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P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement

Interview P-0019

Sara Evans

8 March 2014

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ABSTRACT – Sara Evans

Interviewee: Sara Evans
Interviewer: Seth Kotch
Interview Date: November 8, 2014
Location: Home of Sara Evans, Waynesville, North Carolina
Length: One audio file, 1:15:14

Sara Evans discusses Group 22, a women's liberation group that she created with Paula Goldsmid in Chapel Hill in the summer of 1968. Evans explains that Group 22 became two years later Lollipop Power, a children's book writing and publishing collective. The idea of Lollipop Power was to challenge the traditional gender roles conveyed in children's books. Evans also talks about her involvement with a socialist-feminist movement called the New American Movement in the early 1970s, and her attempt to organize a daycare center on campus. She ended up founding the Community School for People Under Six in 1972. She acknowledges the divide between white and black women, stating that the Women's Movement that she created was white, and that she did not know what was going on in the black community. Evans also remembers her early days as a social activist, when she enrolled at Duke University and joined the Methodist Student Center in 1962. She talks about how the summer she spent in Africa made her deeply questioned American foreign policy. She became very engaged in the Antiwar Movement in the mid-1960s, participating in the Montgomery March and taking the role of the North Carolina coordinator for Vietnam Summer. This interview is part of Media and the Movement, an oral history and broadcast collection project housed in the Southern Oral History Program and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

TRANSCRIPT: Sara M. Evans

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START OF INTERVIEW

Seth Kotch: This is Seth Kotch with the Southern Oral History Program and the Department of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It's November eighth, 2014, and I am in Waynesville, North Carolina, at the home of Sara M. Evans. Sara, thank you very much for having me here.

Sara Evans: Glad to have you.

SK: Alright. So, I'll just note for the record so—for the edification of future researchers—that there are two interviews with you in the Southern Oral History Program collection—.

SE: Great.

SK: Which engage your childhood, so we're going to move—.

SE: Right.

SK: Fast forward past that.

SE: Right.

SK: And direct researchers there who need to learn a little bit about, more about that context. But because this interview is being done for the Media and the Movement Project—.

SE: Right.

SK: I wanted to ask if during your childhood with your father, who was a self-described moderate but with activist sensibilities—.

SE: Right. But engaged with the issues.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: Absolutely.

SK: And a mother who was also coming out of a strong, sort of egalitarian tradition.

SE: Right.

SK: Were there things that you were reading or hearing around the home that you think informed your eventual activism?

SE: Yes, and I think in two ways. One is that my parents subscribed to everything. So, you know, there was *The Christian Century* and there was *Christianity Today*, but there was also *Time* and *Newsweek* and *Life* and *The Atlantic* and *The New Republic* and, you know, you just go on and on and on and on. So, I would—when I was bored, the thing I did was read. And it was very easy to sit down at the living room couch and just pick up a magazine, because the coffee table was covered. So, that's one thing, is that I was just exposed to a tremendous amount of news and information.

The other thing is existential theology. Because when we moved to Dallas in 1957 and my father became the chaplain at Southern Methodist University, he became very

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engaged theologically with the currents that were going around the seminary there. And it intimidated and thrilled him that he would preach on Sunday mornings to a congregation that included professional theologians. So, he was extremely engaged, and I was very drawn to Daddy's intellectualism. I hung out in high school around the Methodist Student Movement at SMU when he was doing things. He loved working with students and he loved the students who were skeptical. And so, it didn't bother him a bit that I became an agnostic in eighth grade and started saying, "Well, why should I believe this, and what about that?" He was totally cool with that. And I also learned that—because we went to this huge church where the youth minister was a seminary student—that if I just said the word, "What is—," if I just asked the question, "What is existentialism," I got all sorts of attention.

SK: [Laughs]

SE: It was like—[laughs] because that was the in thing at the moment. And so, in high school, I was reading Sartre and Camus and Tillich and very caught up in the sense that you are what you live your life to be. You create yourself in the living of it every minute. And asking, you know, I loved asking deep questions about the meaning of life and realizing that I didn't have any answers. [Laughs] But that's very important background.

So, when I get to Duke in the fall of [19]62, the place I went first was the Methodist Student Center and a group there called (Lay) Scholars, and I think there were groups like this at Wesley Foundations and Methodist Student Centers all over the place. But it was a group that was reading Tillich and Sartre and Camus and having—you know,

there I was, a freshman, and there were these seniors throwing all these words around, but it was extremely engaging.

And at the Methodist Student Center, which had a worship service every Sunday evening, those were the primary civil rights activists on the Duke campus. Until the next year, when there was a CORE chapter, there was no organization. So, during the period of time when people were lifting up prayers of concern for the world, they were talking about sit-ins, going on right then.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: So, that was—and by the end of my freshman year, I needed to get involved somehow. I needed to step further into that stream of activism [0:05:00] besides signing petitions and, I don't know, tutoring at an AME church downtown through the YW. That was my other activism.

SK: Um-hmm. That's the YWCA?

SE: YWCA on campus, which I became very active in. But the end of my freshman year, I went on a pray-in. That was my first demonstration, at the First Baptist Church in Durham, and they would not let us come into the church in an integrated group. We stood on the steps. One person went in—a white person—went in and got a bulletin and came out. So, we read the scripture for the day in front of the ushers, who were standing there with folded arms, not letting us go in. And then, the school year was over.

SK: And were the black activists who were with you, were they Duke undergraduates?

SE: No, they weren't. The first black Duke undergraduates were the following year.

SK: The following year, okay.

SE: So, they were students from North Carolina—the black college in Durham.

SK: Central.

SE: North Carolina Central, right.

SK: So, I'm curious about the Methodist Student Movement. Obviously, if there are worship services, this is a religious organization.

SE: It *is* religious.

SK: And why do you think that it attracted activists in the way that it did? And were you still coming at this as someone who would have been very comfortable in the Methodist church but was an agnostic perhaps on a personal level?

SE: Right. Right, and that's kind of the story of my religious life. [Laughs] I'm a ritual-loving agnostic. And I actually enjoy theology. I enjoy thinking about those issues. The Methodist Student Movement and the YW were the places where those kind of questions could be asked and wrestled with. If you read the magazine of the Methodist Student Movement, *Motive* magazine, it was *full* of this. In the [19]50s, they were writing articles about nuclear war and what's our responsibility for peace? They were also writing articles about race. And they were also challenging some of the, many of the verities of the Cold War.

So, it was an amazing space for young people to challenge the status quo. And I think for a generation raised in a new affluence that their parents hadn't had, you know,

after Depression and war. And so, coming up in the [19]50s, which is a time of—its stereotype of extreme conformity, though there was a whole lot going on—.

SK: Sure.

SE: As we all know now. But the Methodist Student Movement and the YWCA, in particular Student Y, were places where those things could be challenged and thought through. And values—people could lift up their values. And so, you know, I wouldn't have, in my freshman and sophomore years, I wouldn't have—I didn't want to separate myself from religion but I didn't want to go to a downtown church, for sure. What I was caught up in was the kind of existentialist version of the Social Gospel. What does it mean to love your neighbor in a world that's full of inequality?

SK: Right.

SE: And that's a very radical thing to be thinking about.

SK: Yeah, absolutely, especially as an eighteen-year-old, right?

SE: Absolutely.

SK: So, when you get to Duke in 1962, and for that first year there are no black undergraduates—.

SE: No.

SK: The campus will have been segregated, right?

SE: Yes! Oh, yeah.

SK: So, it must have been a very—was it a more sort of regimented and segregated environment than you had been exposed to in, say, in Dallas, or growing up?

SE: Oh, no. I grew up in segregation.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: I just grew up in a segregated world.

SK: Right.

SE: And I went to a high school that was all-white. I mean, when I look back, of course, I'm a little bit appalled that I went to Duke before it had integrated. It had integrated its graduate school and it was changing its policy. In [19]63, the first black undergraduates showed up. But I grew up in a segregated world and didn't—I never really had black peers with whom I spent substantial time until the summer after my sophomore year when I went to Africa. And that was, as you can imagine, a life-changing experience.

SK: Right, absolutely, and I want to talk about that. I want to ask first quickly, or not so quickly, [laughs] [0:10:00] what your habits were as far as media consumption when you came to Duke. I don't know if you still had piles of magazines around to read or if you were—.

SE: I didn't subscribe to everything because, you know, I had forty dollars cash every month and, you know, room and board was paid. So, I did subscribe to a newspaper that landed on my—they delivered it in the dorm, so I had a newspaper every day. And there was a television for the dormitory. Nobody had a personal television.

SK: Right.

SE: There was this big old television down in the Commons Room. And so, I [sighs] watched—I guess I watched the news occasionally. I don't remember a lot. I do remember seeing Jesse Helms' editorials on the Raleigh news station.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: And just my skin crawling, because he talked about Martin Luther King as a communist and he totally defended segregation as a good way of life. And so, I did watch, you know, network news from time to time on that dorm television.

SK: There was a—.

SE: And I read a newspaper.

SK: Sorry. There was an African American broadcaster named J. D. Lewis, who sometimes came on WRAL as well.

SE: I don't remember him.

SK: Did you ever encounter him?

SE: No, I don't remember him.

SK: He—as part of this project, we did an interview with his daughter, who is active in politics in Raleigh.

SE: Yeah?

SK: And he sort of moved from being a kind of entertainer to being more of a politician.

SE: Right.

SK: That is to say his entry point into media was through a sort of dance program.

SE: Oh, cool.

SK: But he eventually would go up—basically, a point-counterpoint with Jesse Helms. One would come on (at one), and then one would come on next.

SE: Oh, wow.

SK: And he was what a lot of people, I think, would say a quote/unquote “moderate”—.

SE: Yeah, yeah.

SK: In tone.

SE: Yes, I'm sure he had to be to be allowed.

SK: Exactly. But still very much a leader regionally and in Raleigh.

SE: Right.

SK: You had mentioned in an earlier interview what you sort of called a kind of, maybe an ironic, sort of macho sensibility in the New Left, especially around antiwar efforts.

SE: Right.

SK: Can you talk a little bit about that idea?

SE: Yeah. Let me just give you, in terms of my story, the steps that would take me there—.

SK: Sure.

SE: Because that jumps me ahead several years.

SK: Oh, okay.

SE: And so, you know, when I got into the antiwar stuff was after I spent a summer in Africa.

SK: Okay.

SE: And my best friend and co-activist in both the Y and the Methodist Student Center was Charlotte Bunch. She spent that same summer in Asia. And we came back transformed in terms of our understanding of the United States in the world, understanding colonialism, deeply questioning the Vietnam War, and I had to that time not deeply questioned American foreign policy.

So, by the spring of [19]65—and this story is, I'm sure, on another tape, too—Charlotte and I were running for co-president of the Y. So here we were on campus—and in those days, the Y was a very big deal. It was co-equal with student government in terms of the status of the leaders. So here we were, campus leaders, feeling very angry at the injustices in the world and wondering if we're collaborating. And so, we got a notice about a demonstration from the Durham post office against the war and we hopped on our bicycles, wearing our Duke blazers, and pedaled down to the Durham post office.

And I think everybody else in that demonstration—they were the subculture of activists, which we were not a part of, because that had grown up around coffee houses and, you know, that was a different world than I knew right at that moment. And we just hopped in and demonstrated. That was, I guess, in February of [19]65. And soon after that, I went down to the Montgomery March, which was the culmination of the Selma-Montgomery March, and that was my first really big demonstration. So, I got involved in the Antiwar Movement and by the time I graduated—[0:15:00] my main role in the Antiwar Movement was the summer of [19]67 when I was the North Carolina coordinator for Vietnam Summer. And in that fall, I moved to Chicago for nine months. It's in Chicago that I really encountered that kind of macho sensibility in the Antiwar Movement.

SK: Okay. Um-hmm.

SE: In Durham, the movement was so small, everybody knew—you know, the antiwar people and the civil rights people and, later, the feminists were all part of the same world. But I got to Chicago, where the New Left had been a very big deal for a while, where the Antiwar Movement was a very big deal, and I got into the Women's

Movement there in Chicago. And one of the first papers I remember being handed in that first women's group was a paper with the title "Girls Say Yes To Boys Who Say No" that challenged the way the anti-draft movement framed draft resistance, and the expectation that this was something men did at great risk to themselves, and their reward was going to be sexual availability of women, or "chicks" in the movement.

SK: Right.

SE: And so, it was in the—stepping into that whole New Left world in Chicago, people who had been very central to SDS for a long time. Rennie Davis was heading up the organization of the Democratic Party protest, which was going to be the next summer. I was—I had connection there with a lot of people who were doing draft counseling and that sort of thing. That's where I became aware of—you know, and there was also truth there. Men did stand—they were at risk of being drafted. They were at risk of having to be in the military and go to Vietnam or going to jail or going to Canada. Those were really serious risks.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: It was, I think, a lot of my later thinking goes back to that time and thinking about the fact that those young men were challenging some of the ways that society says you become a man. You know?

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: You join the military, become a man. There are even slogans like that.

SK: Sure.

SE: And they were resisting that, so they needed other ways to validate their manhood. And that ended up replicating inside the movement the hierarchies of gender.

SK: Right.

SE: And the Women's Movement was kind of born out of women saying, "Wait a minute. We really were talking about equality, weren't we?" [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] Such a simple question.

SE: Yeah!

SK: It's so interesting that you mention that flyer. I recall that—it's a strange inversion of these flyers that I've seen from the Civil War.

SE: Yeah.

SK: You know, basically encouraging women to withhold themselves from their sweethearts if they don't volunteer for service.

SE: Right.

SK: History repeats itself, I suppose.

SE: Yes.

SK: So, I just want you to amplify that point a little bit, because I'm starting to learn about the Women's Movement, but I'm not going to be able to rattle off a great deal about it.

SE: Right.

SK: Are you suggesting that the Women's Movement is emerging in large part out of women's participation and dissatisfaction with movements such as the Antiwar Movement?

SE: Absolutely, with a very important caveat, which is those movements gave women an opportunity to step outside their prescribed roles also. I mean, they stepped away from decorum and they stepped into movements that were about contesting,

refusing submission. You know, the Civil Rights Movement, that's at the heart of it. And I grew up in a world where rituals of submission were a part of everyday life: the way you walked on the street, where you sat in the bus, the language people—adult whites used addressing adult blacks. It was just [0:20:00] *full* of rituals of submission. And as soon as you start to think about it, gendered interactions were also full of rituals of submission, (coated/coded) with the pedestal, you know, sort of with the glitter of the pedestal sort of put over it to make it seem like a privilege rather than a submission.

So, it's very, very important to understand that the Civil Rights Movement, the Antiwar Movement, both of those [coughs] encouraged women to think deeply about egalitarianism, about justice, about what's right and what's wrong, and to start taking risks, breaking rules, in order to bring the world into a more just place. So, when they discover that some of those expectations about gender are built into the movement that is all about equality—and the New Left was full of, you know, participatory democracy; in the Civil Rights Movement, it was beloved community—but these ideals of how people could live together in equality, when those were contradicted by the people that were already your comrades and you thought of as your equal, then there was a reaction.

So, it's been a big mistake for people to interpret the New Left and the Civil Rights Movement as exceptionally sexist. They were movements born in a sexist world. So, it got replicated because it was the air everybody breathed. But those movements gave women both the strength and the skills and the words to contest it.

SK: Um-hmm. So, what brings you back to North Carolina from Chicago?

SE: Well, as you know from other interviews, I had married Harry Boyte. And he spent a year in school in Chicago, and I spent that year being a secretary, which was a big

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comeuppance because I had a master's degree in political science and I thought I would do something interesting. And I discovered the only skill of any interest to any employer was my typing speed, so that made me very ripe for the Women's Movement.

But at the end of the year, Harry didn't want to be in school anymore, and I think both of us actually felt politically drawn back to the South, that that was where we should be doing our work. And Harry got a job with OEO in Durham as a community organizer in the white community. This is the time of Black Power. And we were all feeling impelled to figure out how to work in the white community, because the Civil Rights Movement was saying blacks need to do it on their own. So, we came back, and Harry had a job, so we had an income.

And I came back with this sort of missionary zeal to start a Women's Movement down here, down there, and that's one of the—I did start doing—I had part-time work as a community organizer through the OEO project. I also developed a part-time job with AFSCME, working with nonacademic employees at Duke, which is—we had been very, very involved in the AFSCME effort to organize nonacademic employees. That's kind of where the Civil Rights Movement migrated in Durham after, you know, all the public facilities were integrated. And so, we came back into a setting where we had all these contacts and connections. And I was hired by the AFSCME organizer to work part-time, trying to see how to reach women in those middle tiers. So, I was working with LPNs in the hospital and secretaries. Having been a secretary, I knew something about it. I also discovered some of the reasons why it's so hard to organize those pink-collar jobs. But those are the things that I was doing.

And I and Paula Goldsmid formed the first consciousness-raising group in the summer of [19]68, and that rapidly grew and multiplied. It grew into large meetings. This is a story that happens all over the country. And different subsets would say, “We want to talk about stuff that’s closer to us, and you’re busy talking about other things,” so [coughs] [0:25:00] new groups would form. And, you know, within a year, we had multiple women’s groups in the Triangle area.

SK: As a white woman who had an interest in Africa and African politics and had considered, perhaps, a career connected with—

SE: I had. I had. That was my master’s degree.

SK: Okay.

SE: African—you know, I was in African Studies, basically.

SK: How did it feel to have to sort of maybe—I won’t try to over-characterize how you were feeling, but you were impelled in one way or another to choose a different path.

SE: I was. I got my master’s degree in [19]66-[19]67 at Duke. I had a wonderful fellowship that let me actually start that degree before I got my undergraduate degree, so it was quick. And that was the year that Black Power sort of mushroomed. I was admitted to Northwestern, which had a very fine program in African Studies, for the fall of [19]67. And I didn’t go there for two reasons. One is I was a little burned out. I had never stepped out of school. But the other was I no longer—I remember thinking, “How does a person in this body with this skin stand up in front of a classroom to teach about African countries and colonialism and African struggles against colonialism and be seen as an authority?” And I couldn’t imagine how I could do that.

And it did seem to me that the—I now have many friends who’ve been pioneers in African history, and they—somehow that never hit them the same way. But I think it was where I was and the, somewhat the sadness of that time, of feeling like the movement that formed us was saying, “You better go do something else,” and taking that very seriously. So, I did not go to Northwestern, and that’s when I discovered that the only thing anyone wanted me to do was type. [Laughs]

SK: So, well, I’ll say for the tape that AFSCME is the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

SE: Right.

SK: So, you were engaged in activist activities that are not connected to the panAfricanist Black Power movements that are beginning to flourish?

SE: Right.

SK: Are you sort of observing those movements from afar?

SE: Yeah!

SK: And what are you seeing?

SE: Well, I don’t see them close up.

SK: Right.

SE: I do, you know—time gets very compressed. It took a while for the more militarist wings of that movement to evolve, certainly in Durham. When we came back in [19]68, the person who headed the OEO Program that hired Harry was Howard Fuller. And, you know, not too long after that, he changed his name, became a Black Nationalist, and started, I think, Malcolm X University. And so, there kept being, you know, over

time—this doesn't happen all at once, but there kept being these moments of sort of breach.

And then, for me, it was more watching the New Left itself try to figure out what it's supposed to be doing and by the late [19]60s begin to fall apart itself and disintegrate. And the whole Left became—there were militarist fantasies that were built into parts of the Antiwar Movement. You know? “We're going to shut down the Pentagon. We're going to—and, you know, take it to the streets.” And I was distressed by that direction that things took. And I have to tell you that having Women's Liberation as a movement that gave me an identity and something to work on, and where I felt like I made a difference and I was the right person to be doing it, meant I didn't spend a whole lot of time paying attention to those other things.

SK: Right, right. And so, you and Paula Goldsmid create Group 22?

SE: Right.

SK: And is this connected—I'm sure it is in some way or another—with the group that you were in in Chicago? You were in a Westside—?

SE: I was in [0:30:00] the Westside group. And in Chicago, you know, I witnessed this proliferation, and a group also formed in Hyde Park, where I lived, out of the Westside group. So, then I was going to everything. That year in Chicago, I was a secretary in the daytime and I went to women's meetings at night.

SK: [Laughs]

SE: Wherever it was, whatever it was. So, I was in the Hyde Park group, and that's where I met Paula. And she had gotten a job in the School of Social Work at

Chapel Hill, and her husband got a job in the Sociology Department. So, when she and I

both realized we were moving down to Durham-Chapel Hill in the summer, we made a pact that we would call a group. So, it sort of—my friends and her friends came together, and that was Group 22.

SK: Can you talk a little bit about what you did, what Group 22 did, and then sort of how it evolved?

SE: Um-hmm.

SK: It evolves towards Lollipop Power.

SE: It does. It is the root of Lollipop Power. And Paula and I and Margrit Eichler wrote the first three books. Lollipop—I mean, Group 22, we very much—we were doing this early thing, like, “What is the problem? How do we think about it?” So, we had some sociologists in the room, and they said, “Well, there’s this literature on sex roles and how children get taught to be boys and girls.” And so, we started reading that and discussing it.

At the same time, I was pregnant, Margrit Eichler was pregnant, and (Patty Paddock) was pregnant. And the three of us agreed that we would start a daycare cooperative the following year, after our babies were born, which we did and which was very wonderful. But out of that discussion came—then the question is, “So, what do we—how do we intervene in a system that routinely teaches boys and girls how different they are and doesn’t allow them to explore a range of possibilities for themselves?”

So, we thought about media, of course. We can’t write television programs. We can’t produce movies. We don’t know how and we don’t have the money. But we can write books. It came straight out of that. And children’s books were—most of them, the heroes were boys, the actors were boys, and girls watched them. That was the way most

were constructed. So, we decided we would just do that—you know, it was a very late [19]60s, early [19]70s thing to do—and that we would write them and we would edit them and we would figure out how to print them.

So, then we were aware, because there were these national networks that I had kind of gotten in touch with by being in Chicago, which is a crossroads, continental crossroads, that there was another group in the North wanting to start a press also and write children's books. So, we had a meeting and agreed that the Feminist Press, which is what it became, would publish chapter books for older kids and, you know, read-to-yourself books. And we would do picture books that were read-aloud for toddlers and young kids. So, we had this division of labor, and that's what we set out to do.

And I wrote the first book sitting at the table at our childcare cooperative while the three babies were asleep. And so, I just wrote a book! And it has very few words; it's a picture book. We got together—we were all going to write them. Some people tried and some people didn't. And then, we workshopped them together and we ran that book—we found somebody who would draw pictures. She drew hippies [sighs] but, oh, well. And we ran it off on—there was an offset press in the YMCA building in Chapel Hill on campus. We ran it off there. We collated and stapled it. We had a book!

SK: Yeah! [Laughs] So, that first book, was that *Jenny's Secret Place*?

SE: *Jenny's Secret Place*, right.

SK: Can you just talk about that a little bit?

SE: Sure.

SK: What's it about?

SE: It was so simple. I simply wanted to reverse roles. I wanted just to counter expectations without hammering. And so, in my story, a little girl who yearns to do things she can't do [0:35:00], not because the world is telling her she can't, but because she's little. And she's five years old, and this did draw on a memory of mine about learning to ride a bike. And so, she has this—she has a secret place, which is under her mother's study desk. I don't tell you anything about Mother and Father, except Mother has a study desk, and later when she has a birthday, Father bakes a cake. That's the only thing I do about that. But under this study desk, she can use her imagination and go to a magic land where, you know, it's a sort of early childhood thing: I can eat all the candy, it grows on the trees, and she can ride a bicycle "as fast as the wind and never fall down."

And then, she has a birthday. And she has a little brother who follows her everywhere, wants to do everything she can do. So, her father bakes her a birthday cake, and she gets a bicycle. And then, she learns to ride. And she falls down a bunch of times, but then she's off like the wind. And there's her little brother on his tricycle, crying because he can't keep up with her. And she says, "I know a place where you can do anything you want to imagine." And so, she shares her secret place. That's it.

SK: Yeah, and it's such a simple story, and I feel like it belies—it certainly belies the stereotype of an activist-feminist press that one might imagine.

SE: Yeah! Great!

SK: Another book is, I think, among the first is *Martin's Father*.

SE: That's by Margrit Eichler.

SK: Okay, and that doesn't have a woman or a girl in it at all.

SE: No.

SK: It's just about a dad who—you're not told this, but he does appear to be a stay-at-home dad and he does domestic things with his son.

SE: Yeah, right. And he takes his son to daycare. He probably has a job, because there is daycare. But he takes his son to daycare, picks him up, and they go home and they have supper and they do things together. Right.

SK: Um-hmm, and it's just very sort of normal. I mean, I guess you were perhaps trying to just normalize these—.

SE: Absolutely! And what—from 2014, it's hard to know how radical that was.

SK: Right.

SE: Because the idea of a father doing those things wasn't current. You know, when we had a childcare cooperative, our husbands participated equally, and that was all—we were all busy breaking rules. But, yeah, so it was—it was radical but in a very subtle, subtly subversive way.

SK: [Laughs]

SE: Right.

SK: Tell me a little bit about your process. I've seen some of the editorial notes on drafts.

SE: Right.

SK: And it looked like an intense process and also an intensely collaborative process.

SE: It was, it was, because everything was a collective. And so, you know, we had the first two or three books, and then people started sending us manuscripts, which was sort of amazing.

SK: Right.

SE: And then, it became a much more intense process, and we had to figure out how we publish more things. The truth is, I was not—after a couple of years, I was not as active in Lollipop Power, because I was active in the Charlotte Perkins Gilman Chapter of New American Movement, which was a socialist-feminist movement, and we were trying to figure out how to organize daycare workers, which we never did very well. But we did try to start a daycare center on campus and (had a baby in the president's office), and we ended up founding the Community School for People Under Six, which is—also still exists. Lollipop Power lasted I think about fifteen years.

SK: Which is exceptional—.

SE: Yeah!

SK: Given—I mean, presumably given the fact that this was all kind of dreamed up and executed by people who were not professionals.

SE: None of us had a clue!

SK: Right.

SE: None of us had a clue. What did happen, and I was not very active by this point, but what did happen was, as it got more successful, there had to be some specialization. In the beginning, we all wanted to do everything. We would all write. We would all edit. We would all print. And we would take turns, you know, licking stamps if we had to mail out books. That had to get specialized. And in later iterations, Lollipop Power actually—some people went off and learned printing, really learned the skills of running a press. And I do remember us having to incorporate, which was really weird.

But I was involved in doing some of that legal work. We just had to fill out the forms to
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become a nonprofit corporation so that we could exist. And then, we had to keep records.

[0:40:00] You know?

And the ethos of the very beginning was: almost there's no money here. It's just we're all doing the work, and somebody buys a ream of paper. I don't remember how we bought that first ream of paper. But it's a process that many, many feminist institutions which were founded during these years went through. And for some it was extremely traumatic to divide the labor, to allow specialization, and to recognize that you might need differential pay based on skill. All of that was very hard to figure out. How do we live out the egalitarian values that we are *doing this for* and also have a structure in which some people get to make different decisions than other people make? And then, you're paying people. And, you know, one ethos is, "If you really care about the work you don't need to be paid." And the other is, "People have to live and put food on the table."

SK: [Laughs]

SE: "And they should be paid decently." And, of course, when you're operating on a shoestring, you can't do that.

SK: Right.

SE: So, it's all very complicated. This happened with daycare centers. It happened with shelters for domestic abuse. It happened with health clinics. It happened with bookstores. And it happened with publications all over the place. This was a real process over the course of the [19]70s and into the [19]80s.

SK: Speaking of bookstores, how did you sell your books?

SE: You know, in the beginning, I don't remember how we sold them. We sold them to each other and we used—we did use the network of feminists around the country,
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where we could get word out. And word got out, and people started ordering them, but we had no clarity about marketing. We didn't know how to do that.

SK: [Laughs] Yeah. This network, how did you keep it alive?

SE: The national network?

SK: The network itself. Are you writing letters to people? Are you talking on the phone and things like that?

SE: Yeah. A lot of it is writing letters and a lot of it is shared publications. Because, you know, in Chapel Hill, I wasn't actively involved in the *Feminary*, but that was a journal that was created.

SK: Right.

SE: There were journals out of Chicago, out of New York, out of Des Moines, out of Berkeley, out of—you know, all over the country, there was in the early and mid [19]70s, an outpouring of feminist publications. And we were—also, we had these mimeographed papers that we were mailing all around and we were all reading a lot of the same stuff.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: There were two or three efforts to have a national meeting that were mostly disastrous, because we were really products of the New Left. Nobody wanted—you know, we were in the part of the movement that thought NOW was selling out because they had officers and boards and structure. So, nobody wanted structure, one. Number two, the whole New Left that we were part of was in a kind of purist phase where people were declaring that they had the truth about X, Y, or Z, and that that was the only way to be a radical or to be a feminist or to be a Marxist or to be a—you know, whatever the

thing was. And I think we had a deep wish to find an analysis that would explain it all. And whenever people felt they'd gotten there, that was it.

So, there were—you know, what issue is the most fundamental? Are issues about the body the most fundamental? Are issues about marriage the most fundamental? Are issues about labor force the most fundamental? What is the thing that, if we could change it, would change everything else? And that—I mean, that's really a Marxist idea of a fundamental contradiction. And it's a wrong way to try to think, I think, but people were schooled in that, and the battles were fierce. So, every time there was an effort to have some kind of national meeting, it would be—parts of it would be thrilling and creative, and the effort to come together over stuff always blew up.

SK: Right.

SE: And so, there were several of those.

SK: It's interesting that you describe it in that way. Recent criticisms [0:45:00] of leftist movements today are basically saying, "Well, which is it?" You know, do you want equal pay? Or do you want justice for these people? Or do you want to change the criminal justice system? Or do you want to this or that? And they say, you know, "Pick a side and go for it." And then, the pressure seems to be absorbed by the movements themselves and not productively perhaps.

SE: Right, right. I mean, I guess I really think an "all of the above" approach is the only thing to do that really works, with a lot of respect and mutual help. You know? If people working on different pieces of the puzzle could appreciate each other instead of saying, "You're wasting your time. You should be doing what I'm doing." That's just counterproductive, but—I can preach a lot about all of this stuff. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] The family tradition, huh?

SE: Yes, right!

SK: So, Lollipop Power is created in 1969-ish, maybe?

SE: I think it's more like 1970.

SK: Okay.

SE: I think.

SK: I like the characterization of it as being—on the covers themselves or the backs, it says they're anti-racist, anti-sexist, [sound of radio, television, or computer begins] as opposed to—.

SE: [Calls to Chuck] Oh, Chuck, can you not do that? Chuck?

Chuck: Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes. Sorry. [Sound ends]

SK: No problem.

Chuck: I've got the earphones on but—.

SE: Oh, it's not transmitting through the earphones?

Chuck: (Apparently not).

SE: Oh, too bad.

SK: Well, the advertiser just got three times their money's worth.

SE: Yeah, right. [Laughs]

SK: For the popup ad.

SE: He's taking a lot of courses in photography.

SK: Oh?

SE: So.

SK: But you were really only involved with Lollipop Power in an intense way maybe just for a couple of years?

SE: For a couple of years, yeah, right.

SK: It sounds like that may have been a pattern. Was that true for most people who were involved in Lollipop Power? Or maybe there were some stalwarts, and others came in and went?

SE: Yeah, I think—well, partly, most of us were students.

SK: Okay.

SE: So, we were going to leave. You know, Margrit Eichler stayed until she left, which was fairly early. I suspect—Lorna Chafe got involved after I was no longer active in it, but I think she stayed involved for quite a while. So, if you could—I hope there are some documents that would help you track that out, because I really can't tell you how much of a pattern it is.

SK: Sure. Yeah, UNC and Duke both have papers.

SE: Great.

SK: I think there's a decision at some point to sort of share them between the institutions.

SE: Good.

SK: And Lorna Chafe told me that when she was moving here with her husband, Bill, and they were looking at homes in the area and they saw—she saw an illustration for *Martin's Father*.

SE: Yeah.

SK: And that was her kind of radicalized moment, as far as Lollipop Power went, and she knew that she wanted to be involved right away, which (47:57).

SE: Great, great.

SK: Yeah. So, as Lollipop Power is humming along, does Group 22 still exist as Group 22, or has it been kind of transformed?

SE: It's transformed. It becomes Lollipop Power. But there are other groups that have a lot of the same people. I mean, you know, many of us were active in multiple places. So, a lot of those same people were involved in starting the Community School for People Under Six, for example.

SK: Right.

SE: We—I don't remember when we—and then, I guess it was [19]72 when we started the Gilman Chapter. And, you know, there are some of us that were in all of those, but then there's always a changing constellation of others around. The numbers, of course, started just because the groups proliferated, and we didn't want a hierarchal numbering system.

SK: [Laughs]

SE: So, you know, we just had—so, Paula said, “Twenty-two is my favorite number,” so we became Group 22.

SK: It's a good number.

SE: Yeah!

SK: I think you—you've certainly made a gesture towards this, but I'll ask anyway, perhaps. I remember—well, one thing that Lorna Chafe told me was that she

was coming down from, you know, a northeastern city and felt that the Women's Movement as she saw it there was fractious and aggressive.

SE: Um-hmm.

SK: I think maybe in the way that you're describing maybe coming out of these sort of purist energies—.

SE: Right.

SK: Where people are saying, you know, "I've got this thing figured out."

SE: Absolutely.

SK: "And you need to figure it out my way."

SE: Absolutely.

SK: Was what Lollipop Power did a strategic sort of counterweight to that kind of style of feminist activism?

SE: Um-hmm, I think so. We were—all this time, I was very aware of particularly New York. And the Women's Movement [0:50:00] too long has been written about as if it was all in New York.

SK: Right.

SE: With outposts in Chicago and the West Coast. New York was filled with intellectuals who were loners, who had good access to publications, whether it was the magazines or books, very, very brilliant people. But there's also a style of New York politics that pervades all kinds of other things, too. And [clears throat] we just didn't—that wasn't who we were. In some ways, I think we really took the sisterhood part very seriously. But it's just not who we were. And so, we tried really hard.

The different groups that had formed over the first few years periodically got together. We would have daylong conferences, retreats. We would talk about next-stage organizing. What do you do after you've raised your consciousness? What are the things that you can do? And it was always a puzzle to us. We weren't sure quite where to go. And so, Lollipop Power was one. Daycare was another. And so, yeah, we were—we felt very much a part of that radical movement but we didn't—most of us, anyway—want to partake of that kind of sectarian, what I see as a kind of a tendency towards sectarianism: I've got the truth, and you don't.

SK: Can you talk a little bit about the role of black women in movements in your sort of universe in Durham?

SE: Well, I think it's important to say that the Women's Movement that I was a part of was white. I know now that—and I can't say now much about Durham—but I know that nationally there was also a feminist upsurge within the Black Movement. But it was an upsurge that had continually to prove its loyalty to the Black Movement, and for good reason many black women weren't sure what they had in common with white women. Their mothers cleaned our mothers' houses. And so, for them, it's like, "You don't want to be a housewife? Excuse me? I'm supposed to feel sorry for you?" All of that was completely understandable.

And it was a time of such racial polarization. Conversations across racial lines were hard to find, except in support work for particular causes or incidents. But they were hard to find. And so, the Women's Movement that I was a part of in Durham and Chapel Hill was a white movement. And it's a sad reality to acknowledge that I don't know what was going on in the black community.

SK: There were a couple of minority owned and oriented radio stations that emerged in Durham around that time.

SE: Um-hmm.

SK: Were you aware at all of WAFR or WVSP?

SE: I think I knew they existed.

SK: Um-hmm, right.

SE: Yeah. I didn't—I wasn't much of a radio listener. One of the things my women's group did was a few women started a women's radio show at the campus station.

SK: WDBS?

SE: Um-hmm.

SK: Um-hmm.

SE: Right, so there was like a women's hour that they did. I was not involved in that but every now and then, I would listen to it.

SK: At Duke, there was an application that was put together by Celeste Wesson—

.

SE: Yes!

SK: And Chris Carroll—

SE: Yes!

SK: To try to start a Triangle women's radio network.

SE: Right, right! Celeste Wesson was one of the people.

SK: Right.

SE: Yeah, and she went on to be really important in public radio.

SK: Yeah, I'm interviewing her next month, I hope.

SE: Great! I haven't seen her in, you know, ah! I don't want to think how many decades. But tell her I remember her and to say hello.

SK: I'd be glad to. I'd be glad to, yeah. Yeah, you think I came a long way to come here. I'm going to Los Angeles to talk to Celeste. [Laughs]

SE: [Laughs] Right. [0:55:00]

SK: But that application was real interesting, because, I mean, it seemed to illustrate the divide that you are mentioning, which is that to make the case to the National Endowment for the Humanities—and this may have been, let's say, it was around 1975-ish—.

SE: Yeah, right.

SK: Firstly, there was a lot of frustration with what these women understood as the diminishing role of and attention to women at WDBS.

SE: Right, right.

SK: And then, the other was the fact that these stations, WAFR, they didn't think were speaking to women in the way that they could. And so, they said, "Well, it's really a positive move that WAFR is addressing the African American community. And then, we have WUNC kind of for the standard issue white community," [laughs] white male community, I guess, to be more accurate.

SE: Right.

SK: "But there's really no one out there broadcasting for women."

SE: Cool.

SK: So, anyway, if you weren't too much of a radio listener, maybe that wasn't something that you were—.

SE: No, and I was in the middle of writing my dissertation at that point. That's a—you know, I was immersed.

SK: Right. There was something that you mentioned in an earlier interview that I didn't recognize. It was something called the "Blue Paper". Does that ring a bell?

SE: Um-hmm. I'm trying to remember. There were—I think there were two papers that were called by their colors. They were papers written for the New American Movement.

SK: Okay.

SE: They were in connection with that. And Harry was a co-author. I think Heather Booth was a co-author.

SK: Okay.

SE: I don't know that they ever went anywhere, except, you know, mimeographed copies shown around.

SK: Sure. You spoke a little bit about the New American Movement in a previous interview. But for those poor souls who don't know very much about it, could you describe it a little bit?

SE: Well, it was an effort by people who had been active in SDS and the New Left to create a grownup version of that. You know, they weren't students anymore.

SK: Right.

SE: And SDS had exploded and didn't exist in any real sense. And at that point, most of us had begun to identify ourselves as socialists, in terms of how do we talk about
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our vision of a just society and economy, but not a sectarian socialist. So, the New American Movement was an effort to create a democratic socialist and feminist organization that would incorporate the commitments that the Women's Movement had brought forth, that would honor the democratic ethos of the New Left, and—you know, so it was a kind of visionary effort. It resulted in the creation of a number of women's unions around the country, socialist feminists, and they were called unions, modeled on the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, which was a socialist feminist group and did *unbelievable* things.

And in Durham and Chapel Hill, there were those of us who wanted—we were part of the Women's Movement. That was central to who we were. But we wanted to find a way to have that remain central and stay linked to some kind of broader movement for social and economic and racial justice. And so, what we formed was an all-women's chapter of the New American Movement. And there were at least one or two other places where that happened. But we wanted to be simultaneously fully a part of the Women's Movement and fully a part of some kind of broader vision that didn't say, that didn't—that understood that women are part of everything else.

SK: Um-hmm. Yeah, I laugh about that a little bit, I mean, especially in political seasons when we sort of have these conversations about appealing to women voters.

SE: Right.

SK: And, you know, what does the female voter want? And, you know, what exactly is a—these “woman things” that only women need?

SE: Right, right.

SK: And it's always interesting to hear politicians try to suss out exactly what that means. So, as you sort of move into academia—and where are we at for time? I'm sorry.

SE: It's close to 12:30, so can we wrap up in another fifteen minutes?

SK: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

SE: Oh, good.

SK: I'm curious specifically about your own trajectory as far as your connection with the Women's Movement and how active you are as you move, become a professional historian, and also more generally what you think about the role of, you know, academics [1:00:00] is in this kind of thing. That is to say, what good is all this book writing? [Laughs]

SE: [Laughs] Well! Oh, man, that's a really good question to ask. You know, for me, I started graduate school in the fall of [19]69 to study women's history. And I felt I was sent there by the Women's Movement, having moved, stepped away from doing African studies but still, you know, my interest in African studies was really in recent history, the twentieth century anti-colonial movements and all that. So, I wanted to do—I still loved history and I believed, and I still do believe, that if you want to make history, you have to know the shoulders you're standing on. [Someone coughs] You need to have some sense that people like you have made a difference. And black history was the model, obviously.

SK: Right.

SE: And what we learned with the Freedom Schools in [19]64—which I was not a part of, I was in Africa, but I had friends who were very involved in those—the *power* of teaching people their own history when they have been told they don't have one is

enormous. And so, I went to graduate school to study women's history, and I'm part of this huge cohort that did that same thing. Didn't matter that there was not a field; we could take any course and write a paper on women.

SK: Right.

SE: So, you just did it. And so, for me—and, you know, my first efforts to find a dissertation topic were a bread riot during the Civil War, because I was looking at, I wanted to know what about poor white women. I was kind of pursuing the interest from my community organizing. And then, a strike in Elizabethtown, right over the mountains here, in 1929. [Someone coughs] And each of those research papers was, like, “Could I find a dissertation topic somewhere?” [Coughs] And then, women in the Socialist Party, and that was really directly looking for foremothers. And then, I met Mari Jo Buhle, who was writing *that* book brilliantly.

SK: [Laughs]

SE: And I ended up doing sort of my own history, you know. Personal politics was the story of how the Women's Movement emerged out of Civil Rights and the New Left, which I had been on the fringes of all this time. I was not at the central meetings where the issues popped up. I had dropped into the aftermath of that when I got to Chicago and met all these people who had been to Mississippi in [19]64 and who thought of themselves as organizers. That was an identity. And they were powerful and they were wonderful. So, I ended up doing—you know, my dissertation was so much a direct expression of who I was and the linkages between social movements that for me there was never a wrench, there was never a sense that I'm stepping out of activism and into professionalism.

And I was very lucky to land a job in a department that was itself very democratic and had self-consciously broadened what it offered to include new fields. And they hired me to do women's history, which was this whole new field. So, I was the—I never suffered in my department either, because I was *hired* to be the token feminist. And if I had colleagues who didn't like it, which I did, they couldn't stomp on me. The ethos of the department was that that's what I was supposed to do.

SK: Right.

SE: So. But I did, when got to Minnesota, discover—two or three years before that, I thought I could go to any city in the country and find my movement. I got to Minnesota in the fall of [19]76 at a time when there was serious disintegration. The New American Movement was disintegrating. Sectarianism on the Left was kind of at its height. The Co-op Movement, which is wonderful, had had this internal war where a group tried to take over all the co-ops. [1:05:00] There was a lot of sectarianism, and I was sick of that, just didn't want to have anything to do with it, and a lot of people were burned out. So, I didn't immediately find my on-the-ground Women's Movement.

What I found was women's studies, which was being invented, and women in a number of departments who felt that we were engaging in an intellectual revolution. And so, that became where my activism landed for quite a while, the sense that we are trying to shift the paradigms of our disciplines in order to ask questions about women. And that moved rather quickly into gender as an analytical category. Joan Scott was at Chapel Hill for a while, just before—she came to Chapel Hill just before I left. And, you know, that was her big intervention.

I stayed connected to lots of different issues. I did always want my research to have something to do with activism and social movements and understanding them. *And* I was part of a generation of activists who went into academia. Now, that's something somebody should try to figure out: Why it is that in the [19]70s, I think, history was one of the disciplines that was *most* affected by the influx of activists. No question about it. Working class history, black history, you know, the beginnings of the history-from-the-bottom-up thing was—it was so thrilling to be part of that bigger thing. We had seminars among us feminist faculty, in which we tried to teach each other: What is the paradigm shift that's going on in my discipline or your discipline? And then, we spent time thinking about: Why is feminism for the moment seeming to have so much more power in history than in some other disciplines? In the [19]80s, that shifted to the literary field, with the rise of cultural studies, and where the radicals are [laughs] moved.

SK: Okay.

SE: But for my generation in the [19]70s—and, you know, it never left me. I felt like that was—there was always a linkage. And my work gave me the opportunity to give talks in communities all over the place. So, I could take it out, you know, push it out. So, for me, it has not been a huge source of stress or a sense that I had to sell my soul in order to be an academic. It's a very privileged life. There's just no question about that. But, you know, the people that I knew who thought the only pure thing to do was to renounce your professions and go work in a factory—I can't see where they went with that either.

SK: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

SE: So.

SK: So, we're going to wrap up just in a couple of minutes.

SE: Yeah.

SK: But I do want to ask you just to reflect on the present for a moment. So, we have lots of competing narratives going on, at least in popular culture, right—?

SE: Right.

SK: Where there's the Who Needs Feminism sort of movement is out there.

SE: Right.

SK: There's this frankly kind of odd and troubling men's rights current.

SE: Oh, it's very disturbing, yeah.

SK: There's controversy about women's bodies, you know, in entertainment.

SE: Right.

SK: As a Women's Movement activist and as a scholar of that movement, how do you [laughs] sort of see the world today?

SE: Well, you know, I get this question almost everywhere I give a talk.

SK: I bet.

SE: "What's the future?" And I have to start by saying, "I do history! I don't do the future."

SK: [Laughs] Right.

SE: So, if I say something, it's no more valid than anything you would say. I don't feel like I have a special handle on that. I've been expecting there to be another feminist upsurge, you know, for quite a long time, [1:10:00] and I still see—there are so many contradictions affecting women. On the other hand, it's very hard to talk about women as a group.

SK: Right.

SE: And we've known that now for quite some time, that you can't—if you speak about women—that's why some of this political stuff about the women's vote is so absurd. Women aren't all the same. They're half of the population, so they're half of every other part of the population. At the international level, however, it is possible to talk about international phenomena of women being denied rights, denied education, having no ownership over their bodies. It's pretty clear at the international level.

[Laughs]

And in this country, I keep thinking that a new generation has to articulate where the struggle is for them. My generation can't tell them. For us, it was all—in the early years, in some ways, looking back, it's very easy and clear, because the dichotomized paradigms of gender were so strong that you started breaking—it was a house of dominoes, you know. You just touch it, and it all starts falling down. And when women—you know, there were so many legal restrictions, all of those things. Well, we've swept away a lot of that. *And yet*, we still have this epidemic of campus rape. We still have very disproportionate numbers of women at high levels of decision-making, whether you talk Congress or corporations or universities or whatever. There's a whole lot more women there than there used to be, but some of us thought by now it would all be equalized out. There would be some kind of parity.

It's still very, very hard—I just gave a talk yesterday to the Haywood County Chamber of Commerce Women in Business group. And so, I did a quick summary of the sort of revolution in women's lives in the twentieth century and ending up with the acknowledgement that so many things aren't fixed and that we've opened a lot of doors

but we haven't got any social support for people who care about parenting and also careers.

SK: Right.

SE: Men *or* women. And the burden falls disproportionately on women, but I do think there are more and more men for whom this matters. And we don't offer daycare, we don't guarantee health care, we don't guarantee paid leave for parents, male or female. There's a thousand things that are—and we still have careers and professions designed for people with wives. And so, it doesn't matter what gender you are, you need that idea, that old idea that you have a spouse who takes care of that other side of your life.

And young people—the discussion emerged very quickly. A lot of women in their thirties and forties, juggling—you know, they work in banks, they're entrepreneurs, they're in this juggling game. And the world doesn't make it easy, and everybody still—in my generation, we were making it up as we went. I feel like women are still making it up as they go. And if you have family that lives nearby, you use those ties to help you, but people are so mobile that most don't.

SK: Right.

SE: So, the number of problems that remain is just enormous. Enormous! I've been one of the people reluctant to have women's studies just turn into gender studies, because I feel like power is real and—as much as I think it is utterly valid to study gender and to study men and maleness and constructions of masculinity and all of that, I totally agree with all that—but *somebody* has to keep paying attention to women, because they

can slide off the radar, *because* [1:15:00] we're not equal yet! So, I can't tell you how that's going to come about but I still believe it will happen. [Laughs]

SK: [Laughs] I think we'll end on that cautiously optimistic note.

SE: Alright.

[Recording ends at 1:15:14]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council