

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

**Interview U-0591  
Barbara Zelter  
August 11, 2005**

**Field Notes – 2  
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## **FIELD NOTES: BARBARA ZELTER**

Interviewee: Barbara Zelter

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge, Heirs Project director

Interview Date: August 11, 2005

Project: Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists

Location: Raleigh, NC

### THE HEIRS PROJECT

“Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists” is a multi-phased oral history project which explores the stories and traditions of social justice activism in North Carolina through in-depth interviews with fourteen highly respected activists and organizers. Selected for the integrity and high level of skill in their work dedicated to social justice, the interviewees represent a diversity of age, gender, and ethnicity. These narratives capture the richness of a set of activists with powerful perspectives on social justice and similar visions of the common good. These are stories of transition and transformation, tales of sea change and burnout, organizing successes and heart wrenching defeats. These are the stories of the Movement.

All of the oral histories will be archived in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and will be a valuable addition to the modest amount of literature about contemporary social justice activism in the South. This is a project of the North Carolina Peace and Justice Coalition.

### THE INTERVIEWEE

Barbara Zelter has lived in North Carolina since 1971 and has been involved in organizing in the areas of economic justice and peacemaking through a number of groups, including NC Equity, NC Fair Share, the Common Sense Foundation, Democracy North Carolina, NC Waste Awareness and Reduction Network, New Beginners Community Help Mission, and for the past 10 years with the NC Council of Churches. She is an active partner in the Southern Faith, Labor, and Community Alliance. Barbara and two partners founded a statewide nonprofit called JUBILEE, operating from 1997-2002, linking churches with families affected by welfare reform and fostering the family voice in welfare policymaking. She has written several study guides and curricula on faith and justice.

She has co-led a long-term, experimental inter-racial, interdenominational group of four churches in rural Orange County, NC, in a program called Living the Word. With others she coordinates Triangle-area Sabbath Economics gatherings that tie into Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries of activist theologian Ched Myers.

Honors include: Health of the Public Award, UNC (1994); Mitch Snyder award for antipoverty action (Boston, 2001), NC Justice Center's Defenders of Justice award for JUBILEE (2002), the NC Peacemakers award from NC Peace Action (2006), and the Distinguished Service award from the NC Council of Churches (2007). Zelter is currently taking a year away from organizing for discernment of the next stage of calling.

### THE INTERVIEWER

Bridgette Burge graduated from Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee in 1995 with a degree in Anthropology/Sociology and a semester of intensive study of oral history theory and methodology. In 1995 and 1996, Burge and a colleague conducted fieldwork in Honduras, Central America collecting the oral histories of six Honduran women. She earned her master's degree in Anthropology from the University of Memphis in 1998. In 1999, she moved to North Carolina and served as North Carolina Peace Action's state coordinator, and later as North Carolina Peace Action Education Fund's executive director. In 2005, Burge began her own consulting company to provide training, facilitation and planning to social change organizations. The same year, with the support of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Burge launched the project "Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists." The interviews from this project are archived at the Southern Historical Collection in the Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill.

### CONTENT OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interviews in the Heirs to a Fighting Tradition project are organized around several themes:

- Lessons learned through their experiences about effective social justice activism, movement building strategies, and approaches to community organizing.
- The ways class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity affect the narrators as social justice activists.
- Questions related to the significance of activism in the South and specifically in North Carolina.
- Exploration of what nurtures and sustains the narrators as activists as well as what challenges and discourages them.
- Questions about the evolution of the narrators' socio-economic, political, and philosophical perspectives.

Generally, the interview questions flow chronologically beginning with questions about the narrators' parents and family of origin and ending with descriptions of their plans for the future.

Interview topics included: Barbara's childhood in Rochester, NY, as part of a white, middle-class, ethnically Jewish family; her experience growing up in the Catholic church and the gender roles there; her parents and their siblings; her move to Geneva, NY, to attend Hobart and William Smith College; meeting her husband Tom in college; their move to Durham in 1971; her work with Baldwins retail store, Snelling and Snelling Personnel, and Research Triangle Institute; her early interest in racial and class justice; giving up her faith when she went to college; her volunteer work in the late '70s and early '80s but lack of connectedness to other activists; the impact on her of Father Bill Coolidge of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cary; her participation in adult education through Management and Training Associates; her decision to go to graduate school in social work at UNC-Chapel Hill; her position as N.C. Fair Share's health care community organizer and the lessons she learned there about race, class, sexism, and the importance of experience apart from formal education; her participation in the health committee of the NC Council of Churches; her work with JUBILEE around welfare policy, living wage, job loss, and sustainable economic development; her peace work with the Council of Churches; her children, Charlie and Mollie, and their political views; the importance of relationships in her organizing work; the feeling as a privileged person that she hasn't done enough; being a recipient of the Health of the Public award, the Mitch Snyder award, and the Defenders of Justice award; her writing and publications about social justice issues for pastors and the church; the publication of "Not Making It in North Carolina," and the process of writing about people without exploiting them for their stories.

**TRANSCRIPT—BARBARA ZELTER**

Interviewee: Barbara Zelter

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge

Interview date: August 11, 2005

Location: Raleigh, North Carolina

Length: 2 cassettes; approximately 145 minutes

**START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A**

BZ: How many are we're going to have here on Tuesday?

BB: It looks like there's going to be six. I'll count for sure when I find out directions and get it to you then.

BZ: Okay. I've got this dining room table that seats six.

BB: That will good, yeah. Okay, so I'm here with Barbara Zelter in her home and if you could say the date and the time and your address.

BZ: Okay. What is the date? [laughter] Is this the tenth?

BB: Eleventh.

BZ: It is August eleventh, 2005, amazingly enough. We're here in what I call my living room, but it's really just a little nook in my shoebox, but it's nice and cozy and candlelit here with Bridgette. What else would you like to know?

BB: That's good. Why don't you just tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Rochester, New York.

BZ: That's funny. I just found out today that a workshop leader for the peace conference we're doing later had a guy that went to Colgate Rochester Divinity School. This

reminds me of what it was like to grow up in Rochester, because my house that I lived in my entire childhood until I went off to college was right across the street from this divinity school. We call it the divinity school. It had a big part in my childhood in Rochester because it was like a big, gothic, park-like place, where we sled down the hills in the winter and played bowling in this old, musty room where you put up your own heavy bowling pins and knocked them down, and then ran down and set them back up again yourself. Yeah, so that was just a flashback when you first said Rochester.

You know it was a big northern city, and we lived on one of the major artery streets in the city, where a city bus stopped every twenty minutes, night and day. It was the kind of zone where people who are from cities know about, where every block makes a difference in class, socio-economic status, ethnicity. Things are very sharply delineated in cities sometimes, at least that was how it was in the 50s. We lived up kind of on top of the hill near the divinity school and near a city park. For some people, that was rich, because six or seven blocks down the street where my elementary school was that we walked to, that would be where maybe there's an old house that divided into two apartments, and more working class people lived.

We were a, I guess you could say, mercantile family. My dad had one job his entire life. My dad is now ninety-one, in Florida, and when he was fourteen, he went to work at B. Forman Company, which was a kind of nice clothing store that his immigrant Jewish uncle had started. He started as stock boy and became a buyer of all these various kinds of women's clothing and stuff, and ended up as vice-president, but when he retired, he had been there fifty-two or three years, something like that. It's the only job he ever had. He went to World War II for many years and came back, had the same company job. Isn't that bizarre?

So I grew up with that kind of stability. I grew up in one house my whole life and my dad had one job his whole life. My mom stayed home with us during my child-rearing years. She later, I was the oldest of four, and by the time my brother way down the line came, she was working. In many ways, it was the classic white, middle class, fifties childhood, that is mythologically in a lot of people's minds and didn't really happen most places, but it happened at our house. [laughter] For better or worse, it happened at our house. I would say it was probably a pretty protected childhood.

I went to the local elementary school that I could walk to safely, it was great, and then went to a horrible inner-city Catholic school for seventh and eight grade, which was the ticket to get into the Catholic girls' high school. If you launch padded off a Catholic elementary school in that time, you had a better chance. My parents wanted me to go there because they thought it was better than the local high school. So a lot of it was good, and I could hop a bus and travel around. I could ride a bike and travel around, but part of this childhood, because my family was kind of that Chamber of Commerce, middle class family, I was massively, massively ignorant of huge portions of the culture there. For instance, Frederick Douglass published the *North Star* out of Rochester. I never heard his name. He was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, which is in part of my bicycle route, and we played in the cemetery. Did I know that Frederick Douglass was buried there? No. In '68, when the quote, riots were happening, that I would now label uprisings, but you know the spin that I got from my family—I was already in college then, but I would come back in the summers—was those crazy people, those crazy people down there just rioting. Don't they know any better? They're burning down their own stuff. Absolutely no understanding of class, ethnicity, that kind of stuff.

We actually did have some understanding of ethnicity. My dad was Jewish and it was an anti-Semitic time, so my experience of ethnicity is all the limitations of our family's life because Jews weren't allowed to live certain places, work certain places, go to certain places. When we traveled with the family, we couldn't go to certain motels. Dad would ask if you accept Jews here, and some said no, so we would have to go elsewhere. There was a huge amount of consciousness of which country clubs, which subdivisions, which towns allowed Jews, which didn't. So there's a lot of our consciousness was around Jews and gentiles, even though I was raised Catholic, because my mom was Catholic, a lot of the friends and culture was Jewish. I think I've told you before. I had these kids at the Catholic school who would kind of persecute me for being Jewish and throw ice balls at me on the way home and stuff, and call me kike. That was the main ethnic or cultural awareness, was around Jews and gentiles in my life. I've got to say it was pretty good, though, a lot of it was pretty good, because we did have autonomy and we did not grow up in fear. A lot of that was the sheltered, protected middle class, white, 1950s experience, which is a lot of safety, but a whole lot of ignorance.

BB: Did you attend a church or a synagogue? You were raised Catholic, you said.

BZ: Raised Catholic, so we went to confession every Saturday and church every Sunday at Saint Boniface Catholic Church, which is a big, inner-city, mostly Jewish and Irish—excuse me, German—the German club was in that neighborhood. Cities then would have really strong ethnic enclaves and stuff, so our school was in kind of a German zone. Yeah, so I went all the time, and out of the four kids, I was the only one for whom religion stuck, I think. I was, I really think, born mystic and church made sense to me. The whole thing that you see around here with kind of a darkness and candles and incense, that's

straight out of Catholic Church. If I could buy one of those little balls that had that incense in it that they swung around, I would get it. In fact, I found a place on the web, I think, and I may. This is a direct stamp of my route to spiritual peace, that came out of Saint Boniface Church. But yeah, I remember in high school, reading these heavy-duty theologians, Chardin and stuff, and literally running two miles from my house down to the church to have discussions with this young priest about theology and stuff, which none of my friends were doing or anything. That stuff all made sense to me. That was a language that always made sense to me.

BB: How old were you?

BZ: At that point? Around fourteen, fifteen, maybe.

BB: What was the priest's name, do you remember?

BZ: Gosh, what was his name? I know it. Maybe it will pop back later, but I found out later that he was a young, single guy, and my mom was none too pleased, because she thought he had designs on me. He came to the house to visit when I was sick once or something, so maybe that was the truth. He later did go drop out of the priesthood and marry a nun. [laughter] Oh gosh. He was a young one. And then there was the tyrannical Fr. Taylor, who was the pastor who only had nasty things to say, like on Mother's Day, well, honor your mothers or whatever. On Easter he said, "You're only here on Easter. Why aren't you here other times?" He was just a snit. He was awful. Fr. Hoffman! And of course there were the nuns who really ran everything and did all the hard work and got no recognition or power. I had some lessons around gender and power that way.

BB: What's your earliest memory of like noticing gender stuff in the church?

BZ: In the church, well the women couldn't do anything. There were altar boys, not altar girls. The priest was father, father, father. The nuns were geriatric, covered-up, and hustling, cleaning up the altar afterwards and living in the convent. The nuns taught in this Catholic school, Saint Boniface, and listen to how their working conditions--. In my seventh grade, there were fifty-three kids—no, excuse me, fifty-eight—and these were on those wooden benches with runners, those old-fashioned rows of desks that are of wrought-iron runners and you flap down the chairs, the wooden seat, so this seventh-grade teacher had these fifty-eight kids to deal with in one room. She was also the principal, so she would run back and forth between her principal office next door and our classrooms. That's how I got a seventh-grade education. Then, the eighth-grade was Sr. Lumina, who was about eighty-three and way past what should be retirement age. We had sixty-three kids in that classroom, and all we did all day was recite. The homework was memorize this paragraph out of science, memorize this paragraph out of these old books, and then up and down the rows, recite the paragraph. Can you—amazing. Her whole thing was crowd control. [laughter] So it was really a bizarre situation, like a kid asked me for a pencil, Liam McGonagle, to borrow. I said yes, and I gave it to him across the row. Because I was talking, she said you go to the principal's office and ask for some tape to put over your mouth. I had to trot down the hall and ask the principal for some tape to put over my mouth. It was duct tape. I had to sit there the whole afternoon with that piece of tape on my mouth, because I had talked out of order. I said, well ( ), he asked me for the pencil. You know all of these are little, unprocessed-at-the-time messages around power and oppression and control. Then it just seemed like they were being a jerk, but now I see it in a more systemic way.

BB: So would you say your parents' and your siblings' names?

BZ: Yeah, my mom—Mary Ruth Gill, who married Charles Zelter. I'll tell you something about his name in a minute. I was the oldest of four, born in 1950. My sister, Chrissy, was born fifteen months later, and then two years later, my sister, Pokey—Mary Frances, but Pokey because she was born a month late. It was this cluster of three girls. Then when my dad was forty-eight, twelve years later, the king was born. [laughter] My brother, Jimmy. My mom is the most unabashed, how do you say, male chauvinist in the universe. She loves boys. I was to have been John. No doubt about it, boys are better. Girls are so much harder to raise than boys, all this. It was absolute, complete idol worship of boys. So when Jimmy was born, it was like the crown was already on his head. You know, we liked him, I still love him, we're friends, but this is the baby brother that turned out to be the head of investments for City Corp for the moment, on Wall Street, and one of the captains of finance, of the universe, literally. Part of it was because he was born into such thrilling adulation. [laughter] When the boy finally came.

BB: What was that like for you?

BZ: I mean it was so jerky because the favoritism was so absolutely clear. I guess this is not something in print that my parents would see, right? We could maybe edit some of that. Oh, it was horrible. Mom was a very emotionally abusive person and not a happy person. She was born a generation too early. She wanted to go back to work—she was a nurse, head nurse, didn't marry until she was twenty-seven and then had kids— in their social class and race at the time, when we went to school, she wanted to become a nurse at the elementary school so she could work, get out of the house, and use her skill. She was not allowed to because it would emasculate dad. I heard the word emasculate a million times growing up, and whole job of women was not to emasculate men. You had to be real

strategic when you ask for something. Make your dad feel like he's in charge. You know, all of this stuff.

At any rate, because of this, and she was forced to stay home, even forced by institutionalized things like the public school system didn't serve lunch. Everybody walked home. So we came home for lunch our entire elementary school and middle school time. In fact, I walked a mile and a half in ice storms home from Saint Boniface. You'd have five minutes by the time you got home, and walk about another mile and a half in the ice, because they didn't serve lunch. The assumption was somebody's home, and guess who? So she was a very, very bitter person, and she's eighty-three and she's happier now. She would say things like I should have only had one child. If it was my choice, I would have only had one child, but being Catholic, she didn't believe in birth control. A woman down the road on our street worked for Planned Parenthood, somebody younger than mom, and it was like the big scandal of the neighborhood. [said in whisper] She works for Planned Parenthood.

BB: Can you remember her name?

BZ: No. I don't remember the name, but I baby-sat for them sometimes and it was like, you know, [said in whisper] she's a murderer. It was considered way racy and controversial that she did that, so that was kind of the big craziness in the neighborhood. I think mom was part of that generation of moving into that model of the white, middle class, privileged person was its own form of jail. She expressed a lot of bitterness. Now I understand a lot of why she was so bitter, because it was a form of prison that they voluntarily stayed in. I mean she's Betty Friedan's generation, I guess, too, or something like that, but she wasn't one to, she loved structure. Her mom died unexpectedly when she was going into high school. One summer, she was away and her mom got an pneumonia at age

thirty-seven and unexpectedly died. She had to go off with her grandma and her drunk grandpa, and didn't get to go to college. There was a lot of hard stuff she had. Her dad had all kinds of jobs and she went to ten elementary schools or something, so she wanted stability. Like I grew up with my mottos: don't rock the boat ( ), and you're always safe with a blue blazer. Those are the mottos that I learned growing up, meaning acceptance was the most important thing. Acceptance in the right places was the absolute most important thing.

So here's the piece about dad and his name. My dad was a tall, red-headed guy named Red, Red Zelter. Because of the prejudice against Jews where we were, when he met my mom, a nurse, he went by a fake name, Red Kelly. He tried to pass as Irish and he could because he was a tough, red-headed guy. It was only after they had been dating awhile that my mom found out his real name and that he was Jewish, but she didn't care, because she loves Judaism, and I learned all my Yiddish from my mom. So it was handy; I got a great Yiddish vocabulary. She's small and dark so they all thought she was the Jew and he was the Irishman. In fact, she was the Irishwoman and he was the Jew. I guess I learned a little bit through that story about internalized depression.

BB: Do you remember any interesting stories of your parents' responding to how your father was treated for being Jewish when you were young? Like you said that you remember him asking, can we stay here, and they'd say no.

BZ: Interestingly enough, they just kind of always said, "Well that's the way things are." That's why they don't really understand what I do very much, because that's just the way things are. They were happy when certain country clubs opened up, quote, and the University Club in Rochester, when that allowed Jews, they joined immediately, and they were very proud to take people to the University Club. To them, being in clubs was a big

thing, but it was almost like they weren't going to be the ones to break the ground or doing anything about it. They were glad when it finally happened, but there was certainly never a notion of pushing back, never. It's just like that's the way the world was. You don't like it, but that's the way it was.

BB: Tell me what it was like being moved to Geneva, New York in 1971 and you went to Hobart and William Smith College?

BZ: Right.

BB: Studied English.

BZ: Yeah.

BB: What was involved in that decision to go there and what was that transition like?

BZ: Well it wasn't, it was a fallback school, which I got into. My dad wanted me to go to the far-off William and Mary in Virginia. We were upstate New York city kids, and his notion was that if I went to William and Mary, I would turn into a lady and so it'd be very important, because I would learn the gente art of being a Southern lady. That would be just fine; that would be wonderful. I went there and looked at it, and it looked pretty and I was ready and it was academically good, but I didn't get in, and I was heartbroken. I looked at some other places, Denison and Swarthmore. Who knows what reason, by geographical distribution or whatever, that's what I told myself. [laughter] I just thought I wasn't smart enough.

My fallback school was at William Smith and Hobart, which my mom's aunt had gone to, and I had hardly heard of it. It's in the finger lakes of New York. It was really pretty, and I liked it when I went there for an interview. It turned out to be fabulous. It was wonderful. It was right on Seneca lake, and it was a just a beautiful, beautiful place. Fifteen

hundred students, small classes, great professors, I got a fabulous education. I wish I could go back to do it again. It was just thrilling, thrilling in all regards. I just loved studying. I was a complete turkey. I read everything and then read twenty other books in the library. I was a scholar and I had that opportunity to be a scholar there.

It just busted open my world in a lot of ways. Although, I was still so sheltered and coming out of such ignorance. I was in college from '67 to '71, when everything happened in that generation, it was King's death and Kennedy's death, and you know everything, Kent State. My best friend from growing up, Skinny Minny the Galloping Guinea, Margaret, who I've named my daughter Margaret after, she was in the middle of the Kent State shooting and only because a guy jumped on top of her did she not get shot. She actually met him at a reunion again when they had Kent State reunion. But we had a strike against the war and all kinds of action going on, and I would be the kind that agreed with it all, but I'd be studying. Or like when they wanted to shut down the school or cancel classes, I wanted to go to class. I was such a nerd in so many ways. I would judge things like, oh yeah that's the kid that's organizing the SDS or whatever, he's the kind of person that was so unpopular in high school. He's turned into like this tyrannical egotistical person, and so I would not like the person that was riding this protest as his vehicle for self-aggrandizement or something, and then not fully engage in what the point was. I was so un-empowered that I completely did agree with all of it, and I was beginning to get an analysis, but I didn't think that mass action didn't anything, or I just thought what's the point of having a march or anything.

I was still so individually absorbed and not aware of historical movements. I was in English and psychology and religion, and humanities kind of major, but I didn't ever learn labor history or movement history. There were those on campus who did. I just wasn't there.

I was into studying and making out. I found Tom when I was nineteen, glommed onto him as a security blanket, I guess, and other things, the man I married. So I was like in bed with Tom or in the library with a book. I didn't have a giant repertoire. I had a lot of friends and he saw me as very independent and I was involved in things, but I wasn't political. I mean we stood in line for hours to vote for McGovern, I stood in line in the rain and that kind of thing, but electoral was as far as I went.

BB: Did Tom go to the same college?

BZ: He did. He's a year ahead.

BB: And you met him in class, or—

BZ: Well actually I went out with a friend of his and they were in the same fraternity actually, and apparently Tom interviewed him and said what would she be like to marry or something, what's she like. We were together two years during college and then married during my senior year at Christmas vacation. That's a whole other story.

BB: What was involved in your decision to move to Durham in 1971?

BZ: I was the following spouse. I think a lot of people that know me now just would be stunned at how different I was then in a lot of ways. I didn't appear to be a weenie but I was in some ways. I didn't really have a plan of my own. Tom got accepted into law schools and he chose Duke because it wasn't in a big city like Georgetown and the others were. I thought well, hey, I can get a job anywhere, I can do anything, and so I followed. I didn't have a career path plan. I just, like "I will follow him" [laughter] Like those old radio songs. I did that. So that's how we landed here in a steamy August in Durham.

BB: Then you worked at Baldwins' , like a retail clothing store for awhile?

BZ: Yeah, the experience of being one of the massive numbers of students, quote wives, spouses, but looking for work. They all think that you're not going to stay. It's not that easy to get a job as a student spouse, actually, but I got this job at Baldwins' as director of advertising and display. It was a family-owned clothing store on Main Street in Durham, that some people may remember, Woody Baldwin. Oh it was a schlocky little store! I got to do all the newspaper ads and the layout, which was all like wax machine, I mean cut and paste, no computers of course, but I would do the little blurbs about why somebody should buy this dress or this pair of shoes, and then also do all the display windows.

One year I put this Halloween display with ladies in black nightgowns. I had no materials to work with. It was just a cheesy operation, so I put this big pumpkin in the window with two of these mannequins out of the closet with black negligees on, and a pumpkin and some straw or something. I came back in the next week and the pumpkin, because of the sunlight coming through the store window, had melted, and so it was this glommy, slimy, melted pumpkin mess. [laughter] And these two pathetic, skinny, white lady mannequins in their black, unsexy negligees. Oh it was so sorry, that was a sorry job. [laughter] And here's the thing. There was this drunk old white guy that had the job before me, and he made twice what I made, so I learned also about gender and workplace, but it was seventy dollars a week gross, take home fifty, 1971.

BB: Forty hours?

BZ: Forty hours.

BB: But you only did that a few months, it was like—

BZ: Six months, and then I jumped ship to work in the CCB Building in Durham for Snelling and Snelling Personnel. The winning things of that were there was absolutely no pay

and no benefits, but it was a hundred percent commission. I was the employment counselor that was in charge of clerical and administrative, quote, women. It was very interestingly gender biased too, because the men that were there as the employment counselors got the technical, meaning scientist job, ( ) kind of jobs, and sales, and women got clerical and administrative. These were lower-paying jobs, our commissions were lower, so there was a real gender thing I learned about there. But because I was really good at it and I had all these awards and stuff for it, I made like eleven thousand, which was decent back then and we were trying to put Tom through law school and live. He didn't have scholarships or anything, so it was really poverty time in those years. That was funny because I had to have a fake name. You put in ads in the paper saying, secretary, four hundred a month, which is what they were back then, call Kathy Cook, and that was my name, Kathy Cook. I still have a big pile of letters of "Thank you, Kathy Cook, for finding me this wonderful job." It had to be alliterative, easy for somebody to remember, but that ( ) for years walking around Durham, people would say, "Hey Kathy." [laughter]

BB: Why did you have to have a fake name?

BZ: For your own privacy, I guess. Part of it was if your name was in the phonebook and you didn't want these people looking for jobs to actually know who you were or call you at home or anything, that was one, but also to be very easy for employers or people to remember and say, mostly privacy, I guess. A lot of people didn't know that when they called up these employment places all the names were fake. I did that two and a half years, and that didn't support us well enough.

The other good thing about that job was I had to find out a lot about all these workplaces, what they paid, what the benefits were, and then when people came looking for

work, after having left a certain place, I would learn more, yeah this blank-blank company sexually was harassing me, and so I got all this inside skinny of employment in Durham, what wages were, what relative pay and conditions were, which were the good companies, which weren't. It was a very interesting, kind of under the table view.

Also, I learned a lot about race and racism because of course, it was against the law for an employer to give a job order saying I only want a certain kind of person, but a employer who was white, hearing that I sounded white on the phone when he was giving me a job order, would say well, [said in whisper] you know we can't say we don't want a negro in this receptionist job, but [coughs] you know. So my favorite thing was to send those people the most highly-qualified, wonderful person of color. I remember once, Flo Henderson, I'll never forget her, this adorable, sassy young black woman, and she was so more than capable of being a receptionist at this finance company. They could not not hire her. She was gorgeous. She had that job wrapped up, and they did hire her finally.

BB: What company?

BZ: It was a finance company, I don't know, maybe Beneficial Life, I can't tell you for sure. The games we played that way. I saw how many people really wanted to discriminate and they felt they could confidentially say that to me, and I would explain the wrap that we couldn't. I guess I should have turned them in, but at the time I didn't know better.

BB: Where do you think that came from in you, to be off-put by it and to be feisty enough to try to send folks there, where do you think that came from?

BZ: Even when I was five years old, I knew that my parents' and family's attitude around class and race and stuff, there was something off and wrong about it. I often wonder

about whether some people are innately mystic. I think I was born a mystic, and by that I mean you feel connected, more connected than disconnected, more of the same cloth with everybody than not. It just didn't make any sense to me, just seeing the racist and classist way things operated, just being bogus on its face. I didn't have terminology, I didn't have any language, I didn't have structural concepts in my mind, it just felt shameful. I felt ashamed when I was hearing these things and I didn't know why. It just didn't seem fair or kind or correct. It didn't seem to affect anybody else in the family. I don't know why. It's very strange, but I just always had a sense of it, and I guess the older I got, the more I lived into that and didn't doubt myself, because usually I felt crazy because nobody else I heard or saw did anything like that.

BB: You felt since you were five, was there something that happened that you remember that young?

BZ: Oh I just always remember comments, and there were things like John Carberry, the guy next door, who was a college engineer. He also took apart cars and rebuilt cars with rumble seats and things that he would drive us around in, but basically in John's garage there was always on the weekends and nights, a mechanical reconstruction of old cars going on. My parents had attitudes about anybody with grease under their fingernails is lower, and if you work with your hands, it was lower. They were just little comments, and things like in elementary school, you'd have to fill out a form saying what your parents' occupation was or something, and my mom would say for dad, just write executive. There were all these little clues of what was valued and what was not. Not just little clues, I mean there were like a thousand examples, things like that. A lot of reverence for like Lalique crystal and University of Michigan, the good brands, Cadillac is cheapest, a lot of snobbery around the good

schools. The University of Michigan was the Harvard for Jews, and Brandeis was the Yale for Jews, so those were the good schools to get into. It was just an everyday observation, commentary, and ranking of values of people. It just made my skin crawl.

BB: So when you went away to college and up until 1974, when you left Snelling and Snelling, were you still a practicing Catholic or what was spirituality like for you in the early years of your marriage?

BZ: Well just honey, when I went to Our Lady of Mercy High School, it was run by Sisters of Mercy, who were young, feminist, highly-educated, cool women, and they were my first taste of feminism. They were independent women that had their masters degrees and opinions, and I was so struck by the power and influence of these women, that I decided my senior year, I was going to enter a convent after high school. I got all the paperwork, was ready to go, and this is strange because I had like had a date every Saturday night since I was about ten or so, I mean for sure, fifteen on, I was kissing somebody at ten. I mean I liked the guys, and had this quite active life, and so I don't know where it occurred to me that celibacy might be a cool option. [laughter] I have no clue where that came from, but yeah. I truly was really spiritually-centered at the same time. I didn't see any contradiction between the two, actually. But then my mom of all people, who was the Episcopalian-turned-Catholic, said, "Are you kidding me? You couldn't give up men," or something like that. She said why don't you just go to college first, try it out. Strangely enough, after she was like the super Catholic, she didn't want me to become a nun. I was astonished.

So I went to college and immediately hooked up with Tom and immediately lost my faith. It took about two months. I started out going to church there, to the local monastery, and that was the time in the later 60s, in northern liberal arts schools at least, maybe

elsewhere, where you had two choices. You could either have faith or be smart, pick one. That was the culture. It was the secular, liberal intelligentsia kind of thing. I quickly decided which one. Plus, the whole thing of the Church and sex was beginning not to make sense to me. I figured if I wanted to have some kind of a romantic life or something and be a scholar, I gave up faith.

BB: So earlier you said you lost your faith, and then you described it as a choice between being a scholar or being faithful, and then you said you gave up faith, so tell me a little more about that undoing of your faith.

BZ: It's an interesting question and I don't know if I've spent time parsing that out. Part of it was just a peer pressure thing, I think, that fewer and fewer people did, hardly anybody did. There was this little core of us that would get all dressed up on Sunday morning and walk a mile or two down the road to the monastery where there was a Catholic service. It wasn't socially rewarding, so I think there was some laziness to it. Also, some of it was intellectual curiosity about studying Buddhism and Hinduism and other things, and losing the notion that there was one true faith, just opening my head up. I think it's a lot of different things. Ultimately, it really was a loss of faith. I studied all kinds of things with Zohar and Zoroastrian stuff, and Ba'hai. So while I was, I guess, dropping the Catholic faith, I was deeply interested in mythology and traditions, and all I think Islam was the only thing I didn't study at the time. There was always this like a moth to the flame around spiritual tradition, but I was not adhering to the Catholic faith. Then I got more and more aggravated about the Pope and gender and I just got out of that sphere so that I could look objectively at some things. All of the above.

BB: So then from 1974 to '81, right, you worked at the Research Triangle Institute?

BZ: Yeah.

BB: And you did some technical work in research publications and in the meantime there, you'd had Charlie, right?

BZ: Oh yes.

BB: In 1978.

BZ: And then I went back after he was born and worked only part-time until Mollie was born in '81, at which point I dropped out of the paid, full-time workforce for a total of ten years. I was editing and mainly just an editor at RTI. That was really interesting because I would be editing things like a lot of government studies. One of them was interesting in the mid-70s on the war on drugs, and it took four cities, like one in Texas, one in California, one on the East coast, and this big study about how effective the war on drugs was. Of course, it turned out to be completely ineffective, and this was police talk and all kinds of people, and don't you know that that was never released. That report was never released, very interesting about the politics of scientific inquiry, and what becomes public knowledge, and what doesn't.

There were also other things like reports of how the tobacco companies were considering processing marijuana cigarettes, and the whole technology around them flipping over to making joints, and whether or not that would happen, learning that all the qualities of marijuana, how many chemicals are in it besides THC. I got to think well this other stuff is worse than the THC, so I never was real fond of that. I learned a lot there. Environmental impact statements I edited for the ( ) one of the counties in this state, for lakes done by the Army Corps of Engineers, but that's when I learned what a whole environmental impact

statement was like. There were also standards, like EPA standards for carbon emissions and NOx. I learned how that whole process went.

I was a great job in a lot of ways, but ultimately I thought, what difference does this make? Like if I croak tomorrow, there's a hundred other editors that can jump in my place. A trained monkey can do this job. I mean the editing skills I learned were very helpful for all these that I've written since, but I think that's when that whole thing about meaning came back to me, like what social value did this have? I got to be really discontent with it, because it didn't seem to really contribute anything that my growing consciousness wanted to do.

BB: You were also involved in a lot of volunteer work during those ten years too, right?

BZ: Yeah I was pretty much full-time employed; I just wasn't paid, as it goes. What is the lingo they use, community volunteer or something? There's a somewhat little patronizing title that they give to mostly women who did a lot of amazing things really. We sponsored several Laotian refugee families and—

BB: Your family did?

BZ: Yeah, I tried to get the Episcopal Church—I had gone back to church by that time, I had ten years off from church and then '78, I started slowly going back to an Episcopal church in Cary, where I formed my own faith and—

BB: What's the name of the church?

BZ: Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Cary. My mind was getting messed up, so the woman I drove to work with at RTI, whose now the godmother of our kids, said I go to this little church in Cary and the pastor's cool. He's kind of a hippie. He's got black, curly hair and he's cool. Why don't you go talk to him? Which I did. He ended up getting me kind of

free counseling for months, and free theological reflection for months, and it changed my life utterly, utterly, utterly. He would ask me what my concept of God was and I would say, you know what, I just think God is about love and we need to love other people, and that leads to a lot of challenges. He gave me opportunities to teach, like he set me up teaching a little course in this church called "The Nature of Man in Russian Literature." I took four languages, one of which was Russian, in high school, and I had been taking some courses at State and actually got accepted in a doctoral program at Carolina in Slavic languages, because I wanted to read Russian novels in the original. How wacked is that? What kind of job would there be around Wake County for that? At any rate, he wanted me to teach and I said I don't know anything in the Bible to teach, and he said, teach about Russian literature, so I did. That opened up this huge twenty years of doing adult ed work and getting into Bible study.

BB: What's the priest's name?

BZ: Oh, Bill Coolidge. He and his wife, Cathy, now deceased, ended up starting Recompense Retreat Center out in Chatham County, Bear Creek, near Pittsboro, which was a place many people went for many years, even IBM folks would have retreats there, but people would do spiritual retreats. It was out in the woods on the ( ) river. Totally changed my life.

BB: So when you said that you were really messed up, what was going on in those years that was really hard for you?

BZ: There's probably seeds of the marriage breakup that finally took thirty years too, but I wasn't really naming it or knowing it or wanting to understand it well enough. I'm sure that was some of it, and also just that search for meaning. I guess I had the regular work-a-

day life. Tom had a little law job and I had my little RTP job, and we actually thought we probably wouldn't have kids, or I thought, I wasn't eager to have them. I just knew something was off and I was just searching. I knew that there was whole lot more I needed to be about, but I had no clue what or how to get into it. I didn't know any of you. I didn't know any Bridgettes. I didn't know anything about the world that is now my world. I just was unexposed. I stayed in my little group.

**END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A**

**START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B**

BB: You said you always meant to be ( ) but didn't know how begin dealing with that.

BZ: Yeah, something just felt off. I think also there was a lot of childhood stuff that I had never dealt with, a lot of just family, home craziness underneath the surface of the perfect-looking family, and a lot of anger at my mom and just that belly button kind of stuff. I was somewhat emotionally damaged and just needed to look at that. Also, I guess I didn't mention that I was sexually assaulted when I was in the eighth grade, walking home from school in my little Catholic school uniform, by a guy that followed us home, my sister and me, after we got our hair cut one sunny May day. As I was turning into the driveway walking home with my arm full of Catholic schoolbooks, he jumped me and it was an attempted rape. By screaming, with my sister and me, he ran off. That's a long story. Mom ran out trying to

kill him. She chased all around the street trying to find him and kill him, because she would. She's a tough little woman. When they find him awhile later, there was a court trial and I was on the stand and he was in jail for a year. He had assaulted other women. That was very traumatic and at the time, the whole thing was let's get this guy. There was no processing for me at all, no consciousness of what that might mean. My parents went out that evening to some dinner or something, because they thought I was, quote, fine, because I was fine. I cried and then was fine, you know. There was just a lot of stuff that I had to kind of pop the bubble and understand. I hadn't done that deep, deep work, so I had to do a lot of that deep work, and began to.

BB: ( ) what happened to you?

BZ: Well in a way, it's interesting because I think maybe other women that have had sexual abuse of one sort or another, it's like there's this magnet and women know. Now it seems like women tell me all their stuff about it and there's just some kind of a secret club that you don't even know, but it's like a ( ) or something that comes off you that people can tell, and tell you their stuff. The wound is always the gift, the wound is always the gift. That's my deal, so it's helped me help a lot of other people too with all that. It's interesting because the guy was black, and an African-American male friend of mine just this week was saying well, how come it didn't make you do the stereotypical thing about black guys, since it's like the official thing that all the lynching and everything is about, you know they'll come get my young white thing. That absolutely never occurred to me, strange as it is.

This particular guy, I hated his guts, with his great big eyes. I remember having to identify him through the glass at the police department, and oh yeah, that was him. I remember his face really well, and he had these great big eyes. So he, I didn't like, but it just

seemed why would anyone think you would generalize it? What were you saying? What was the question? Oh, why did I feel messed up when I was twenty-seven. I think all that buried stuff was just inching its way to the surface and making me feel a little crack, literally cracked. That's a good image of me because it was like I was becoming cracked and a lot of junk was going to come out and be purged.

BB: Can you tell me more about your conversations with Fr. Bill? What was transformative about it? Can you talk some more about—

BZ: He recognized something in me. I don't know if anybody, somebody would know that there's this theologian and writer called Matthew Fox, and he's written books, *Original Blessing* being one. I'm still really ignorant, but I was massively more ignorant then and I had never heard of him, and Bill gave me copies of his book, a white book with a big apple on the front. I've since bought a dozen copies for people. It's about creation spirituality, which is this alternative way from the fall redemption theology that emerged in Western Christianity. Mainly life is a gift. We're here to savor the gift and be reconciling healers and people of delight. Bill saw that, and meanwhile I'm this person with no kids, and then I was with him during the first baby, I guess. He said, "This is you. This is all about you. This is who you are." It was my favorite line in the Bible, I think one of them is in Isaiah, and it's "I have called you by name and you are mine." It is about being known and that that's what the essence of this love is, that I know who you are and I love you anyway. [laughter] I have called you by name and you are mine. This guy called me by name and he was the first person that got that piece of me, that understood that this was my core, this was my way of seeing the world, and why I felt crazy lots of times. Then he drew me into all kinds of growth opportunities like there's this thing called M.A.T.S., Management and Training Associates,

and it was a group out of D.C. that was operative in the late 70s and 80s, where ministers and psychologists and those types of professionals went for weeklong experiential education certification. It was kind out of the T-group model. ( ) know what that is.

BB: Kind of out of the what?

BZ: The T-group model. It was a fad in the 60s and 70s and 80s, but it was where people would sit in groups and interact and then analyze what happened. He was a trainer in this thing and he pulled me through this, which was the best education I ever had. It beat graduate school by a long shot. Literally, you would sit in a group for the first week and learn about how you're perceived, how you perceive other people, and as people would interact, these trainers would stop action and teach you to speak in "I statements" or to say what you really want or mean, give people feedback on how they appear. It was getting information about yourself and how you operate in a group that you never get. Then the next summer, it was four summers in a row, the next one was on group interaction, with a lot of group theory, like [Kurt] Lewin's field theory, and then the third one was experiential design of learning situations. I attribute most all of the skills that I got for this work now and understanding groups, being able to lead a meeting, setting up processes that work for people, out of that training. It absolutely changed my life.

BB: And those years again were?

BZ: By that point, I had three little kids, so those were summers when the children were all really small. It was, I guess, early to mid-80s, late 80s, maybe '88, I think, was when I got the finally certification. That was huge, just becoming self-aware and aware of group dynamics and when there are all kinds of things happening in planning meetings and

organizing groups, what are the underlying dynamics going on, what really needs to be addressed, unbuckle that, great stuff.

BB: And you had already gone to graduate school at that time?

BZ: That was before graduate school.

BB: What were some other volunteer experiences during those years, and do you think that that work with Bill, was that one of the inspirations for you being involved in more volunteer work in those years?

BZ: I always did volunteer work, even in high school or even in college, I was doing art classes for kids in the local city schools and so, that's the traditionally ( ) volunteer work. Good religious kids grow up doing volunteer work, so I kept on on that level. One of the things was getting trained as a Hope Line counselor, this crisis hotline. That was again before graduate school. That was fabulous training on suicide prevention and active listening. Being on those lines, you'd work four hours a week taking calls and also called for Interact, the direct crisis line, when they shut down. So I would get calls from people like, "Hi, it's my thirtieth birthday. For my birthday present, my husband just broke both my thumbs," stuff like that. That was like being a police officer or something, in that you saw the side of life, that as a middle class person, many of us don't see, although domestic violence is everywhere. But there were all kinds of calls, a lot of kids left alone, just so much of the pain that people who call a Hope Line and say things that they would never, maybe all the people that are around them had no clue that they're going through. Or worrying about STDs and getting information on sex, and you name it. That was a huge education too and some excellent training. That's one thing. There's a lot. All the usual school things when you have

kids. I was always teaching a lot of adult ed at church, heading up ( ). There were just all kinds, doing environment work, working against the Shearon Harris nuclear plant.

BB: How'd you get involved in that work?

BZ: I read the paper. It's like, "that's not right," and just nosed around and found out how to become active in that, did all kinds of things. I remember once on that line, being at some big demonstration in downtown Raleigh with Chris Fitzsimon—remember when he was just starting to get—it was in '95, I guess. It was after graduate school. I dressed up like a fat cat and Chris Fitzsimon, and we had a little cardboard statue of governor Hunt, and I was holding this giant check for five thousand dollars from CPL to the governor.

BB: Was that your first big demonstration?

BZ: No, I don't think because I was into feminist stuff too. I remember when Mollie was a little girl, taking her on pro-choice marches and things. Yeah, gradually my consciousness was getting raised about a lot of different issues, and I would always be firing off letters to the editor. I've got this huge notebook of letters published in the *News and Observer* about me shooting off my mouth on one thing or another. I guess I was just educating myself in various ways.

BB: I'd love to see those, that compilation of letters to the editor. That would be great.

BZ: Oh, okay. They're somewhere upstairs in a file. They were on mental health funding, I mean you pick a topic, I had something to say about it. I was basically your increasingly aware and increasingly angry person who was just diffusely sounding off and contributing wherever I could, but not real well-directed.

BB: What was involved in your decision to do to graduate school?

BZ: I think I was whining to Tom about what am I going to do with my life, and knowing that the kids, the last child was ready for school, and now I wanted to do something else, and he just correctly said well, quit whining about it and just do it. So I decided I wanted to be a therapist, because I was the lady that everybody came and told their stuff to. I had this kind of thriving non-paying therapy business on the living room couch. [laughter] Thought hey, hold up, some people get paid for this. But I was also reading extensively on therapy and psychology and I actually had quite a little body of knowledge around all that, so I thought well, I'm going to go to social work school.       Actually, I wanted to go to divinity school and I found out their program, I mean Duke wanted to let me in, but their program was three years and then required all these posts at churches and stuff, and was very expensive, whereas the social work program took two years and was less expensive. I went with the easier course, but I really did want to go to divinity school then. It just seemed too demanding having three little kids to do that. Duke, like some kind of snotty, official, prestigious institutions, are not as flexible as for instance, Shaw is, with its CAPE program around making a way for adults that have a life.

BB: CAPE?

BZ: CAPE is a program, I forget the exact acronym, but it's Shaw University's program so that adults can study weekends or off-site in different locations in the state. I found that the historically black colleges and universities and stuff are much more accommodating to actual people's lives, adult education past the four-year college age, and making a way for people to get degrees. But the so-called prestigious institutions are much more locked-on, because I guess they have this notion everybody's got plenty of money and

can stop action and stop life to just go to school, which is the back story of picking social work school.

BB: And that was in 1989. It was at UNC-Chapel Hill, right?

BZ: Yeah.

BB: In social work.

BZ: Actually I went to take a sample audit course with Micheline Malson called “Institutionalizing Discrimination,” and Micheline later turned out to be my partner in the non-profit. We created Jubilee. She was just wonderful and taught that course so well. That’s where I really finally understood institutionalized racism in all its forms. She was a great teacher, ( ) Higgenbotham. I just learned a lot. I thought wow, this is good, and so then I enrolled full-time after that little hors d'oeuvre. It didn’t turn out to be as good as Micheline’s class, but still. I flipped over to the administrative and policy side and never did become the therapist. That’s where I did get an understanding of a lot of structural inequity and how allocation and finance works in social programs and political economy. That’s where I got the internship at NC Equity, after having one at Wake County Mental Health, but I had one at NC Equity, now defunct, women’s public policy and research and advocacy, and that’s where I learned legislative advocacy, how to do that, how to negotiate the general assembly, do citizen lobbying. That’s where the world finally bust opened to reveal this layer of all of you, the layer of progressive activists in the state, that I had not known.

BB: So during graduate school, ’89 to ’91?

BZ: That’s when I finally found yes, this is my people. This is my people.

BB: Is that when you first started to identify yourself as an activist and organizer, with Equity and—

BZ: Somewhat, I was daunted because there's this whole mystique around organizing, if somebody's a lifetime activist and organizer, and I put myself down so much for being your basic middle class person. I thought I had really nothing to offer, or certainly I revered these people, the civil rights activists, people that have spent their life in it, whose consciousness was, the Ed Whitfields of the world. I thought who am I in this spectrum? I'm forty years old. But I knew I could write and I knew I could organize. At that time, this is when national health insurance is becoming an issue at the beginning of Clinton, and I found my crusade. I thought this is asinine and immoral that our country doesn't have health care for everybody. I wrote papers that I am going to find a way to change the national health care system. That's how I got hooked up with Fair Share, because that's what they were doing at the time, and I met Lynice [Williams] through Equity. We were trying to get the Wellstone bill passed, the late great Paul Wellstone had HR1300 in Congress, national health care, found all about it. By that time I was beginning to know that was my call, but I certainly didn't give myself any standing, because I felt like I was born-again in a way. I finally found what I knew I would be for the rest of my life. There's no doubt about it, but I realized how much a latecomer I was.

BB: So then in 1991, you were hired as N.C. Fair Share's health care community organizer, right?

BZ: Right.

BB: Did you create that position for yourself?

BZ: No, that was strange. The guy who the E.D. wanted be to do policy work on health care, which I could ably do. I'm an absolute policy wonk. I eat that stuff up and could do it very well. I was translating policy stuff into like simple handouts for community folks

and stuff and speaking with groups about it. But Lynice Williams, who worked at Fair Share as the organizer, had said if we hire somebody, and they rarely did, we need somebody who can do membership database. She had a whole other notion of what was needed, which was correct, and when she was out of town, he hired me and didn't honor her knowledge about it. So it was really awkward and terrible. I was doing some policy analysis and stuff that he wanted done and she didn't, and I was hired behind her back. It was awful, a terrible process.

BB: Who was the E.D.?

BZ: I don't know if I want to share it with you.

BB: Oh, okay.

BZ: Yeah, I don't know if I want to say.

BB: Okay. Was he white?

BZ: Yes, white man, black woman.

BB: What was that like? What was the work like for you? Awkward at first you said, but—

BZ: Well I was so impassionate about the task that I loved the work; I really just loved it, but it was kind of awkward sitting there in the office with that way of being hired, which I only found out later, a year or two later, a long time later, that that was the case. Lynice didn't let me know right away. But the blessing of that job was after John left, I was basically a white person in a mostly black organization. I was a minority most all of the time, which, what better education can a caucasian person have?

So that's where the great undoing began, where the great undoing of any notion that I had of education makes right. I learned there, more than anywhere, the wisdom of the country people, the old women out around eastern North Carolina, various places that had

boatloads and eons more wisdom and experience and so much that I could learn from about how to get things done, how to give honor, how to prioritize, just how to communicate. That's where I learned that information made hardly any difference, but relationships made all the difference—you don't drop a paper on people and expect something—how folks in different circumstances operate and that there's not one way of doing business. There's a whole lot of ways of doing business depending on who you're with. Basically the most important thing I learned to do was just shut up and listen and learn. That's great.

BB: What was your job in this ( ) ?

BZ: Well I was supposed to be working with people around health care, informing them about how there's this bill in Congress. We would have people, for instance we went to representative David Price's office with a group of about eleven people, P.R. Latta, there was labor union people, there were nurses, there were people without health insurance. It was a wonderful diverse group, racially-diverse, age, all kinds of things, all trying to get David Price to sign on to HR1300, the health care bill. I thought well, this is a no-brainer. Why would not a democrat want to sign on a bill to give everybody health care? He was not interested. He wouldn't sign, a very cautious guy. So then we had from Bob Hall the list of all the campaign contributors to David Price, from the pharmaceutical industry, the health industry, and all that. We said—if I think I shouldn't be saying these things, you can edit it out. I don't know—will the fact that you have x-amount of donations coming to you from these industries affect the fact that you don't want to sign onto this health care bill that all of us are saying we want and need? He blew up. Oh, he was so angry at us. They weren't real pleased to have eleven people come and try to sit in his office anyway, but yeah. He was not pleased; he wouldn't sign it. I learned a lot then about the difference between rhetoric of

caring and willingness to put yourself on the line for something that's the will of a lot of people.

BB: Politicians' rhetoric of caring?

BZ: Yeah. Also I got a great disdain for moderates at that point, a great disdain for moderates.

BB: So do you remember specific stories or people when you were working for Fair Share and you were talking about the wise women?

BZ: Well, one great one, and I had nothing to do with making this happen because it was right when I got started in the fall of '91, Lynice had been working in Rocky Mount for many years, working with a group there, and it was mostly African-American, some men, some ministers. It was all about disparate health care because Nash-Edgecombe County has black-white power alignments and differences. There had been at one point a health clinic in the side of the county that didn't have ( ) it had been gone, and so a lot of people had to travel far distances to get to the community health clinic. So the Fair Share style was listening to the people in the community, what did they want and then helping them achieve that. They wanted a clinic and so, apparently, the process was that Lynice helped them study the county budget and they saw things like, hmm, two hundred thousand dollars allocated to build a dog pound. So the folks started going to County Commissioner meetings and sending out press releases when they did, and holding up signs that said, "Dogs don't vote." Don't you know that they got a beautiful new health clinic built? So part of what I did when I was just first coming on board was to accompany Lynice to Rocky Mount for the ribbon-cutting, where an elderly woman had her little grandson hold the scissors to cut the ribbon on this beautiful clinic. There was jubilation. Scott Barber filmed. You know Scott Barber? He's got

a video business. These folks that people thought were no-account, no-influence, country women had pulled themselves together and gotten the county to build them a health clinic. Furthermore, they had gotten an arrangement such that they were on an advisory board to give continuing guidance to what they needed to expand services about, and how they needed to relate to the community, and then some of the them volunteered at the clinic. I jumped in to witness what real empowerment's about and what good community-based organizing can achieve. That was one great story.

BB: You just said women. Were men involved?

BZ: Some, but it was mostly the women. There were some, but mostly older women, blind women, disabled women.

BB: What do you think that's about?

BZ: I think women face a lot of the consequences of discrimination and lack, and they feel it. They're the ones trying to take care of the sick kids. They're the ones trying to go to work sick and figuring out how to make things work. It ( ) to women. They've got the passion for it, it seems. Now I don't know all the reasons for it, but lots of time when I look around, women are on the cutting edge of changing things.

BB: Want to take a break for a few minutes?

BZ: Yeah, that's fine.

[tape interruption]

BB: Okay, we're back. So you were talking about work in the field with N.C. Fair Share.

BZ: Yeah, here's another example. At that time, when I was working at Fair Share, there was a legislative task force on health care, a special study commission, the goal of

which was to find a way to assure that every North Carolinian had health insurance. It was a great notion. We don't have a study commission on that now. We've just kind of given up. But one of the things that Fair Share did was to have grassroots citizen representation on boards and commissions, to bring that voice into these kind of groups. So there was a woman from Fair Share—for some reason I'm losing her name at the moment—she was an African-American single mom and in nursing school that Lynice worked very hard to have her appointed to one of the seats on this maybe fifteen-person study commission. Pam Silberman was the assistant head of it. It was when Carmen Hooker just came in as secretary of state DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] and she was chair of it with another legislator, who was a dentist.

I went to a lot of these study commission meetings and task force meetings, and that is where I completely lost my innocence around—this is all to say, this is a story of how a person gets radicalized—because I learned a lot of sham displays of public input and how task forces and study commissions work and don't work. Here is this study group highly loaded with academics like Chris Conover from Duke, and insurance, health, Blue Cross people, nobody poor without health insurance except for the Fair Share person. So she's there on her own as a single mom trying to go to school, raise her kids, work, all of that and to learn this vast lot of paperwork they all had to go through, with support from Fair Share, a lot of personal support from Lynice, but one of the things was she was the one token. One of the lessons I learned from that is you don't have representation by the group experiencing the problem unless there's a body in there, how one person's token voice can get dismissed, minimized, and how intimidating that is to the person who's the only person of color in the

person, the only whatever, and how disempowering that is. So that's one piece I learned about it.

The other, more scandalous piece is the affect of money in politics. This task force discussed three options and had the Lewin Corporation, it's an economic analysis kind of group, look at the economics of whether individual mandate, meaning each person would be forced to buy health insurance, pay-or-play, this thing where businesses were forced to either cover health insurance or pay into some pot, or the single-payer Canadian-style plan, which of these would be best for North Carolina as a way to assure that everybody has health coverage. I was really paying attention to all these policy reports and things coming out and here is what the Lewin study said. I still remember it's page 113 on that final report because it was so—or no, not the page, but the number—the report basically came out with the fact that if we had a single-payer Canadian-style plan, meaning government-paid health insurance where people could pick their own providers but the government, not a hundred and fifteen different insurance companies, would be the payer. The result was that if we did the single-payer plan, every single North Carolinian would have long-term care, glasses, wheelchairs, prostheses, dental, basic health care, medical, whatever, the whole deal that Medicaid basically pays you, and our state would save 1.13 billion dollars a year in health costs.

So it was a slam-dunk study saying how if we did this, everybody would have health care and we would save money, no-brainer. This was buried; this wasn't talked about. So I went up to Pam Silberman, who was associate head, and now is head of the Institute of Medicine as of last week, and said how come this isn't the recommendation of that study commission? Save money, cover everybody, tell me what I'm missing here. She, who had been a lobbyist for legal services and public benefits for years in the General Assembly, just

kind of laughed at me like you know you might be nice, but you sure are dumb. She said, “Well that wouldn’t be politically feasible.” That told me the world. Everything I had known about or came to know about later about money and politics, the influence of the insurance lobby, and docs that were on the study commission, the academics that just wanted to talk and study and show charts and weren’t feeling the pain of not having health care, all of that just came crashing down and I realized this has been a dog and pony show. This is not about doing the right thing for the people of North Carolina. This isn’t about saving money. This is absolutely about looking like you care and keeping all the powers that be in place. I was furious, furious, because I was at that time putting my life into organizing around this and thinking there might be hope. I learned how they would use and abuse a token participant and pretend that they’ve got citizen participation, and that basically, the white boys in charge win.

And the white boys in charge can include the white women in charge. I was really disgusted at what Carmen Hooker Buell would accept, but she had been a legislator in Massachusetts before coming down here with Chancellor Hooker of UNC, her husband. Again, these are all probably fine people that do care but I saw how people limited themselves to the parameters of the current situation and did not envision how to jump out of that into doing what’s right. I had to wrestle with that a lot, about is my idealism and wanting to do what seems patently correct, fair, good, and right, a crazy pipe dream, and am I really the person with no common sense that my parents said I was? Like my tape was, “Tootsie, you’re smart but you have no common sense.” All of this was playing into the fact like how stupid am I to keep thinking that maybe we can organize and get something done. Can’t you see what this wall is? Can’t I realize that this machine is so in place that it’s virtually

impervious? It brought a lot of soul-searching, and it made one resolve that I would never in my life be on another task force, but I ended up being on one for the Council of Churches on welfare reform, which was the same thing in a different venue. It wasn't a legislative study commission. It was a task force in '95 on welfare reform, same situation, a lot of input, a lot of recommendations, and then the legislature does what they want, which is basically bump people off welfare.

A really disillusioning time, working at Fair Share, working at Equity, getting to know the inside workings of the system, and I swear if it weren't for my spiritual faith, there's no logical reason to be doing this. I always marvel at where secular people keep on going, because to me the facts lead to no optimism, and all I have to fall back on is hope, which is such a different animal. I know you can generate hope out of a lot of different things, out of values, a vision of the right, and all kinds of things, but I'm just saying for me, seeing straight is so discouraging. Absolutely seeing how things are and reckoning with that is so paralyzing that I do understand why people would rather watch reality TV or not give a crap. That's the common sense reaction, that we know it's rigged. I can see why people don't vote, but to me it's a spiritual thing, that we're here to love and do justice. That's what the Book says to me and so there's not another option for me. It certainly was very revealing and discouraging in those early years to lift the veil and see the maggots there under the log.

BB: So does that still feel like the main motivation in the work that you do, because we're here to love and do justice and there is no other option?

BZ: Yeah, but also I'm so selfish and I'm really high into the pleasure principle, and the delight and joy are high on my scale, so what I found is that in this work are the most honorable and wonderful that I could ever imagine. As discouraging as it is looking into the

systems of the powers, the flipside of it is looking at the people on the ground, all these single moms that are spending time, I mean like you have been, that make a way, make time, make changes. I mean last night the House passed a minimum-wage hike of six dollars an hour, and you know what one of the things was? I've been working with Alma Adams' office and representative Ronnie Sutton of Robeson County, who's one of the democratic holdouts that, this is the third time around for trying at the session to get a wage hike, and we capitulated from the eighty-fifty down to six.

I called Mac Legerton in Robeson County, with whom I've been working for many years on other work, and said we need to flip Ronnie Sutton's vote this weekend, this vote's coming up Monday. And didn't he get the chair of his board, who's Ronnie Sutton's friend and old Lumbee Indian to talk to him. Didn't they get a petition going on people making five-fifteen an hour. Didn't they talk with him over the weekend, and Monday he voted right. He said I still disagree with it, but now I know that—he had said there's nobody in my county making five-fifteen an hour, and Mac flew into gear. He knew just what to do and they flipped that man's vote and that's credited with being the vote, the democratic flip that made it pass the House.

This is people on the ground doing the right thing. I could just jump out of my pants. I am so happy today about that, and that's really pathetic because being happy about six dollars an hour, are you kidding me? It takes twenty to make it, but nevertheless, it's a crumb, but it's something. Seeing how the people in Lumberton made that happen is where I get my energy and they're legion. These folks are legion. They're all over. They're wonderful, and I know who I love and admire and I know who feeds me and I know why I get up in the morning. I'm just so excited to get back out there or on the phone or on the

email with you and with people like you all over the place, that inspire the heck out of me and make me privileged to be in their presence. It's a good day. It's always a good day.

BB: Tell me about when you first got involved with JUBILEE. How did you make the transition from Fair Share to JUBILEE?

BZ: Well I actually left Fair Share after a couple of years. I was officially working part-time and you know what part-time work is. It's like [laughter] full-time work, part-time pay. In those years, I was trying to be home when the kids got home after school. The work really needed it more than that and it was just a tough little situation. At that time, three kids at Cary High School, where my oldest kid was, committed suicide. I just was thinking you know what, these are tough years for my kids. My kids at that point were like elementary, middle school, and high school or something. I had this huge urge to spend more time being present for them during these few precious years. Luckily enough, I was married at the time and Tom earned enough that I could do that. It was a huge point of privilege that I took, but I did take it. I decided to stay home for a couple of years. During that time, I was working a lot, like I helped get ( ) Common Sense Foundation off the ground and served as volunteer coordinator for him, and volunteered to supervise social work interns to work there, helped start Alliance for Democracy with Pete—

BB: Pete MacDowell.

BZ: Pete MacDowell, did a lot of work for that. I was really highly involved doing a lot of work, but I was out of the pay loop at that point so I had freedom to be home in the afternoon. That was good for my mental health if nothing else, to be more with my kids then. During that time, when I was with Fair Share, Jimmy Creech was at the Council of Churches at that point and he was working on health care, and the Council works through committees

that have volunteers that get the work done, because our staff is tiny. So Jimmy Creech said when I was at Fair Share, asked me to be on the health committee of the Council of Churches. I think Pam Silberman was on it then too. We were figuring how to advance the health care cause at that point, but at any rate, during that time I got into the sphere of the Council of Churches by virtue of being on that committee.

In 1995, when the buzz was that welfare reform was brewing in Congress, out of the Lieutenant Governor's office—it was Hunt's administration, the fourth one I guess maybe, I don't know, governor in perpetuity—there was a task force created to anticipate what welfare reform in Congress might mean for North Carolina and what we wanted to recommend to shape our own welfare reform agenda. There were about eighty people on this group, including mothers in the welfare system, but a lot of state workers, D.S.S. [Department of Social Services], business, and they asked for the Council to send a delegate. Well the Council knew that I was not full-time employed and asked if I would serve in that capacity, which I did. That was the weekend retreat at the North Carolina zoo, strangely and aptly enough [laughter] where we learned all kinds of stuff about federal welfare reform proposals and got huge reports, number-crunching out of D.S.S., and had various committees. I ended up one about community involvement and how other community groups could be involved, like mobilizing the church to help people who would be dropped off welfare. I met a lot of people there and that was a very good experience, but another example of spending tons of time going to meetings, drawing up reports, and they were going to do what they were going to go anyway.

Basically '96, welfare reform happened, no longer an entitlement, and it became clear to me that the church was going to be where people show up at the door. Welfare benefits

end, you have a time limits, work requirements. Where do people come as a last resort? The church, urban ministries, the crisis assistance ministries. So I kind of developed this little road show, going around to churches saying, here's what's happening. Be prepared. You need to know that this major public policy change is going to devolve, deprivatize public welfare. It will affect you tremendously and here's how to help, here's how to get involved in policy, all that. That was starting to be a full-time piece of work and I finally went to the Council and said, I need to get a paid job. My kids are growing up. I need to earn money for college for them. For various reasons, I've got to get a job. I've had this time off but now I've got to go back.

The saintly, wonderful Sr. Evelyn Mattern, who worked there at the time with Jimmy Creech, said well why don't you turn this work you're doing around welfare into a project? The Council worked at that time by having what they called special projects, one of which a lot of people know, People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, which in fact just this year spun off to be on its own. They've spun off lots of these special projects, like Triangle Interfaith AIDS Network came out of the Council; and the Seeds of Hope, that spawned a lot of farmer's markets, came out of the Council; and Disaster Relief, that worked a lot around the floods, came out of the Council. A lot of people don't know that. This idea of having special projects which essentially were statewide non-profit organizations that used the Council's 501(c)(3) status, where the Council board was the official executive board, that was the structure. So Sr. Evelyn suggested that and I thought, well okay. I was so dumb. I had no clue. I'd never run a non-profit organization or started one. Maybe you can relate. So I thought, oh yeah, we can do that. I found Micheline Malson, my old discrimination teacher, who basically had since that time been pulled in by Robin Britt to develop the Smart Start

program. She was instrumental in that and she had also started the Family Resource Center system in North Carolina, but she's a Harvard PhD and her whole academic background had been around strengths of the black family and scholar activism around leadership by people involved, such as women in the welfare system should design welfare policy. I knew Mich knew what she was talking about in this realm and she had run organizations. She at that point was a consultant after the General Assembly kicked her out of her job, blah blah blah, and she had time. So she jumped in, and then Kathy Putnam, who was a woman I met when I was leading a legislative seminar for the Council, a workshop on welfare, she presented herself. She was social worker who had worked on adolescent pregnancy prevention stuff and knew that population. The three of us—

**END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B**

**START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A**

BB: Okay, so the last thing you said was you were talking about Bob Wineburg.

BZ: Yeah. Things just kind of came together. Bob Wineburg is a social work professor at UNC-Greensboro, who is one of the national experts on studying social services and religious groups. He's been doing this in the shadows for twenty years when nobody really cared, and had examined how Greensboro and all the non-profits and churches worked together in social services. He had an arcane little area that suddenly, come welfare reform time, became a noted, popular area. How do social services devolve to the church and how do you work together, and how to make systems that are effective for people? So suddenly his body of expertise became noted. I met him on this task force and we became friends. We were both in the community sub-group, and he liked the notion of what we were planning to do.

Bob knew a lot about grant writing. I had never written a grant proposal except in social work school as a pretend one. He helped us conceptualize how to design this statewide program with pilot counties where we would pull together social services and ecumenical, interracial groups of churches, to form these steering committees that would figure out how churches could help people that were transitioning off welfare. Also, the sainted Joe Mann, who was the program officer for the rural church division of the Duke Endowment. He had been president of the Council of Churches and he had seen, we did this workshop, and liked what I could do. Between Bob Wineburg and Mark Constantine, who worked with Catherine Price Bryan [Family] Foundation at the time, he and Bob were friends, and basically these three helped pull together Z. Smith Reynolds, the Duke Endowment, Catherine Price Bryan

Foundation, to sit in a room and to listen to our notions, and basically they gave us 120,000 dollars the first year between the three organizations, fifty from Z. Smith, fifty from Duke, and twenty from Catherine Price Bryan. That was a gift. It was just, I understood then that if you're bold enough to have a notion and there's some people that trust you that happen to be in the right places, you can make something happen. We jump-started a non-profit with 120,000 dollars, not knowing, I mean, me? I didn't know anything about it. I mean I knew a lot of things, but I did not know how to run a non-profit.

Nevertheless, we did it and we came with a bold plan to have seven pilot counties, that basically came down to Wilson and Durham, when it became practical, because I was full-time out of my house. Cathy was a day or two a week out of Chatham County. Mich was a day or two a week out of Durham County. We had this little cyber organization without an office, without a staff. You don't even want to know about the bookkeeping. [laughter] Oh my gosh. I mean nothing illegal or bad happened, but I didn't even know how to make a budget; Mich did. But gosh. It was like watching sausage be made or something. You don't want to really see it. Over the course of '97 to 2003, five years, it was amazing really what got accomplished out of that. In Durham and Wilson County we did develop these pilots. Kathy was in charge of Wilson, Mich was in charge of Durham, of pulling together D.S.S. and a bunch of churches.

Kathy and Mich did research and developed a program called Families First, which trained faith communities and organizations to have a covenant relationship with a family that wants that kind of partnership, that's facing the welfare cuts, on how to achieve what they want, helping people and women say what do you really want. Do you want to go to school? What kind of help do you need? What kind of backup? It was very laborious, but it

was based on family empowerment theory and a Cornell program that Mich helped work with, and she brought these principles into our program of Families First. We also looked at Charlotte, which had this role of faith community coordinator, a minister who had worked for D.S.S., he said I'm quitting. I want to go back to the seminary or whatever. The long and short of it is that they set him up, Ralph Williamson, with a job in D.S.S. pulling in church support for families in the welfare reform spin. Churches before had basically, you know if somebody needs a crib, they call somebody from the church, or if somebody needs a particular thing, but there had not been a coordinated system and a training program. I helped proliferate with Ralph this model of faith community coordinator, which was basically you have money to hire a person that would mobilize this kind of community support. It got to twenty counties during the height of it; it made it to twenty counties in North Carolina.

BB: The model?

BZ: The model, the faith coordinator model. About seven or eight of the counties used the Families First model, and they are all over the state, hundreds of faith teams and hundreds of families that have gone through this process and mothers that have gone to school and gotten economically viable. The main good piece about it was a lot of church folks that had notions about these people got their heads spun around on its axis about, oh, you can really try really hard and still not make it. Oh, there isn't enough affordable housing in town. And I've heard stories of county commissioners who were on these faith teams, that said I've always thought about [finger quotes in air] "these people" and now I have completely opened my eyes and we've got to do something about housing here, or what about this transit system. To me, that one of the greater pieces in it, because families that are struggling, they got the strength, most of them have been making it, but the barriers are the

middle class people, or the church people often, who might have judgments. Or they would come in and say, well you got cable TV; just get rid of your cable, not understanding where that might be the only entertainment possibility for the family.

While that was going on in JUBILEE, my part was more of speaking around the state around welfare policy and living wage. The first year, I did something like fifty keynote speeches or workshops or something around the state, then it wore out, and then trying to look more at the public policy edge side of it, which we later called the public Samaritan piece of the program. That's where a lot of the work I still do now at the Council came from, about helping people understand structural inequities, how the wages are too low, the whole structural economic piece of what are barriers for people. It's very fine, go ahead and do welfare reform, but if you're booting people into a totally untenable situation, what's the morality of that and what's needed. That's more now I do a lot of work around living wage, community economic development, and involving church people in public policy kind of stuff.

The third piece of JUBILEE was, our third statewide program was VOICES of Experience, that came out of Mich's work. That was where we pulled together five or six grassroots, mostly African-American women-led groups, like Southerners for Economic Justice with Donna Dudley, SEJ with Cynthia Brown, Community Wholeness Venture with Alease Devenia Bess, Mother WIT [Wisdom in Training] Family Development Center out of Winston-Salem, and Anna Green has this multicultural community development services out of Spring Lake. All of these incredible survivors doing amazing work with women that were even the ones that the welfare reform shunned. We got continuing grants and we did research with them and wrote a report, I forget the exact name of it now, but we've got something to

say about Work First. It was their experience of what worked and what didn't, and what public policy recommendations needed to be made. That got a certain amount of traction, but we were trying to force the issues in all these county Work First task forces. Every county had to make a Work First plan on welfare reform, so the idea was to get the voices of the people who experienced it and know what is needed into these plans that went to the General Assembly. There was some work with that. VOICES is still informally operating.

BB: What year was this?

BZ: JUBILEE was in June of '77, when the Council of Churches' executive board approved it being created as an actual non-profit.

BB: Do you mean '77?

BZ: I always do that, '97. Then after making it and finally getting an office ( ) and doing really well, the kind of bottom fell out of the funding in '03, and we made a decision to shut down the organization and save the program. That was a long process that was painful, but good in a way. I think it came out of our commitment that the work needs to continue, but the institution doesn't need to. Sometimes I think we have too many non-profits or there's so much energy that goes into maintaining an institution—you know something about that—but our notion was we were going to find a way to keep the work going, which we have. My piece, the Council asked me to join, to come on staff and roll some of the leftover money on, and continue through the Council. Really all the work is ongoing, but we didn't need to keep JUBILEE going.

So it was a kind of sad but interesting process, and I learned a lot about many things, one of which was I will never be an executive director again. [laughter] You know, budget, board, trying to find 200,000 dollars to keep the staff going in a fickle foundation

environment where we were the flavor of the month in '97 to 2000, and then there's a new flavor. When you want me to write a full-time book about non-profits and funding, that's another story. It was wonderful. I made so many connections, learned so much, and I think we did good. There are a hundred stories. While in the middle of JUBILEE, my whole dream, Kathy and Mich were program consultants; I was not a program social worker. I was about structural economic change, and so I finally learned that if you want to do something, you have to give it a title. That's the way to get money. So all this organizing that I was doing and speaking around wages and the unfair economy and the need for national health insurance and da da da, we called it public Samaritan, based on the good Samaritan story biblically, moving out to the public arena, the ones that need to do right by the person who is injured and fallen, in the major public arena. Bob Wineburg actually coined that word, got to give him credit for that and kind of allowed us to adopt it.

We won grant money to work intensively in two of our counties, Henderson County and Robeson County, for three years, building on a Families First program to raise awareness around advocacy for citizens to change. Let me just give you a few pieces around how well that worked in Henderson County. The program there they named Faith Link, and it operated out of their interfaith assistance, the multi-church crisis assistance ministry. From the very beginning, they started, as an offshoot of this program group there, an advocacy group. They had some ministers that wanted to say, this is nice to help the families, but we need to be about more. They decided to focus on housing, child care, and education especially. They used their money to help hold a faith summit every year and this was a huge community event with non-profit people, families in the welfare system, faith teams, discussing policy, what the program was doing, and what's needed. Out of that has come the county's first ever

affordable housing coalition that they've constituted. They're beginning to have housing ( ). They have worked on all kinds of child care progress.

Some of the money that I divested to them they sent to women that were in the Faith Link program, quote welfare mothers, up to the Center for Policy Alternatives, for their state of the state training in December, for about three years in a row, where they learned national public policy, organizing. These women that were, they called them the Faith Link partners, the family partners, part of our goal was to get them equipped to be public policy advocates in their own name. They had the experience but they needed more of the public policy awareness and national systems connections and stuff, which they've gotten. So now they're back there and they're on the affordable housing coalition and speaking out. That was my piece. It was really great to see how long-term investment in the community, starting with the community's desire to quote help, can kind of morph into a structural analysis and understanding that people have to speak for themselves, and a willingness to back that up. That was beautiful. I feel like "Wow!" We really created something here that made a difference, even if it's just one county.

Here's another piece of it. Some of the ministers, after this education around living wages, they developed a petition to give to the county commissioners and state legislators, that was a statement standing on faith, saying we need a living wage in Henderson County. They did a preface about how our faith was about justice for all. They got sixteen hundred signatures for that about conservative church people in Henderson County. There was a pleading, they called it a pleading, and there was a press conference on the steps of town hall, the county courthouse, where some of these mothers in the program, some of the church people and D.S.S. stood there at a press event, saying we can't just have this situation with

rich retirees and the people who wait on them in the restaurants. This is not a ( ) situation, and if we've got welfare reform, people need to make a living wage. This was a voice of faith and community and the people making more wages standing together with this pleading for a living wage on the courthouse steps. I mean that's good. It's been a slow piece of organizing work, but that was really part of my dream to help the church buck past the Christmas basket mentality. Of course, legions of people have done this forever, you know Rev. James Lawson out of the civil rights movement was instrumental around unionizing hotel workers out in California. It's not a new thing to do, but it was just a piece of the work that I wanted to do and that actually worked out great in that one sample county.

Here's the piece that I feel best about. Money began to drive up for it; ours is a three-year grant which ended this June 30, and D.S.S. had put some money into it, but they had money drying up. The people in all of these congregations that have had these transformative experiences with families all decided we can't let this die, and by then they had spawned an after-school program that was a reading and literacy tutorial with the moms and the kids, peer group support for the welfare moms, camps for the kids, just boom boom boom, all of these programs starting spawning. It was so successful and so encouraging that the churches said we can't let this die, and they all started kicking in money, and it's living. It is a living, grounded, community-based movement now. Wow! I feel like if I died, at least I know I've done something half-decent to help divest and help that happen. We had a little celebration banquet down in Hendersonville. I parked my car, and my peace bumper stickers got peeled off, but that's another story [laughter] but one of the D.S.S. Work First instructors that was there said, this whole Faith Link experience and this faith summit and all of this has been the first time that I have ever seen the races come together in this county like this. You know

western North Carolina is real white and it's just been pretty much utter segregation in a lot of ways. This common endeavor, at least people were saying, has brought this community together like we've never been together before. So I was like, "Wow!" This is really a beautiful thing.

I give a lot of thanks to the Duke Endowment, who gave three-year grants. I have a bloody crusade against the foundational world giving these damn one-year grants, so you spend your entire life writing picune, little fifteen, twenty, thirty thousand dollar one-year grants and can't do the darn work. I think it's constructed nefariously that way. I think they ( ) deep to talk about around all that. That's a whole other discussion too, but the Duke Endowment has enough foresight to give three-year grants. So between '97 to 2005, when this stretch in Hendersonville proceeded, you can get something done in seven years. That's fodder for discussion around organizing, I think, that the need for deep, long-term investment—which is not what foundations are about, it's not what most funders are about, not that you should be dependent on foundations—how long it takes to get organizing done in ( ). Fair Share knows this and they've invested in Bladen County and Pender County and certain areas for a long time, and the results are fabulous. That's what it takes. So when we shut down JUBILEE, we rolled public Samaritan grants into the Council of Churches, and so I've been able to continue that work.

Then in Robeson County, it was all around job loss, because they lost a huge amount of manufacturing jobs. We hooked up there with Mac Legerton at the Center for Community Action, whose twenty-five anniversary celebration is this September, with their second annual conference on rural job loss and economic development. There's a different title, but it's basically that. Let me explain this. When I got these fifty thousand grants for public

Samaritan, I gave away twenty thousand dollars a year and I invested ten thousand in Henderson each year, and ten thousand in Robeson each year, which helped pay for staff time and whatever else was needed. So over time, they got basically thirty-five thousand dollars each. I think that's an interesting concept too, about getting grant money and giving it away, so that you don't keep it all yourself. But if you want to work with communities, how can you not share the bounty with the community? I didn't see tons of people doing that because we each need so much for our sustainability. In fact, maybe we would have stayed longer at JUBILEE if we had kept it all for ourselves.

All to say with the Robeson County money, we hired a researcher, Leslie Hossfeld, out of UNC-Pembroke, to actually do economic models of the effect of job loss in Robeson County. We decided to measure is there more crime, are there more kids dropping out, what's the mental health usage, mortgage foreclosures, all kinds of things, a really good study, wrote a policy statement and then we took several hundred people who were community leaders, people who had lost jobs, unemployed factory workers, up to rural caucus of Congress with [Rep.] Mike McIntyre, their Congressman, and we got a presentation about the effects of NAFTA and trade policy and how it devastated rural America, and we need to do as a policy agenda around sustainable economic development. We got that hearing and we've got photos on the web and everything about standing on the steps of Congress with Mike McIntyre, and had people who had lost manufacturing jobs at Converse Shoes and stuff, testifying about what it's like.

It was our way of rebelling against NAFTA, how predictable it was that certain sectors of the economy would take a nose dive. We knew it and we were claiming that we have a twenty million proposal for how you can reinvest now that you have stolen the social

fabric of the county with intentionally. That's an ongoing piece of work now. I'm out of it officially, but out of that money we had ( ) and the rest of us, and others we pulled in, like John ( ) at Good Work [Inc.] designed this first annual conference on job loss and rural economic development. This year there's going to be September twenty-fourth a big conference with twenty different working groups on the schools and small business development.

BB: What's the name of the conference?

BZ: I've got a flyer, but it's about, second annual conference on rural job loss and something about restructuring the economy. It's about how do we not just import or buffalo hunt—what the awful Bill Lee Act does and gives incentives and subsidies to move corporations to places—but how do we do our own incubation, as Matt calls it, building homegrown companies that will stay there. One notion was that the abandoned factory could be turned into a bread baking business that would sell to the local school system, so you've got a closed loop inside the community. I don't know if that idea will fly. John Parker's down there working with dislocated workers around what's your dream, how do you make a small business grow up out of what you know you can do. This is all part of the globalization picture, transitioning economy, what do you really make happen. This is a drop in the bucket.

This public Samaritan piece has led two counties in North Carolina doing two very different things with different situations, Robeson's poor; Henderson's wealthy retirees, and two different cultures, the local more poor people and then the wealth retirees that come in from the North and other places. Robeson's that Lumbee, black, white, and now Hispanic community. This deals with the fallout of the Smithfield Hog Plant and then all these factory closings, and the demise of Tobacco. That's where my heart is. It's around the economic

analysis and community empowerment constraints to change structural, economic injustice. It's hard to get a handle on, but those are just two pieces in two places where we've done something.

BB: Phenomenal work, Barbara.

BZ: I have a good time. [laughter]

BB: It's phenomenal.

BZ: That's just a piece of it. That's a piece of what happens now. That was just one part of my grant work. Then there's the whole peace section that after Sr. Evelyn died, I was able to begin to move in, and not fill her shoes. Nobody could do that. That's the part that I, it's a learning edge for me around doing peace work, because I've always felt that I was a pacifist, but I was never a full-time peace organizer like many of you that have done peace work as a main occupation for a long time.

BB: What are some of your roles around peace work with the Council?

BZ: Well officially, I am allocating one day a week of time to basically work with churches, our denominations, around peace, which golly, what a job is that. But mainly, I worked with y'all around the two big, major Fayetteville peace events and mobilizing church people to come to that and working as part of that peace and justice group. As you now, after this year's wonderful rally, I finally figured out that I needed to kind of move away from the peace and justice structure that y'all are doing so well on, so I'm not needed anyway, but to concentrate more on how to work specifically with our denominations around peace work, and then help bring a bigger body of those folks into the excellent work that's already happening among the peace workers that are coming out of a maybe more secular voice, if not intent.

So just Chuck Fager of Quaker House, and Wendy Michener of Quaker House, and I, at the southern organizer's conference that you helped lead, decided that we needed to focus on our own, in a way, because you can't do it all, to target our energies. We designed this giant peace conference that's going to happen November fourth and fifth. It's geared toward Christians but open to anybody, but it's basically saying remember our gospel of peace. It's called "Seek Peace and Pursuit It: Preaching and Living the Gospel of Peace." It's hard for ministers to talk peace and faith ( ) in Southern Pines. A minister I know in Southern Pines, who believes as we do around peace and was preaching it, well he's got a lot of retirees; this is military at Southern Pines. They were not pleased and they tried to run him out of the church. It was a huge deal and he wrote a working paper about what he believed. There was a lot of discussion. He finally stayed, but pastors are afraid to preach the Gospel around this.

BB: What was his name, the pastor?

BZ: I don't think he would like me to say, if that's alright.

BB: Okay.

BZ: But he was a very brave guy that was doing it and he paid the price. There is an enormous cost for naming that Jesus would not use a military solution. We have twenty workshops, things like preaching peace in a military town, or something like that, or just war versus justify any war. There's a body of theology around the just war theory, and I think most people, average folks, think that war is okay, that there's theology of the just war. Of course, World War II is cited as an example for that, you know an evil person, we're the good guys, God's on our side. But just war versus justify any war, so it's trying to help clarify where this theology comes from, out of Saint Augustine and other Church fathers and

things, and how there's a body of theology now that no war in this time can be just, because the kind of equipment we use targets, I mean there's so much quote collateral damage. The just war theory says that you only fight defensively. You only engage soldiers and that you do no harm to others. I'm not an expert in just war theory but we have a just war theory expert coming and try to clarify the notion that as we do war-making now, there can be no just war. Watch Iraq. Need I say more?

We're trying to help us all become more educated around the theology of it, the practice of preaching peace, and then a lot of practical things like how to do counter-recruitment or the costs of war on the psychology of a family, if you've got a soldier returning in your family. I mean what about domestic violence? How do you be a support? How do we understand what PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome] is like and help somebody in our congregation who's dealing with all this stuff and afraid to admit it. It will be the full range of the theology, the practice of preaching, how to live out the gospel of peace by learning about the GI Rights Hotline and Quaker House and maybe how you can help do that or how to do counter-recruitment. Or things like am I a pacifist? What does it mean to be a pacifist? How do I define that? Am I one? Who would Jesus torture? Counter-recruitment of the military families speaking out as a new band of prophets. What does it mean to be a prophet in our time? Military families speaking out are what we could call prophets of our time, reframing that kind of thing.

One of the things I like about how we're doing it is that we'll have the tables, where people sit for all the meals we'll provide them will be local. So you'll be sitting at a table with people from your part of the state. You're developing follow-up circles of people that will get to know each other from a same area for continuing work in that area. Then we will

have interest group caucuses at the end of each day too, so that you might have been to a few workshops and you'll think, "I really want to learn more about counter-recruitment," so we'll have those. Jump into whichever one have sparked your fancy.

Rose in our office has developed this phenomenal way of registering, kind of like Andrew Pearson did for the peace rally, where you're jumped into a database where you can make egroups and dubs people out by interest or locality. We hope to have for the first time, I think in the state, some kind of actual database of peace workers from religious groups all over the state for continuing voice. We may help involve them in Clergy and Laity. There's a national group that started during the Vietnam War, Clergy and Laity da da da. I'm not able to remember the name at the moment, but it's a group that speaks out against war and it's national, so we may try to tie in with that. But a lot of it is just a first step toward uniting the faith-based peace workers in our state and expanding that circle so we're more effective, and that we can use a moral voice, a religious voice, a faith voice, specifically in this continuing need to deal with the most military-friendly state in the nation, as the sign says on I-40. All of this feels always completely beyond my reach and crazy and just do it.

BB: Yeah I noticed that. It seems to be a pattern in your life, like it's not just, I mean from early on that you were involved in so many different things that are all related to justice, but when you look at your work with Laotian refugees and you were also with the schools and also in the study groups with the church, and then your research and writing environmentalism, it seems like that's kind of a theme of your life. You have a lot of irons in the fire and a lot of different issues.

BZ: Well it's funny these silos that we put things into. It's real interesting because they all connect and everybody knows that, but it seems that for funding reasons—you know

what I think it comes out of? Academia. Academic departments slice themselves up into fields of study that become these silos that don't connect, although now there's more interdisciplinary stuff than there used be when I went to school in the 60s, but I think that is all about notions of expertise. I am of this, that studies this, and I have a doctorate this, and that's my niche and nobody else is a bigger smarty pants than me. Somehow that separateness comes out of all that, because you know when you're in indigenous communities or just regular old country people or people who haven't been educated out of knowing everything's all connected, that's how it is. Whether in celebration or in worship, the ground and the crops and child rearing, and honoring elders and stuff, it's all like part of the patch. Somehow in our quote, civilized western culture, we've made these little niche zones and it just isn't real. It's a fiction. I don't think it's—I mean tons of us are this way, most people I think, most of us are that way. We just have to define ourselves ( ) sometimes for jobs that we do. [laughter]

BB: What do your children think about your activism and organizing?

BZ: It's funny. I've haven't talked much about my kids. I haven't even said their names and ages, I don't think, yet. Charlie's now twenty-six, turned twenty-seven, and recently married to Danitza, a Bolivian environmental scientist and a doll. They live in Asheville. Mollie lives here in Raleigh. She's twenty-four and has an art degree from the design school of State [NCSU], and has a variety of low-wage but fun enough jobs, three to be exact. Zach, my youngest, graduated from Florida State in December and just got a job in the business world up in Arlington, Virginia. He's a recruiter. He's a head hunter of techies. So he's in the business world. He says, "One of us has to rich, huh mom?" Charlie washes windows. He's got a wonderful liberal arts degree and is a brilliant student. He completely

gets the analysis. He went to Warren Wilson College and he also has a little window washing business. He's an entrepreneur.

None of them are quote activists, but I certainly wasn't at their age. Mollie, well we just did a banner drop at the General Assembly, Mollie provides art for the movement. I guess you know about a few weeks ago, Lynice Williams and Pete McDowell and I did a civil disobedience kind of banner drop in the General Assembly in the Senate. We dropped a banner that said, "Health care for all. No Medicaid cuts." And we were chanting, "Have mercy on the people. No Medicaid cuts," until we were pulled away but not arrested. But anyway Mollie did this great big red lettering on this eight foot by four foot piece of muslin that we draped up over the Senate chamber railing. She's often done art for the movement.

Actually, she's become involved in CodePink because a friend of mine—who is like her second mom, she's babysat and raised that woman's kids—Celia Hartnett, hosted Medea Benjamin of CodePink at her house last month when she was in, you know the head, the leader of CodePink, and somehow met another friend from design school. They decided to have a fundraiser tomorrow night, Friday, at Mitch's Tavern by State, a CodePink fundraiser. So Mollie's there, going to be selling books, and they got Mitch's to design a drink, some pink drink they're going to sell. This is my daughter's debut tomorrow night as an activist. It's her first action in her own way, for her own generation, making it a little bar scene thing. I am so proud, I could just pop like a sausage that's been in the fire or something. It's great.

Charlie's a libertarian. He's really interesting. He likes the second amendment. He's a pro-gun guy. He doesn't have one. Danitza does from Bolivia. She's from Cochabamba, where they had the water wars. She's from La Paz, Cochabamba. People need a gun, she says. That's her experience. It's very interesting. Charlie is extremely well-informed, but he

goes the libertarian route. He will home school his kids. He's really interesting. I respect his intelligence. We debate. He thinks socialism's a bad word, but he's thinking and engaged, so that's good. Zach is pretty much in sympathy with how I see things, but he's a business major. He's a marketing major. I'm in the claws of the devil. [laughter] But he's such an ethical and wonderful person that I think he'll be in the business world and a good influence. Plus, he has a Jiminy Cricket on his shoulder, like a little conscience thing. It's always my voice, he says, that's reminding him about inequity and stuff.

You know they're young. I would hate to look at myself at twenty-two and measure what I was at fifty-five now. They're all, I like them. They're just wonderful and we're really, really close, all of them. But they respect the heck out of what I do. I don't think it's a false vision to say because they keep telling me that. They just think I'm wonderful and they say, you know Mom, you don't realize you're not like most people. I mean all generations, they really need somebody to respect and need things to respect. They really respect me a lot. I mean also coming through the divorce five years ago, they had seen--. I think before, when family life appears to be going fine, parents can kind of become invisible or ( ), but when all three of them were in college, Zach was a freshman, Mollie was a sophomore, and Charlie was a senior when Tom kind of flew and they watched me recoup well, in fact great.

Life is really good. So I think they have come to see me as a strong person. Where before they saw me as a loving person, I think they now see me as a strong person. They just, I mean state a lot of admiration and I think they hang onto it as a vision of how you can be in the world that's materialistic or cynical. They don't necessarily share my religious faith at all, but I felt like one of my main jobs in raising them was to help them not be despondent. Zach, for instance, believes we will have a nuclear holocaust, you know. They got a lot of

information that would lead them to not have hope, so my whole deal has been to help them have hope, in whatever form they fashion it. One way to do it is to show that you can keep acting in the face of insanity, in a way that is joyful and hopeful, even though that makes no logical sense. It's like that's what I call pro-life. [laughter] That's my definition of pro-life. Yeah.

BB: Let me check the time real quick. It's ten. How are you feeling?

BZ: I'm fine.

BB: You're good?

BZ: Yeah.

BB: Okay, let's keep going then. Tell me when you need a break or want to stop. You're involved in so much and have such an impressive array of skills in your organizing activism work, and even in just your background and education, writing and lecturing and mentoring and editing and networking and direct action work and all these things. Out of all those different skill sets that you use still and you've employed in your organizing, which ones feel most right on or empowering to you?

BZ: You know I'd probably say, it's just a general, okay, here's what I think. Like I feel like the old lady in town who is good at hooking people up, knowing a lot of people and you need to meet that person, this person can help you with your cause, all that mixing up. That's really a village elder function or something, no big deal, but that's one of them. The other is the old womanish value of just relationships, like it really is all about relationships. So I feel like I spend tons of time just listening or making friends and all this stuff. This is why I never consider myself an organizer, because I'm just doing like regular people things. I really never, I'm just beginning to think that maybe I'm an organizer. I don't know. It just

seems like duh, talk to people, make friends, share an idea, pass along some information, try to get something done. This is normal. Before we had this label organizer, people somehow did this all throughout life everywhere. No big deal. But I just do think that being relational, but see to me, that is like love one another. This is what it means, at least my version, love one another. That's pretty simple.

I do think I spend a lot of time around relationships, like one example is I staffed the statewide economic justice committee for the Council, which mainly I've decided is organized labor. So we've supported UE-150 and Smithfield foods organizing. That's the Women for Justice campaign at Smithfield, a lot of that labor stuff and the worker hearing boards, but we meet three times a year. It's a statewide group of maybe twenty. Well there's a lot of work to do when you have like three meetings a year and not everybody's at each one. But the last one that we held in Salisbury, we invited council people that lived in that zone to sit in with us, and we spent three and a half hours out of the five doing relational stuff. Through the whole morning, we went around the circle telling stories of what keeps you in this work, where's your passion.

One lady, Janie Speaks, who is the widow of Bishop Speaks an A.M.E. Zion heroic pastor, who was highly involved in the Council, she was a civil rights activist. She's been a missionary in Africa. She's quite the elder. She went on for, people gave her about a half hour. She gave her analysis of culture and how it's changed and what's needed. People poured themselves about what they worry about, what their fears are, why we do this work. It was a real interesting range of people: Lori Khamala, from National Farm Worker Ministry, was there; young, up-and-coming pastors; Black Workers for Justice folks. We've got a huge range of people on that committee. At the end of it, this young pastor from Salisbury, who

was new to the committee, said this has been an anointing. That was his language, that this has been an anointing because it was such sacred space. It was really powerful.

There was such enormous respect and love in that room, that then when it came to doing the work, like endorsing the migrant housing bill in the General Assembly, and making an anti-CAFTA [Central America Free Trade Agreement] statement, and doing some things that we can use as resolutions to base our organizing work on, boom boom boom. Poo! I really believe in that theory, but man, you know what? That's not on task, right, but I'm telling you that's--. I love being in charge sometimes because if you're in charge, you can have things that way you want it to be. I have found that spending time on soul work is really important, because I think that in this context, in the work we do, we're sitting on a bucket load of grease. We are sitting on a bucket load of grease. If we walk chipper into a meeting, what's next, chop chop, where's that? Where's the grease? And it's almost like you've got to pierce that bubble and let the soul flow out, you know.

**END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A**

**START OF TAPE 2, SIDE B**

BB: You said that's where the spirit does its work, that's your theology and—

BZ: Praxis.

BB: Practice.

BZ: Actually, praxis is the word, P-R-A-X-I-S.

BB: Oh, praxis.

BZ: That's like the ( ) theological word for practice. [laughter] It's kind of weird. It is interesting to make yourself talk things out. You get more of a sense of all of it.

BB: What else would you like to have documented in this interview? Are there pieces of your story that we haven't touched on that you'd like recorded?

BZ: Maybe the continual doubt, like the difference between the resume and the feelings about I'm not making any difference at all, or like I sure could have done that better, or just "calgon take me away," all kinds of things, but mostly a feeling of inadequacy to the task almost all the time. That's one thing. Let's see. I mean I really, I guess I dislike all these labels, like organizer and stuff, because it can set up, it seems like status systems, just like in the business world or just like in any status world. I kind of like just to consider everybody just all people pulling it together, all disciples. Because I know I struggle a lot with like, am I

worthy? I was not the oppressed population, except for gender and Judaism, but I certainly never experienced hunger. I was called kike and had snowballs thrown at me for that, but I certainly didn't experience what an African-American experiences or any number of ( ), all kinds of. So I didn't think I had any legitimacy as an organizer or as a person doing this work. I thought maybe I could be in service to these actual heroes or these actual oppressed populations. I delegitimize myself a whole lot around all that, thinking that if I'm middle class and didn't experience A, B, C, D, E oppressions, I'm an interloper.

I think finally I'm moving past to say like, you know what? I can't help how I was born. I can't help that I had Ozzie and Harriet [laughter] somewhat for parents, some of the time, or that I was such a latecomer. I can't help any of that. That was my time and schedule and just how it was. I'm just accountable for where I'm going next. So I mean I have struggled with a lot of that. There's all these heroic people that I see. I mean I got my college paid for, for gosh sakes. I have had it easy in many ways. That's just a piece about self-definition, I guess, that I was just like a privileged hanger-on that could contribute a thing or two. Now I know it is really my life and my call and my work. I just don't care what of these labels are. I know I'm doing what I got to do.

So I guess the big thing that I'm always thinking is, when I work a lot with younger people in their twenties and thirties and stuff, and in terms of encouraging people to just do what they want to do to contribute and call it good. There can be kind of clique-ishness in this work or a kind of who's a real organizer, who's a real champion of justice. I mean I actually got this Defenders of Justice award [laughter] from JUBILEE, that actually gave me a little Lucite statue. That can be insidious and not helpful, all of that. Am I good enough?

Am I a real organizer? Am I a real civil rights worker? Well yeah, we all are real, but that was some of the mental illness I had to swim through.

BB: So about the awards, in 1994 is that maybe the first, you got the Health of the Public award, right, from UNC-Chapel Hill? It was for your community organizing around universal health care.

BZ: Yeah.

BB: And then in 2002, you got the Mitch Snyder award for your anti-poverty work and then the Defenders of Justice award from the Justice Center that you mentioned, for grassroots empowerment work.

BZ: That was for JUBILEE, that wasn't me. I think that was like a sympathy shot because that was the year we were disbanding the organization. [laughter] They wanted to do something ( ) before we were gone.

BB: What did it feel like to get those awards? Did it affect some of this struggle of inadequacy?

BZ: I don't know. That all seems to be some wacky world in the ozone, the world of awards. I just I honestly am not fond of them. I've turned down stuff before too because it just seems like, well thank you. I guess it's nice, but to me, the person that is cleaning the bedpans in a mental hospital, if you're an orderly at Cherry and O'Berry [hospitals] or something, that to me is an award. If you are tending to somebody who is bedridden or has quadriplegia or something, and are doing the daily, repetitive hard work of loving, tending, and stuff, that's who deserves an award, as far as I'm concerned. I feel like I guess it's nice, but this is all about just me getting to do what I want to do, and thankfully there have been some effects. That's great, but I just don't take it that seriously because I see so many people

that are so much deserving and that have been way more sacrificial. I mean I don't want to put it down. It's nice to have. The best thing about it is for grant funding. The greatest thing about it is to put it on your grant proposal, crazy as that is. I'm not writing any grants these days or proposals.

BB: Are there other things you think of that you'd like to have documented to talk about?

BZ: ( ) that writing piece. I really haven't talked about that much. In '03 and '04, I wrote four kind of publications, guidebooks on social justice and community ministries and one on job loss, books for pastors. I'm thankful for the gift of writing. I was an English major, which got me that wonderful seventy dollars a week gross job at Baldwin's'.

[laughter] Which is like the "do you want to be poor the rest of your life" degree. But now I've found that that ability to write, and I can whip out a flyer or a recommendation letter or something in such short order, that, like Mitch always said, Barbara, she puts out ( ). I could just crunch out the verbiage. For various reasons, that's a helpful skill that I'm grateful for. I really find a lot of people can't write. A lot of smart people can't write. I've just found it really useful for a lot of things, especially around communicating so you can organize.

BB: What were the titles of those?

BZ: The first one, when I first came back to the Council in '03, that's when I was working on all this job loss stuff. It occurred to us that pastors, who are dealing with all these people losing jobs, didn't necessarily know the systems out there. So we wrote, it's called *Job Loss: A Guidebook for Pastors*. It had just really easy breakdowns. One page: what is worker's comp? What is unemployment insurance? What is D.S.S. and how does it work? What are the programs Medicaid and Medicare? How do you qualify? Then it had some

analysis around it about the difference between bandaids, helping people out versus working for a living wage or doing structural reform. There's one on how to start a small business and then all these resources where they can go for information. That was pretty popular. It hit AP and we got calls from all over the country for it.

BB: The Associated Press.

BZ: Yeah, Associated Press. Yeah, the people in the meatpacking industry that was going under out in Midwest somewhere, they got lots of copies. People got it in Texas and it really struck a chord. We ran out of those, but it's on the web. That was one. Then two of the other ones were a joint project with the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church. We did a series of workshops over a year and a half called *Street Smarts*, that book. We did workshops and then accompanying books that I wrote for it. *Street Smarts* was about how to do community ministry and to discern what your congregation can do, assessing your assets, how to do grant funding, how to write a grant proposal. Then *Thy Kingdom Come* was about nine social justice topics. It was actually a curriculum about the prophetic work of the church and then tying it in with all these North Carolina groups. If you want to do civic work, you learn about Democracy North Carolina, sustainable economic development, there's wages, jobs. So we put in the theological context these social issues, and then North Carolina contacts and information about where to learn more. Because I found that in my life, the world of the church is here, the world of the organizing and advocacy groups are here, and they don't know each other. So that knitting together has been a crusade. Crusade is a crappy word, excuse me. That's a bad word.

BB: You're reclaiming it. I like that.

BZ: Yeah, I reclaimed it, redefined it.

BB: Then there was another one, *Not Making It in North Carolina*.

BZ: Oh yeah, well that was with the Alliance for Economic Justice, the Ford Foundation-funded group that was there for—is it six years or three years? It's six years, yeah. Golly. It was ( ), Justice Center, Fair Share, CDC [Community Development Corporations] Associations, Southerners for Economic Justice and the Council. During our last year, we held four public hearings around the state around jobs and what people are experiencing with the economy. There was one around the Fayetteville area, one around Rocky Mount area, Salisbury and Winston. *Not Making It in North Carolina*, I wrote that at the end of '04, and that was seven profiles of people who spoke out, what they wanted for public policy that would change their life, and then summaries of what we heard in these public hearings, and then a call to policy makers about what's needed, like living wage and universal health care and stuff. But it was the reflection of what we heard around the state. We gave that to all the General Assembly members and leaders in government. Then Fair Share has really done the most with it. They took it back to Bladen County and are using it to have meetings with their county commissioners, meetings with Representative Ed Nye, who still voted for the third time against the minimum wage hike, ( ) him. But they're using it to say this is what matters to us. These are our lives. These are our policy suggestions. What was cool about that is these seven people that I worked with were pleased with how they were represented, because it was showing their strengths and all they're doing to live on low income and improve their lives, instead of the poor, pitiful, working, poor people approach. They liked it and to me, that was a test, that they felt like their lives were characterized correctly and showing their power.

BB: How did you find them?

BZ: They were people that had come to these forums or some that had been recommended to be interviewed by people in those localities. Like one was Paulette Robinson, who was a twenty-five year Pillowtex employee, that was one of the folks that lost her job when Pillowtex shut down. She had been a leader with the local UNITE! union as well.

BB: UNITE! union?

BZ: Uh huh.

BB: Does that stand for something, the acronym?

BZ: Yeah, it was something about needlework, textile employees and stuff. Now it's called UNITE HERE! I think they've changed their name. They were actual people who spoke out or were referred by somebody who did, and were willing to lay their lives out there for people to see, with their name and their town and their struggle. One was one of the leaders at Mother WIT Family Development Center in Winston, and she had been a drug addict, welfare mom, and Mother WIT Family Development Center helped her out of it and she's now one of their staff. But she was there to say we need money for non-profits, these great non-profits that help grassroots people turn their life around. That was one of her notions. One guy had been in prison for years and he was talking about what it's like coming out of prison and trying to get a job.

BB: Are you comfortable saying their names since they're in the book?

BZ: Yeah, Damon Thomas was the guy from Winston—that book's on the web too, on our website. Anybody can get it—and Georgia Smith is the woman from Winston-Salem with Mother WIT.

BB: When you say our website, you mean the Council of Churches?

BZ: Mmm hmm. We have hard copies of that one left too.

BB: So you really have seen the powerful effects of storytelling in organizing.

BZ: Yeah, but I've also learned from working in the community that, well Donna Dudley—Donna Latimer now—has said and others have said, it can feel like rape, like so many people in communities have felt like the Dukies—Donna calls them the Dukies—come down, “Hey! ( ) research you and I want to write a paper about you.” I'm sorry to use that kind of voice but that's how they characterize it. They feel like they're exploited, their stories are stolen, and it feels like rape. That is a continuing experience of people in the community, that those of us that sometimes come out of academic environments aren't sensitive to how it needs to be a reciprocal relationship. I learned that a lot when working with Lynice at Fair Share, because people always wanted to come and study and hear about it. Her thing was what are you giving back? What can you contribute to our organization, because you're taking a lot of my time. You're taking these people's stories and information. What are you giving back? Where's the parity? This is where justice occurs, in these kind of interchanges. I've learned a lot about not stealing people's stories. What is it, the ( ) people somewhere—I don't know if it's Africa or South America—don't like their pictures being taken by a camera because they believe their soul is being stolen. Is that right? You know this stuff as an anthropologist. I think of that in terms of how privileged people who want to quote “study these critters” can steal a soul by not honoring the sacredness of somebody conveying a story, and not making it a partnership agreement. For instance, in the *Not Making It* book, these folks wanted to be visible, wanted their life situation to be more recognizable to people in power. So it was their choice to say, “Take a look at this. Get this, this is real. Consider

this when you're taking that money for your campaign and deciding what you want to vote on."

BB: Can you say a little bit more about ways that you tried to tend to that notion of not raping and stealing stories when you interviewed, especially with the seven folks for *Not Making It*.

BZ: Well a process piece is that after I wrote something that distilled what they had told me, I sent it back to them several times. There was a lot of back and forth around them able to say does this accurately reflect, do you want to emphasize it. Send the picture you want to send, giving them editorial control pretty much all the way through. They changed stuff. They would say, well don't emphasize this or do this and add this, subtract that. They felt like yeah, this is really what I meant. That's one piece, and then all the official permissions, and then thinking through how they want to use it or how it might be useful to them in their community, making sure they got a couple hundred copies of the hard copy of it so that they could use it as they wanted in their communities for education or organizing.

BB: Did they?

BZ: Oh yeah, some of them did. We got copies out to all the communities, a couple hundred that they could use. The sponsoring organizations got copies of it. I honestly think that the Fair Share and the Bladen group has done the most and made the most use out of it and then we kind of, the grant funding ran out and the thing has whittled down and it's going to morph into something new probably. Those are a few things, making sure it had multiple use and it wasn't just I'll put something on my resume, we say we wrote a book, big deal. What good is that?

BB: So tell me some people who would say interesting things about you, if I were to talk to other folks. This is a ( ) question.

BZ: You probably know most of them. [laughter] Well you would be one. Interesting thing, does this mean you're actually going to try to track them down if I give these names? Is that what that's about or is that part of this or not?

BB: I don't really know. You know what, that's really not my question, so let's just let go of that one.

BZ: Okay. We can deal with it later if you want.

BB: Okay.

BZ: I mean anybody I've worked with. You know all the people. Ask one of my kids. It would be interesting to see what the kids would say, for a purpose like that.

BB: Are there other questions you wish I would have asked?

BZ: Nothing's bubbling to the surface at this point.

BB: If you were interviewing activists and organizers, what kinds of questions would you ask?

BZ: Where do you find your strength to keep on? What nourishes you the most? I mean I think I answered some of those questions without you asking them. Do you have a guiding strategy maybe, or do you have an approach or strategy that you think is most helpful for organizing and getting the results you want? Who is your main teacher? Who are your main models? I mean I do think a lot of these things all came out in one way or the other, don't you? What would you say are some of the most important things you want to pass to others who are thinking about this path? And I also think some of that came out too. I don't know how this—it might get edited or chopped up or rearranged and it could kind of more in

an artificial question and answer way, where some of those observations get patched into the questions or something. I don't know how that will evolve in the construction of the thing. I was thinking as people try to weed through this long conversation, part of the editing process for a written document would be pulling pieces that fit more with the questions that, it wasn't officially in answer to the question at the time. I don't know. That's all to be determined.

Good enough for starters.

BB: I think that's great for starters.

BZ: Okay.

BB: Yeah, thanks a lot, Barbara. I appreciate it.

BZ: No, it's interesting. Yeah.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

Transcribed by Emily B. Baran. October, 2005