you will find that women do more of the work than the men do.

JW: And why do you think that is?

BA: See, I don't get to go very much anymore.

JW: But what about in the earlier years?

BA: In the earlier--. Well I think that we had more leadership and training, and we always got as many women involved as we could, and I think that's where it came from, the leadership that we did. The training they got. And they ended up being the ones that were standing up, doing most of the talking. That's something you can check with staff, but I think they would agree with me.

JW: Mmm-hmm. I've heard that from other people, too.



**Betty Anderson**

BA: Yeah. I think that the training that we gave in these chapters, and it just came about naturally.

JW: Do you think the men in the communities were okay with that?

BA: Yeah, at least the ones that I know, seemed to be. I know of this one couple in Caryville, it's in the Campbell County chapter. She is very outspoken. She'll talk faster, or she'll talk quicker, than Marvin will. And they have their own business. I don't know exactly what, they sell something. Mostly by internet, I think. In meetings that I'm at, that I've seen them at, she tends to talk quicker than he does. So I think that she is the more dominant SOCM member. Of course, her brother was a SOCM president at one time.

And then I have noticed in these new chapters that we have down in middle Tennessee, that I think it's more women that are involved. One reason may have been the staff person we had down there. She was the first black that we hired, Rochelle, and she doesn't work for SOCM anymore. But she was the one staff person that we put down there to work with those chapters. And she was a social worker, trained person. I think that she ended up talking to more women than she did men. And I see that they're more active. We do have one couple, Johnny Ferris, in Bedford County, I believe it is. It could be Murray County. Johnny seems to--his wife is always with him--but he's the one that served on the board.

And I don't know many of them; since 2001, I haven't been able to be real active. I read everything they send me. In fact, I get the board minutes. I've been able to keep up with what the staff's doing and what's been going on in all the different chapters, even though in the last three months I haven't looked at it as closely, because I had a pretty

**Betty Anderson**

rough time in the last part of March. I spent eight days in the hospital. So I haven't been able to keep up with it as much since then. But I think [background shouting followed by pause]. One of our Alzheimer's patients, sad case.

JW: What were the biggest challenges that you faced as a member and organizer for SOCM?

BA: [Laughter] I guess the biggest thing was to shut my mouth sometimes. It never bothered me to talk. And I guess, well when I was president of SOCM, the biggest thing I had was to--. We had a few people that--and they were professional people; two of them were lawyers--that came to our meetings and they expected everything to just be clockwork. You have a two-hour meeting, you (1:06:52). Well when you go to some of these communities, you might have fifteen people that wanted to have their say. So when I was facilitating the meeting, I tended to let these people talk longer than I probably should have. So it was to balance that, I guess that was my biggest challenge while I was an officer, was doing that.

But I believed that this was the only time these community people had a chance to say what they wanted to say. And I felt like we should give them as much time as we could. Because that was their only chance, because they didn't, they probably wouldn't come to the meeting that we had three or four counties away, the next time. They couldn't afford to. We're working mostly with low-income people, trying to get the chapter--. Well, at that time we didn't even have chapters. We just had communities. That's when we were in five counties. And we were, what was going on in one community was not going on in--. Well, we always had the strip mining. But things that were concerning these people was not happening in another county. Like the swinging

**Betty Anderson**

bridge issue on New River. That wasn't happening anywhere else, and not many other people were involved with it, other than the ones that went to the meeting.

JW: Can you say a little more about why you think it was so important to have local people--. We were talking a little bit before we started the interview about how maybe you fear that local people aren't going to be as involved, the "common people," as you called them.

BA: Yeah.

JW: Could you talk about why that's important, why that's crucial, to the organization?

BA: I think that's how you get things done. What I always say in SOCM is, in the early days it was strip mining we were working on, but now each chapter has their own issues, and I don't care what becomes a SOCM issue if it involves the majority of the people in a chapter or in a county, for instance. If you can get the people, you know twenty or thirty people--we have a requirement, thirty members--if you can get thirty people to agree on an issue in their chapter or in their county, to work on, I'm for it. If it is something that will be better for that community. And those people determine that. It doesn't bother me. I mean, it's tickled me to death that they're getting involved in education in some of these chapters. Because it's (1:09:52).

And down in one of our chapters, I don't know a lot about it, but they were working on preschool, for the Head Start, some kind of program. They weren't happy with the way the director was doing, so they got this director to resign. And they're sort of taking it over. It's being reorganized and hopefully going to be better. If that group of

## Betty Anderson

people decided that's what they want to work on, and that's the best thing for them, I'm all for it. Whatever the issue.

Because I realize that right here, one of the biggest problems in this county is it's the fifth largest county in the state, but we only have twenty-one, maybe twenty-two thousand people. I mean area-wise, it's so spread out. And we've got, what, Huntsville, Winfield, and Oneida, as towns in this one county. And they've all got different problems. I don't know a lot about them, because I haven't lived here in so long until I came back over here after I--. Well I was sick when I came back. And came into the nursing home. But it just, the counties are so different, like Anderson county is not near as big as Scott County is, but they've got three or four times as many people. So there's different problems. But I think it's very important that everybody be involved. And it tickles me to death to see women taking more active roles in everything.

JW: What have been your proudest moments in SOCM?

BA: My proudest moment in SOCM? Gosh. [pause] We lost a lot of fights. I don't know; I have a lot. I guess getting to know all the people that I know. Getting some of the state to vote on passing a few of the things--and right now I can't think of anything--and getting the knowledge out about these overloaded trucks. And getting the attention that that got at the time was one of the highlights. I guess passing the national strip mining bill in 1977 was another one that didn't have some of the things in it that we lobbied for. Probably the best thing was when OSM [Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement] was formed, and it took regulations away from the state of Tennessee to regulate strip mining, and we got the OSM office in Knoxville. That was

## **Betty Anderson**

good. And we argued with them all the time; even over permits and that sort of thing.

But I was generally not happy with the director of OSM.

But I guess that was probably one of the biggest things, was seeing the regulations taken away from the coal industry. Because the state did whatever the coal people told them to. See, my brother worked for West Coal Company, and that was one of the biggest strip miners in the state. There was a guy that worked for the coal industry as a lobbyist in Nashville, named Bill Fond. Just getting to see him not have as much power as he had before, or at least it wasn't as evident. He probably still had more than we thought, because there was no doubt about it: they bribed the government to get by with driving these overloaded trucks. Some of the things that they did. I was never really involved with the permit fights, other than I might go and speak at something against a permit, but I didn't really know all the details about it because the staff did all that.

[pause]

Another thing is the SEP [Southern Empowerment Project] connection with SOCM was real gratifying to me, and there I met a whole different group of people. The SEP was made up of people from three or four states. Different issues. And what SEP was, it was organized in order to train community organizers. That was its sole purpose, was to teach people to be community organizers. Because we were finding, even though these people that we hired for SOCM and the other grassroots groups were college educated, their education didn't teach them nothing about community organizing. And that's why we needed this school.

June and Walter Davis, and Rosemary, were the three staff people for SEP. That was their responsibility, to have this school each year at Maryville and train community

**Betty Anderson**

organizers. And they did a super job until things went downhill, and I don't know all of the details why June left; I've seen her one time since she left SEP. I saw her at the party they had for Maureen last year. Now I have talked to her a few times, but it's more or less when she's called. She's heard about some of my health problems, and she's called to find out about that. That was very important, and another learning time for me. The work we did, and all of the different organizations in West Virginia. They were just starting the mountaintop removal. [It] was getting started in West Virginia, that's where I first heard about it. Now we've got it over here. And we haven't been able to make any headway with [Tennessee Governor Phil] Bredesen, in getting him--. We were hoping he would outlaw it in Tennessee, but he hasn't done it. And he won't do it. I guess that's about all I can think of. What other questions are on your--

JW: Well, what do you think the state of things are right now for organizing?

BA: I think it's opening up a little bit, from what I'm reading. During the Bush years, there was a big need for it. But I don't know, I think that it was very hard for them to do. I know we are not as far along in our five-year plan; every five years we had a new plan for SOCM, and when we evaluated our plans, we didn't always meet our goals. We don't have as many chapters as we had hoped to have at this point. But I think that things have opened up some. I hope they have. I think there's better chance for it now. We're going to always have these issues. I mean, there's going to be an issue of something that needs to be worked on in every area. When we were revamping SOCM and going to the chapter system, I remember John Gaventa said he wanted to see SOCM grow far and wide in Tennessee. And we've done some of that, but not--. See, we haven't got to do, we tried it, in Johnson City and Kingsport, up in that area, but it didn't work out. Tried it

**Betty Anderson**

in Morristown, and it didn't work out. I mean it did for a while, but then it was gone. So I'm hoping that it will get easier. And just, I hope it will.

JW: Well those are all my questions; we're starting to--. I know that you have to go eat lunch before church. But are there any other topics that you want to talk about?

BA: Well, one other thing that I'm real proud of is my involvement in the Mountain People's Health Council. And that came about from some of my SOCM work. In this five-county area, a group of students from Vanderbilt was trying to look for money for health care, and they found out that a big portion of this county, and the other counties too, was owned by about ten large landowners. But they paid like three percent of the taxes. And that's the big problem in this county. So they did this land study and found all this information, so they turned it over to the East Tennessee[Research Corporation]--I forget what it's called--and that's where SOCM started from, some of that research. So they knew that there was a big need for healthcare, and we are in a very underserved area.

So we got together and started this to raise awareness and raise money to have a health clinic in Norma, which is where I graduated high school. It's four miles, five miles down the road from Smoky. So we bought a doctor's office up there, and he had been murdered. We got his old office and turned it into a health clinic. In order to have Mountain Peoples and get the government money, we had to have so many population. So we paired up with Stony Fork in Anderson County, and Petros in Morgan County, and we were able to get a doctor that went to all three clinics. So that's how Mountain Peoples was formed. I became one of the board members, and one of the reasons was that one of the other people in the Mountain Peoples was all the time calling me, he was a

**Betty Anderson**

high school principal, and he would say, "Betty, would you go down and tell the East Tennessee," I forget what it's called--

JW: Research?

BA: It's the sixteen-county area, East Tennessee. Anyway, we had to get the approval of Dr. Duffy at the Knoxville Health Department. He would have me go speak to this group about the medical needs over here. So I told him that my mother had eleven children, and I was the oldest one. The rest of them, we'd all been born at home, but she had a midwife for her other ten. And just all the medical problems that I could think of is what I'd go tell them about. So finally I told Raymond--. Excuse me. [turning away, speaking to someone]

You can never get them on the phone. But anyway, Mountain People is now thirty-five years old, thirty-six, something like that. And they have got a clinic in Winfield, one in Oneida, one in Huntsville, and one at Norma, all in Scott County. And I don't know exactly how many doctors they have, but they use nurse practitioners quite a bit, and I know they've got one at each clinic. Now, the Norma clinic's not open all week, but three days a week or something like that. And if the rules haven't changed, a doctor has to be on-site one day a week. So they can use nurse practitioners for most of it. I think they've got about three doctors. Two just left and went into private practice here, and I don't know how many they have left, or if they've replaced these two yet. Because I'm not involved with it anymore.

But I served four years on that board, and worked really hard. How we got Dr. Duffy, I told Raymond Jeffers, he was bringing some of them over here for a tour, and I said, "Raymond, bring them down the river, and when you get to Nicks Creek, drive



**Betty Anderson**

through that river bed up there. And let them see how rough it is.” Because there was a, where the water goes across the road, it would always back up, the flood would, and it’s got it real washed out. I’d say, “Bring them down through there, and let them see how rough the road is.” And Dr. Duffy, after he brought her and a black man from Knoxville, I don't know what his name was, down through there. And she never voted against our health clinic funds again.

JW: That was a smart move on your part.

BA: Yeah. And so Raymond always said that I won Dr. Duffy’s vote because I went and told her so many times about the midwife delivering everybody. There was a woman named Rosie Gibson that delivered--I guess she delivered three or four thousand kids in her lifetime. Her granddaughter is a patient here now. And my mother liked her better than she did Dr. Chambers, that delivered me. But he would say that because of Dr. Duffy coming down the rough road, and my talks to that group over there, is what got her vote finally. [Laughter]

That was a very rewarding thing, is seeing the success of the health clinics. And Scott County does have a better medical system than it had back in the seventies. I don't know what a lot of the problems are, but we have three or four doctors that won’t use the hospital. I’ve never been involved in any of that, so I don't know why those problems are. But that has been one of the biggest things, and SOCM has been involved with that indirectly, because of J.W. and Kate [Bradley], that were president of the Petros Clinic, and some miners up in Stony Fork were involved in the Stony Fork clinic. SOCM’s been involved in a lot of things over the years. [pause]

**Betty Anderson**

And I enjoyed the SEP work. That was mostly finding these people to take the training and then finding the money to pay for it. I think it's still needed; it's probably needed more now than it was. And see, now, SOCM I think sends people to different schools. I mean that's a requirement when we hire somebody. They go take some training somewhere. We pay for it. And that's one of the reasons for requiring them to work for two years, just sort of pay for what we've invested in them.

JW: Was there anything else you would like to close with?

BA: Well, I can't really think of anything. I just wished I was able to stay as involved with SOCM as I was, but it just isn't possible. I don't drive anymore. What happened to me was I had an infection; they probably told you that I'm on dialysis. And I had a very bad day Friday, that's why I've got this on.

JW: Oh, I'm sorry.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Winnie Titchener, November 2010

Edited by Jessica Wilkerson, December 7, 2010

\*names of siblings need to be clarified