

## **TRANSCRIPT: BRUCE HARTFORD**

Interviewee: Bruce Hartford

Interviewer: Will Griffin

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Length: 1 disc, approximately 53 minutes

### **START OF INTERVIEW**

Will Griffin: Okay. I think we're all set. Okay. We're here today with Bruce Hartford at the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's fiftieth anniversary. And Bruce is here—Mr. Hartford is here to share his story with us about his experience growing up and becoming involved with the Civil Rights Movement. So one of the first questions that we want to start off with: just tell us a little bit about yourself. Your name, birth date, and age.

Bruce Hartford: Bruce Hartford. January 15 1944, which would make me 66. I was born at a very young age.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: We all were. Just a mere baby.

WG: [Laughter] So where were you born?

BH: Well, I was born in Chicago, but I grew up in Los Angeles.

WG: Okay. And you were—both parents—raised by both parents?

Bruce Hartford

BH: Yeah.

WG: Talk a little bit about your childhood. What are your--.

BH: Okay, well. Okay, see, here we go.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: My parents were communists.

WG: Wow.

BH: They were labor organizers, CIO organizers, and they had been working unions and they continued to do that until the red-baiting, the McCarthy hysteria.

WG: Right.

BH: They were hounded by the FBI, called up before committees.

WG: Okay.

BH: They were fired from their jobs and so forth. So we grew up, I grew up in Los Angeles.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And I'm not sure what more to say. But--. Oh! So my upbringing was somewhat different--

WG: Right.

BH: --than a typical white upbringing. We, you know--. The party, the Communist party, was integrated--.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --if you can say it that way. We had—I had black friends who were the

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children of other party members.

WG: Okay.

BH: They would go to a meeting, they'd bring the kids, we'd play out in the backyard, and they would do whatever it was they were doing. Paul Robeson had dinner at our house--.

WG: Wow.

BH: --so to me that was the norm. However you grow up as a kid, that's the normal thing.

WG: Okay.

BH: Went to summer camp—Commie camp. [Laughter]

WG: [Laughter] Commie camp.

BH: But, basically, other than that, I was just an ordinary kid--.

WG: Okay.

BH: --except when we would get harassed or something.

WG: So what, I mean: your parents, how did they get involved in this. What were your parents names, first of all, and where were they--?

BH: Ken and Claire.

WG: Ken and Claire?

BH: [Laughter] Alright, this is going to be a long interview.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: My father was a Kentucky hillbilly.

Bruce Hartford

WG: Okay.

BH: He--. From the hills. He managed, I think he had a sixth grade education--,

WG: Okay.

BH: --became a telegraph operator. During the Depression, the conditions were oppressive.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: He heard about a union—he was in Cincinnati by then—started a Union--,

WG: For telegraph--?

BH: For telegraph, which--.

WG: --operators?

BH: --eventually evolved into what is now, today, the CWA.

WG: Okay.

BH: And became a union organizer. My mother was from Brooklyn--,

WG: Hmm.

BH: --and she was dating a guy and they were sort of liberal, you know, but his sister was challenging her: “Oh, what about the Scottsboro Boys? What about this? What about the--?” My mother knew nothing about this. So: “Well, I better study up on this.” [Laughter]

WG: Okay. [Laughter]

BH: And from there, and then she ended up--. She was actually the highest-ranking woman organizer—paid staff—in the CIO.

Bruce Hartford

WG: Okay.

BH: And, you know, went toe-to-toe with Roosevelt at Hyde Park, and--.

[Laughter]

WG: Wow.

BH: I mean, there're a lot of stories, but if we go off onto that--.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: [Laughter]

WG: Okay. So what were some of the most important things that they taught you growing up that you remember? I guess, you know--.

BH: That's hard to say. It was more just the acculturation.

WG: Okay.

BH: See, actually: the party had a rule--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --and they were very rigid—that the parents were not allowed to tell the children what they were doing.

WG: Okay.

BH: For fear that the children would tell some other child, and then it would get back to the FBI. So they never told me all of what they were doing. I had to just kind of sense it.

WG: Okay.

BH: So there was a time during the period where they were trying to deport

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foreign born, who were citizens, but they were radical, so they were trying to--. We had people hiding in our cellar, and I had to answer the door when the FBI knocked because they couldn't interrogate a child.

WG: Right.

BH: And so, then, I'm being told to go out and tell the FBI, "My parents are not home,"--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And not to mention I got people hiding in the cellar, but they wouldn't tell me why.

WG: So what were you thinking?

BH: I had no idea. Well, this is your family, this is what we do. You don't question when you're a kid.

WG: Okay.

BH: So I knew stuff was going on, but it was hidden. It was secret. And when your parents don't want you to know, you know that--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --and you don't challenge that--

WG: Okay.

BH: --until you get a certain age.

WG: Yeah. That was the next question--.

BH: Well, by the time I got to the rebellious youth age--,

Bruce Hartford

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --they were out of the party. They had left the party--

WG: Okay.

BH: --after the revelations on what had actually--. See, they believed the myth of what was going on in the Soviet Union. When they found out the reality, they cut out.

WG: Right.

BH: And in some ways they felt betrayed, and they were betrayed—by the party. So by the time I became a rebellious youth, they still had the values, but they weren't, politically, that active any more.

WG: Okay. So how did it play out? I mean, in high school, did you get in trouble? What were your schooling years like? And where did you--

BH: Horrendous.

WG: --take them? [Laughter]

BH: I was in--. I went to school in Los Angeles at Dorsey High School.

WG: Okay.

BH: And Dorsey was a marvelously integrated high school: quarter white, a quarter black, a quarter Asian, and a quarter—well we called them Mexican then, but now we would say Latino. And the buildings were arranged in—where there were open triangles of open space.

WG: Okay.

BH: And each race seized a triangle. And if you were the other race and you went

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into their triangle, you got beat up. I unfortunately, or fortunately, was Jewish--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --on my mother's side. We didn't have a triangle, and the white kids didn't consider Jews as to be really white. I mean, sort of white, but not totally white. So I didn't have a triangle, so I did not have a good time in the high school.

WG: Okay. Do you remember any of your teachers there?

BH: Not really.

WG: Not really?

BH: Not really. I was of the school--. I hated and loathed every minute of school.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: I barely scraped by with a C average.

WG: Okay.

BH: I was not an intellectual.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Well, actually, I did a lot of reading. I educated myself in spite of the Los Angeles city school system.

WG: Okay. [Laughter]

BH: So, yeah. No. It's not a good--. I don't have good memories there.

WG: Okay. I guess the other question that I was going to ask is, like, you said you read on your own.

BH: Mm-hmm.



Bruce Hartford

WG: Were there books around the house that your parents--? Where did you get your books, and how did you seek that knowledge out—that information out?

BH: Oh, well my parents, yeah. Huge readers.

WG: Okay. Okay.

BH: So there was that. I went to the library, I got a paper route, I bought my own books. But I didn't really start reading political books--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --until I was in the movement.

WG: Okay.

BH: It didn't go that--. It went that way rather than, you know, read the books and then get active.

WG: Okay. So you graduated from high school what year?

BH: '59--,

WG: '59?

BH: --'60--,

WG: Okay.

BH: --something like that.

WG: Okay. And so what next? What do you have after--?

BH: [Laughter] I went to college. I couldn't get into a real college, so I went to what we called a junior college--,

WG: Okay.

Bruce Hartford

BH: --today they're called community colleges because "junior"--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --doesn't sound so good. Had no idea what I was doing with my life: bored, just hanging.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Went to a coffee house. Oh. The one readings that I did do--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --was on the Holocaust.

WG: Okay.

BH: And I was deep into studying that and very, very angry. Not just at what the Germans and the Nazis did, of course, but as angry or angrier--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --at the American government and all those who allowed that to happen without lifting a finger to save the Jews and to oppose them. And I called myself, I don't know if you're familiar, but just like in Christianity, you have different groups like Baptists--

WG: Right.

BH: and Lutherans--

WG: Denominations.

BH: Denominations, that's the word.

WG: Mm-hmm.

Bruce Hartford

BH: There are different denominations in Judaism:--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --liberal, conservative--

WG: Okay.

BH: --reconstructionist. And people said, "Well, what are you?" So I made up my own denomination.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: I said I was a "for nevers" Jew.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: Never again, never forget, never forgive, and never stand by while other people are persecuted--

WG: Okay.

BH: --the way they stood by while we were persecuted.

WG: Okay.

BH: Now the relevance of this is: I was hanging around in a coffee house, not like a Starbucks--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --this was a beatnik coffee house.

WG: Right.

BH: And they said, "Oh, we're going to show some movies of the CORE open housing demonstration.

Bruce Hartford

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: I didn't know what a core was. It turned out to be the Congress of--

WG: Right.

BH: --Racial Equality. And I didn't know what open housing was, but I was bored, so, "Oh, okay." And they were picketing a white-only housing tract that would only sell to whites. Housing segregation in California in general, and Los Angeles in particular, was very total. I mean it was extreme. So they're showing these movies. Well, there was--. The American Nazi party was counter-attacking the CORE pickets.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And these are Nazis in full uniform: swastikas, the hats, the "Sieg Heil," the "Kill the Jews. Send the niggers back to Africa." I said, "Fuck it. If you're against the Nazis, I'm with you. When is your next--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --"I'm going. You tell me." Went out there, there was twelve of us picketing, there was thirty or forty Nazis attacking us. I said, "Alright,--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --"you against the Nazis.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: "Anytime. You call me." And then, by that--. And I became a full-time CORE activist.

WG: Wow.

Bruce Hartford

BH: And after a while, we outnumbered the Nazis, and they dwindled away, but

[Laughter] I stayed in the movement.

WG: That's stories you don't hear about: Nazis protesting in America.

BH: No, but this was 1963.

WG: 1963.

BH: 1963. And they were throwing stuff at us, and the cops were laughing. And, you know, it was--. The cops sided with the Nazis.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: Actually, it turned out I preferred the Nazis to the LA police department--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --because at least the Nazis were honest about it.

WG: You knew where they stood, right? [Laughter]

BH: Made no bones about it. But the cops, when I was in jail, the Lincoln Heights Jail, they marched us by the admini- sergeant. And we saw on his desk: klan literature.

WG: Wow.

BH: [Laughter] So--. [Laughter]

WG: So you said CORE--. I mean, CORE focussed on housing issues in Los Angeles.

BH: And employment.

WG: And employment.

Bruce Hartford

BH: Housing--. Oh, and de facto school desegregation.

WG: Desegregation.

BH: Those were the three CORE issues: employment, housing, and school segregation.

WG: Okay, do you remember something about the people who sort of pulled you in? What were some of their (12:51-12:54)--?

BH: [Laughter] Well, the--. One of the main guys who really got me involved is Woodrow Coleman, and he's wandering around here.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: I just met him forty years or fifty years. Just saw him yesterday.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And he's here at this conference.

WG: And I bet that brought all kinds of--

BH: Oh, yeah.

WG: --feelings.

BH: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We had some times.

WG: So what, I guess, as an organizer, what was he like? And--.

BH: He, well--. He was your basic grassroots, up from the people, salt of the earth--. He was a hod carrier.

WG: Okay.

BH: That's like a construction laborer.

Bruce Hartford

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: A union man--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --but, you know, no great education. But he had courage, he had charisma, he had dignity. He was the example we tried to live up to.

WG: Okay, so--.

BH: But, by the way, I did work in the South.

WG: Okay.

BH: I know this is the Southern Oral History--

WG: Yeah. [Laughter] And we're going to get to that, if you'll get that.

BH: [Laughter] Alright.

WG: So this is 1963, right?

BH: '63, yeah.

WG: 1963, so, I mean: what, I guess--?

BH: Well the next thing that happened--. Aright, so this is 1963, I'm going to all these protests, but I'm not getting arrested.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Because my parents, the revolutionary communists--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --ex-communists, but still. They were, "Oh, Bruce. What you're doing is wonderful, we think all this civil rights is great, but what you should do is get your

Bruce Hartford

degree--,

WG: Right.

BH: --“and then you'll really be able to help, but you'll be safe.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: “You'll have a profession.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: “And you won't lose your—they can't--.” See, neither of my parents had college at all.

WG: Right.

BH: And they were always being fired because the FBI would--

WG: (14:31-14:33)

BH: --come around and say, “Fire these people.” And they figured if you had a college degree you were safe. [Laughter]

WG: Right.

BH: Talk about ignorance.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: So they kept trying, “Don't do--.” So this influence was still strong unto me.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: I was nineteen. So I didn't get—I was afraid to get arrested. Then I went to the March on Washington.

WG: Okay.



Bruce Hartford

BH: And it had an enormous effect on me. Within a month after returning from the--

WG: DC.

BH: --the March on Washington, I had been arrested twice. [Laughter]

WG: [Laughter] So much--.

BH: And after that, I was a regular customer--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --of the judicial system. Yes, I was one of their best customers.

WG: Well you couldn't get rid of that record after the first couple of arrests, so--.

BH: Yeah, and it turned out had no meaning to my life at all.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: I think, probably, I got—counting the South and everything—maybe arrested fifteen times would--

WG: Wow.

BH: --be my guess. It's hard to know sometimes whether you're officially arrested or they're just, you know, fucking with you.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: Can I say that? Okay.

WG: That's up to you. [Laughter]

BH: Yeah, well you can--

WG: Yeah.

Bruce Hartford

BH: --bleep it out.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: But I have never ever had that effect--. I never would apply in a place--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --for a job, where I knew that would be an issue.

WG: Right.

BH: And I never had any trouble finding--

WG: (16:00-16:01)

BH: --a job otherwise. It never had any effect on me at all. [Laughter]

WG: So, your trek across from California to the March on Washington: how did that--? Did you go by yourself, was there a group of people, or--?

BH: Oh, well, as it turned out, my parents—just my last semester in high school—my father got a job in the East. They moved east, I stayed in California.

WG: Okay.

BH: And then I went--. Parents are so sweet.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: They always wanted to see me, so around the time of the March on Washington, I says, “Well, you know, if you want to send me a ticket--,

WG: [Laughter]

BH: “--I'd be happy to come to Connecticut.

WG: Right.

Bruce Hartford

BH: "But I'm going to go to the march." I mean, I didn't lie to them about that. They said, "Oh, great, great, great." So they flew me to Connecticut, and I actually took a bus down from New Haven that had been chartered by New Haven CORE.

WG: Okay. Okay.

BH: So it wasn't a trek across the country--

WG: Okay.

BH: --for me. [Laughter]

WG: [Laughter] Okay. So after the March on Washington, did you get more involved in CORE or--?

BH: Yeah.

WG: Okay.

BH: Yeah. Yeah.

WG: And this was in--? Did you stay in Connecticut or did you go back out--

BH: No, no.

WG: --to California?

BH: This was back LA.

WG: Okay.

BH: We—Woody Coleman and several—we were the action faction.

WG: Okay.

BH: I was part of the action faction. Felt that CORE wasn't militant enough.

WG: Okay.

Bruce Hartford

BH: And so we formed the non-violent action committee, which was really going to be militant.

WG: [Laughter] Okay.

BH: But non-violent.

WG: Right.

BH: So I was working with both NVAC, which is what we called Non-Violent Action Committee, and then I started working with--. [Laughter] Somehow I graduated junior college.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And somehow I got into UCLA.

WG: Wow. Okay.

BH: And so I was working with the Bruin CORE--

WG: Okay.

BH: --the UCLA campus chapter of CORE. And it took them a whole year to flunk me out.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: This was--. Talk about oppression.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: They flunk me out, and the only reason they had to flunk me out was that I never attended classes--,

WG: [Laughter]

Bruce Hartford

BH: --I never took any of the tests--,

WG: [Laughter]

BH: – I never wrote any of the papers--,

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --and I never did anything else they wanted me to do.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: But I was getting a tremendous education--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --in the movement.

WG: Right.

BH: And they took these excuses, “Well: he never took his test,

WG: [Laughter]

BH: “--he never wrote his papers, he never attended classes.” And they flunked me out for that.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: But I'll tell you, I learned far more in the movement than I ever would have in those classes.

WG: So--. [Laughter]

BH: So I count myself fortunate that I was one of the lucky ones who never went to class.

WG: [Laughter]

Bruce Hartford

BH: Now, I know you, probably, are college--. I'm subverting your life. Don't take anything I say seriously--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --because otherwise--

WG: You got it.

BH: --you'll get in trouble.

WG: It won't work today.

BH: Yeah, well, it might.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: But--. [Laughter] It worked for me.

WG: So what were some of the things that CORE, on UCLA's campus, focussed on? What were some of their things?

BH: Well, just the same things.

WG: Same things.

BH: Yeah. At that time we had this big campaign going against the Bank of America.

WG: Okay.

BH: You would walk into any bank in any city in the country, and everyone working there—with the possible exception of the janitor--

WG: Right.

BH: --was white.

Bruce Hartford

WG: White.

BH: They would not hire blacks, latinos, or asians.

WG: Right.

BH: And we had this campaign, and we were victorious.

WG: Okay.

BH: And we got them to integrate, and today you walk into a bank, it looks like everything else.

WG: Right. Right.

BH: So that was the big thing we were--. And then the de facto school segregation. [Laughter] Los Angeles was so cold.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: They had a big--. There was a street called Alameda. Ran ten miles, north and south.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: The west side of the street: all black.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: You could fire a missile, and it would be ten minutes before it passed by any white people.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And on the east side of the street: all white.

WG: Mm-hmm.

Bruce Hartford

BH: And the schools—because it was a big, wide street with a railroad running down it--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --so the land was cheap---

WG: Right.

BH: So the schools were checker-boarded up and--

WG: Down.

BH: --down, right?

WG: The strip.

BH: But the school district--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --ran down Alameda Street. So: here you have the line of the school boundary, and the school is right on the boundary.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: So the schools on the west side of the street were all black.

WG: Right.

BH: On the east side of the street, were all white. I mean, it was just so blatant.

WG: Right.

BH: You couldn't believe it. So we had sit-ins and marches--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --and boycotts and we did coin-ins at the bank and all kinds of stuff.



Bruce Hartford

WG: Any moments that were more interesting that you'd like to share?

BH: Oh, no. That's--.

WG: [Laughter] Okay, so how did you end up in the South? I mean, this is what:  
'64, '65 now?

BH: Yeah. Well early '65, I forget why I needed to--. Oh. NVAC basically got--.  
We had so many court cases--,

WG: Okay.

BH: --it just crippled us. And I decided I was ready to go South.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And I wrote to SNCC and SCLC. SNCC was, at that point, moving away  
from having white staff.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And SCLC never went that direction.

WG: So this is '66? (21:23-21:24)

BH: No, this is '65.

WG: '65.

BH: This is early '65. So a few days after Bloody Sunday, I was in Selma.

WG: Okay.

BH: And then I was put on the SCLC field staff.

WG: Okay. Okay. Who were you working with at SCLC? Do you remember?

BH: Well in Selma, Bevel was--

Bruce Hartford

WG: James Bevel

BH: --the main guy. But then after the Selma campaign—I guess Bevel started planning the Chicago campaign—anyway--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --I ended up under Hosea Williams.

WG: Okay.

BH: So I had worked in Dallas County--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --and Hale—no. Dallas County and then Crenshaw County.

WG: Okay.

BH: And then Marengo and Hale County. And then I had to go back to California to serve a sentence for a sit-in.

WG: [Laughter] How long?

BH: [Laughter] I served thirty days--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --on the Wayside Honor Farm—Ranch. The Wayside Honor Ranch.

WG: Honor Ranch? What--?

BH: Yes. Honor Ranch.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: Other places would call it the prison farm--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

Bruce Hartford

BH: --but in LA, it was the Honor Ranch.

WG: [Laughter] Because it's an honor to be there.

BH: Because it was an honor to be there--,

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --yes. And so I served thirty days there. I tried to go back to school a little--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --but that didn't work out. So then in the spring of '66--. So that was like the winter, I don't know, a few, couple of the winter months '65.

WG: Okay.

BH: Spring of '66, I was back in Hale County, Alabama where we had the first black candidates running for office.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And then I was around there. And then The Meredith March in '66.

WG: Alright.

BH: I went on that. And then I was assigned to Grenada, Mississippi, where I was there from July of '66 to February of '67.

WG: Okay.

BH: Nobody knows about the Grenada Movement, but it was a big movement.

WG: Okay. Let's get back and talk to that, but I want to back up first and talk a little bit about your--. When you came South, what was your reaction? What did you think? I mean, had you traveled in the South before?

Bruce Hartford

BH: Never been to the--.

WG: Especially coming from a big place--

BH: Never been to the--

WG: --like Los Angeles.

BH: --South in my life.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: What was my reaction to the South? Well, that's a good question. I had been two years now in the movement, so I knew what was going on--

WG: Right.

BH: --in the South. I mean--

WG: Television, news--,

BH: --people would come.

WG: --right?

BH: Well, the CORE had its news operation--,

WG: (24:08-24:09)

BH: --the Freedom Singers would come to California, I was friends of SNCC.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: So the political aspects of what was going on was no surprise to me, and I knew what to expect. The horrendous poverty--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --I wasn't prepared for.

Bruce Hartford

WG: Okay.

BH: The sharecroppers.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And it's interesting--. It's hard to imagine--. You're from the South, yourself?

WG: Yes. I'm from Charlotte.

BH: You're from Charlotte.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Okay. The thing that--. You would drive along the roads and you would see these sharecropper shacks--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --of just abject poverty--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --and starvation and hunger.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And children—babies—so weak, as they lie there, they can't brush the flies out of their eyes, right? And that was very striking. So I come back to the South--. First time, I came back for the fortieth anniversary of the Selma March--

WG: Okay.

BH: --of five years ago—2005.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And I'm driving around in all these rural places where we're--. And there're

Bruce Hartford

no--. And those shacks are all gone.

WG: Mmm.

BH: And I'm saying, "Wow. This is great. This poverty has been alleviated."

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And then I dig a little deeper, because I do do research, and I realize, "Oh, no. That's not what happened." All those people were pushed out.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And they all migrated to the inner cities where they're the homeless of the inner cities.

WG: Right.

BH: But nowadays you drive the country roads in North Carolina or Alabama--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --Mississippi. You see a lot of snug brick homes--

WG: Right.

BH: --and nice trailers and whatever. Even the white sharecroppers--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --portion was poor. But that poverty really--. The poverty stunned me, and then coming back decades later, seeing the difference.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: People say, "Well, what did the Civil Rights Movement accomplish?"

WG: Mm-hmm.

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BH: And, obviously, it accomplished a great deal. But in the economic sphere, the biggest beneficiaries, economically, of the Civil Rights Movement were white Southerners.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Because now you have all of these franchise businesses, all of these shopping malls--,

WG: Right.

BH: --and it's mostly white owned.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: It's mostly white employed. The poverty of black communities is still really noticeably poorer than the white communities. It's somewhat up from what it was in sharecropper days.

WG: Yes.

BH: But it was the whites, who were so vicious in opposing the Civil Rights Movement, they turned out to be some of the biggest beneficiaries.

WG: Right.

BH: Before the Civil Rights Movement, the South was, what we now call, an underdeveloped nation. It was like a colony--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --of the North. And now it's been brought in to it's now part of the United States—to the benefit of the white Mississippians. [Laughter]

Bruce Hartford

WG: I just realized, right. So, I guess, when you first got to Mississippi, what was your responsibilities? What--?

BH: Alabama.

WG: Alabama.

BH: I was first in Alabama.

WG: Alabama. I'm sorry.

BH: Well because I had been with CORE, I had done non-violent--

WG: Right

BH: --training for CORE, they had me doing non-violent training--

WG: Okay.

BH: --in Selma. Then when I was in Crenshaw--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --that was a voter registration project.

WG: Okay.

BH: And in Hale County, we were trying to elect the first black sheriff--,

WG: Okay. Alright

BH: --which we did not.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And then in Grenada, it was pretty much everything.

WG: Mm-hmm. So talk about Grenada a little bit.

BH: Oh, Grenada. Grenada never got the attention that the previous major



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focuses like Albany, Birmingham--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --St. Augustine. Partly, I think, mostly because of the timing.

WG: Okay.

BH: This was now '66: the Voting Rights Act had passed, the Civil Rights Act had passed, the focus was on the urban uprisings in the North, certainly King's Chicago. But Grenada was one of the longest-running--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --mass movements on a Albany, Birmingham scale.

WG: Right.

BH: Tiny little town, I mean a real pit.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And vicious--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --vicious racism.

WG: Examples? What are some examples that you?

BH: When the Meredith March came through--. Well first of all, Grenada, even during Freedom Summer two years earlier, they hadn't gone into Grenada.

WG: Okay.

BH: It was considered one of the places too dangerous--

WG: Don't go?

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BH: Don't--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --try a project in Grenada. Nobody would willing to even sponsor it.

WG: Right.

BH: The march comes through, and the black community has this enormous response. It was like a lid had been taken off a pressure cooker.

WG: Mmm.

BH: The Grenada white power structure, they had a plan. And they told the--.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: We know they had a plan because they bragged about it to Jack Nelson the LA Times.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And their plan was: we will not give them any—we'll ease the march through town, we'll register people, we won't give them any excuse to do anything, and we'll get them out of town as quietly as possible.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: But they were not ready. [Laughter] They figured, "Oh, alright. Twenty people try to register to vote. Big deal, you know?" Like hundreds came out.

WG: Right.

BH: So anyway, but they did manage to ease the march out of town. And then it turned out they had played a trick. That the people who—. They had registered a

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hundred or two hundred people, couple hundred—they weren't really registered.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: They played a game of it.

WG: Right.

BH: That was just so typical. [Laughter]

WG: When did you find out about that?

BH: They found out a couple weeks later.

WG: Yeah, okay.

BH: People found out and there was a--. People were demoralized. But SCLC—the people had said, “Look. Please come back.”

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And SCLC had committed to coming back to Grenada. So once the march was over, staff workers came back--,

WG: Okay.

BH: --and we rebuilt the movement from that demoralization.

WG: Mmm.

BH: But this is now '66, right?

WG: Yeah.

BH: So there's a court order—we did legal stuff, too—and there was a court order to desegregate the school system, which, of course: totally white, totally black.

WG: Mm-hmm.

Bruce Hartford

BH: And because the movement was strong, the court order was that black parents could sign up to send their children to the white school. They could--. That's all they had to do was say, "I want to go there.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: "I want my children to go there." Four hundred and fifty black children registered--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --in the white elementary and high school. I don't think they had a junior high. I think it--

WG: Right.

BH: --just was elementary and high school. Well at this time, even in '66--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --an integrated white school in Mississippi meant that there were four black girls and maybe one black boy.

WG: Right.

BH: Maybe not even that black boy.

WG: Right. [Laughter]

BH: And that was big integration.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Four hundred--

WG: Four hundred.

Bruce Hartford

BH: --and fifty. So they freaked.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: They totally freaked. The first day of school, the Klan mobilized from all over Mississippi to come to Grenada.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: They had four or five hundred white men with clubs and chains beating the children, even the little grade school children.

WG: Are you serious?

BH: I am serious. They had pickup trucks with walkie-talkies. Say, "Alright, there's a group coming up Pearl Street. Send the mob over to this street, there's a car trying to get through bringing their children to school." They brutalized--. Hundreds of men were attacking, with axe handles, school children. And the police just, "Oh. Hey, George." You know? [Laughter]

WG: [Laughter]

BH: Just standing by. Oh. The police helped beat up the reporters.

WG: Hmm.

BH: That was their job. And attack the news--,

WG: So there were cameras there.

BH: --the TV people. So it turned out that one of the organizers of this mob was the local judge--

WG: [Laughter]

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BH: --who was the judge who would sentence us for our sit-ins [Laughter]--,

WG: Right.

BH: --arrests, and stuff.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: That was Grenada. They would mobilize to a--. Every night we would have a march from Bellflower Baptist Church--

WG: Okay.

BH: --up to the town square, which was one of these town squares with a Confederate--. [Laughter] When the march came through, when the Meredith March came through--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --one of the SCLC people put an American flag--

WG: Alright.

BH: --on the Confederate--

WG: Statue.

BH: --soldier statue. And the whites in Grenada: that was a desecration.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: That was the word they used: desecration.

WG: Desecration.

BH: To put an American flag on a statue in the town square of an American town.

WG: [Laughter]

Bruce Hartford

BH: But to them it was--

WG: Right.

BH: --a desecration.

WG: Desecration.

BH: It was like we had raped a nun or something.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: So they would mobilize these mobs to attack our demonstration. We would usually have somewhere between a hundred and three hundred marchers.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And they sometimes would have five hundred to a thousand--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --people.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And we had to use non-violent tactics to survive and to keep things going, but we did.

WG: Who were some of the local people that you got involved? Do you remember local--?

BH: The minister--

WG: Okay.

BH: --at Bellflower Baptist Church--

WG: Baptist Church.

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BH: --was the main guy. And I'll call his name as soon as it gets to my brain. So he was the main one. I didn't work very closely with the local leadership--

WG: Okay.

BH: --because I was working, like canvassing and things. SCLC had a large project.

WG: Okay.

BH: And so there was usually ten to twenty organizers there. Our project directors were the ones who worked mostly with the local leaders.

WG: Okay. You mentioned that children were being beating, so I imagine that--.  
Was there a larger involvement from the children locally?

BH: Oh, yeah. Well as usual, it was the youth who--

WG: Okay. Right.

BH: --did the march. The youth and the women.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And one or two ministers in the League.

WG: Mm-kay.

BH: [Laughter] And behind them was all children--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --and women.

WG: Okay.

BH: Interestingly enough, one of the children who was beaten and severely



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injured that day--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --later became the mayor of Grenada.

WG: Wow.

BH: But--. Well, there were two white candidates who—they fought each other and she--

WG: Sort of slipped in.

BH: --slipped in--

WG: Okay.

BH: --with less than a majority. Because Grenada's not a majority black--

WG: Okay.

BH: --county. And of course they did everything then to sabotage her term and got rid of her as soon as the next election was, [Laughter] but even so--.

WG: [Laughter] Divine retribution, right?

BH: Yeah.

WG: So, I mean, I guess, on a whole, how did you view the campaigning in Grenada after you left? And what were you able to accomplish? (36:43-36:44)

BH: What we--. Well, first of all, we accomplished—no, that's not right, wait a second—the movement accomplished.

WG: Okay.

BH: Remember, us--. We were just facilitators. We, you know, the movement

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was from the people.

WG: Okay.

BH: And we brought certain skills, and we brought ability to connect with the outside world, but the movement was their movement.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And what they accomplished was they changed a culture of oppression to a culture of resistance.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: They said, "No."

WG: Okay.

BH: They changed--. It didn't happen over night, but they changed the whole social dynamics.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Economically, not so much. But in terms of the whole way in which people in the races related--:

WG: Mm-hmm

BH: --total change. Voter registration, which would then effect the elections

WG: Right.

BH: --and so forth. It used to be we never had any difficulty knowing which was the black community and which was the white community because the black community roads were all mud--

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WG: Right.

BH: --and no pavement and no streetlights [Laughter] and no sidewalks, and the whites were the opposite. And now that's--,

WG: That's changed now.

BH: --you know--. They got their streets paved--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: [Laughter] --and so forth.

WG: Okay. Did you spend, now--. The majority of your time in the South, was it spent in Grenada?

BH: Well, actually, a little bit under half because I spent probably a total of more time in Alabama--

WG: Okay.

BH: --in Selma, in Crenshaw County, Hale County.

WG: Okay. So when you got ready to leave, when you were winding down and decided--

BH: Uh-huh.

WG: --what was the next move, how did you come to that?

BH: Well, I just was forced out by health.

WG: Oh. Okay.

BH: You wouldn't know it now, but I was known as the skinny kid.

WG: [Laughter]

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BH: And I was down to like a hundred and thirty pounds.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Couldn't eat. Ulcers. Just because of the tension and the violence and--.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: So I had to get out just because I was worn down.

WG: Okay.

BH: And so then I left.

WG: Where did you go after that?

BH: I later--. I went back to Connecticut for a little while. Oh, and then I--.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Some of the SCLC people—Bev Owen [sp?], Bernard Lafayette—were organizing the first mass protest against the Vietnam War--

WG: Okay.

BH: --in New York City, and they asked me to help organize with that. I did that.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Then the next fall I went to San Francisco State, where I became a student activist, SDS, and then we ended up having the longest student strike in American history--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --for third world studies.

WG: Okay.

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BH: I was involved in that.

WG: Okay. So you remained active.

BH: Oh, yeah.

WG: And you can still consider yourself an activist.

BH: Yeah.

WG: [Laughter] (39:52-39:53)

BH: Last month I was on big demonstrations in California to defend public education.

WG: Wow. Okay.

BH: Which you guys will soon be having here.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: I hope. [Laughter]

WG: I guess, so, I mean, looking back, you've shared a lot of your just reflections about it, and--. I mean, is there anything you feel that hasn't been said here that needs to be said or--? Maybe, you spoke about Grenada, which was an event that not a lot of people know about, but--?

BH: Actually, I posted a chronology of the Grenada movement on the Civil Rights veteran's website.

WG: Okay.

BH: I don't know if you're familiar with--

WG: Mm-hmm. I am. I am.

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BH: --that site. Okay. So you can--

WG: Check it out.

BH: --check that out. Um. [Pause 40:36-40:43] People talk—how can I say this--  
-. Living in California, living in San Francisco, I've encountered people who have had  
drug problems.

WG: (40:55-40:56)

BH: Is it time?

WG: No. Go ahead.

BH: And I've had friends who became addicted to heroin and--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --meth and stuff like that. There is no drug as addictive as being part of a  
people's mass movement for freedom.

WG: Wow.

BH: Once I hit Selma, I was addicted to that drug. I have been for people's mass  
movement—searching for that fix [Laughter]--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --ever since. You do not forget it.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And it was the most powerful, euphoric drug for me, personally, that I have  
ever—and I've tried them all--,

WG: [Laughter]

Bruce Hartford

BH: --believe me. [Laughter] I've tried them all.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And that's the only one that I'm addicted to. Because there's something about--. You know, the books and the official Martin Luther King, who I loved and admired--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --that wasn't--. The real movement was the movement of the people from below. It was a movement from below. It was not a top down--

WG: Right.

BH: --movement. And this is something that the media, the textbooks, continually miss. But there was something so powerful about that, and so American--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --about that, that it stuck with me ever since.

WG: Hmm.

BH: So--.

?Max Krochmal?: I guess, I have a few questions, but some of them that I have, I'll rattle them off and see if you feel getting into this stuff--

BH: Alright.

?: --and then if you do, we can continue. So one of them was—some nitty-gritty stuff because I do a lot of organizing myself—so I'm really curious about some of these things like how you dealt with court cases? You said you were so inundated with court

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cases at a certain point that you had to just leave or whatever, so that's one question.

Then, I'd like to ask what the non-violent training consisted of? You know, like the workshops--

BH: Mm-hmm.

?: --that you conducted, if that's the way I understood it? What the participation in the San Francisco State student strike looked like? Like, that whole thing. Because that's an interesting thing from the '70s.

BH: No. '68.

?: Late '60s? I'm sorry.

WG: '68. Yeah.

?: So that--.

BH: '67.

?: Okay. Okay.

BH: Late '6—.

WG: It's when they--.

BH: The '67-'68 term.

?: Okay.

WG: It was the push for African American studies--.

?: Yeah.

WG: and it falls around in there.

?: So those would be the that questions I would ask, and that might take another



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twenty minutes or so to cover. Would that be cool?

BH: Yeah, except that I hope I don't miss lunch.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: But, yeah, sure. Let's--. The court cases isn't an interesting question.

?: Okay.

WG: Mmh.

?: Okay. Well, I'll just--.

BH: We just spent--. In terms of the court cases, the reason it sort of, really sagged NVAC for a while is that we spent every day in court.

?: Right. Right.

BH: And we couldn't do anything else.

WG: Right.

?: Right.

BH: And some of these trials went on for four, six, eight weeks.

WG: Mmh.

?: Mmh.

BH: Not for the trial--,

?: Right.

BH:but to select a jury. [Laughter]

?: Right. Right.

WG: [Laughter] Mmh.

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?: Okay.

BH: So we were just exhausted sitting around a court.

?: Okay.

BH: What was the other question?

?: I'll turn my camera back on.

BH: Yeah.

WG: Okay.

?: The other question was: you mentioned that you did workshops on non-violent training.

BH: Right.

WG: Yeah.

?: So what did those workshops look like in practice?

BH: Okay, well--. I and--. The workshops I ran were from the point of view of tactical non-violence--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --not philosophic non-violence. So we talked very little about the philosophy of non-violence.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And, basically, it was: how to be a protester. How to march, how to sit-in, how to picket, how to defend yourself against attack, how to—giving training in how to remain cool when people are screaming racist insults--

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WG: Right.

BH: --into your face and pouring stuff on you and hitting you. And we would practice. It was very different. I had been used to doing these training for people in California where it's very hard to get those who are playing the role of the attacker--

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --to actually attack people. "Oh, no. I can't hit anybody."

WG: [Laughter]

BH: We always had to say, "Okay. Now you really got to do this and you'll have your turn on the other side," and so forth. So we would practice. What do you do when you're hit? How do you non-violently protect yourself and protect other people? The first training session I did in Selma, I was working with the junior high school kids from Selma. I said, "Okay. Now we're going to role play how do you do when they hit you." I said to a girl—I don't know, she must have been fifteen or something like that—I said to her, "Okay. Now you come up and slug me."

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: She goes, "Are you sure about--?" "No, no, no. I really want you--."

WG: [Laughter]

BH: So I go into this spiel about, "You really get to do it," the way I would do in California.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: She--. This big light came over her face, and she hauled off and she [Table

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pounded] slugged me and knocked me across [Laughter]--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --the room. And I slid across the wood floor, and I still have a scar

[Laughter]--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --on my shoulder back here where it cut my--. [Laughter]

WG: [Laughter]

BH: After that I didn't stress the--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --hitting so much. [Laughter] But that's what I--.

WG: (46:38-46:40)

BH: It was non-violent training in how to survive, and how to organize a picket line, how to do a sit-in--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --how to be a march marshall. And a little bit on the philosophy, but mostly it was: we're doing this because this is the way to win.

WG: Right.

BH: We're doing this because this is the way to keep our discipline. Oh. And discipline.

WG: Right.

BH: That was an important thing which nobody pays any attention to now. But

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discipline was crucial to not only survival but political effectiveness.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Everybody counterposes non-violence over here, Malcolm X over there—because he spoke against non-violence. He was mostly non-violent.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Without the rhetoric. I'm sure you've seen with Denzel Washington--,

WG: "X". Mm-hmm.

BH: --right?. There's a scene in there, I believe—I knew about this, so maybe I'm putting it onto the movie, but I think it's in the movie—where one of the most powerful things Malcolm ever did, was after the incident of police brutality in Harlem--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --he organized the nation. They went out, and they stood in front of the police department in orderly ranks--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --organized, silent--,

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --completely non-violent. And completely, totally freaked out the police.

Why? Because of the discipline.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: The discipline of the non-violent protesters was what made—gave our message its [Hand smack] political power.

Bruce Hartford

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And Malcolm used the same thing. I'm not criticizing him in any way.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: I'm just pointing out that tactical non-violence was essentially—we all had to do it

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: No matter how you felt. [Laughter]

WG: Right.

BH: There was--. In one two-month period in Alabama, the Klan tried to kill me four times.

WG: Wow.

BH: Twice I used non-violent tactics to survive. Once we fled and they chased us across half a county.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: And once we fired back. Because that was what the situation was.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: So, you know, [Laughter]: non-violent tactics, run like hell, fire back.

WG: [Laughter]

BH: [Laughter] As according to the tactical necessities.

WG: Right.

BH: So I was not a philosophical non-violent person. But I am a strong proponent

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of the power and effectiveness of tactical non-violence.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: Did that answer your question--

WG: Yeah, that was--.

?: Yeah.

BH: --or did I go off ranting and--?

WG: No, that was good.

?: No, no. That helps a lot, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Definitely. The last thing I'll ask is, just to get a quick question out there, is you mentioned your involvement in the San Francisco State student strike--

BH: Uh-huh.

?: --so if you could go into that a little bit--?

BH: I don't know. [Laughter] What do you want to know about it?

?: What was it about, I guess? How did it develop? How did you--? You ended up winning, more or less--,

BH: Pretty much.

?: --what you were asking for, so--

BH: Well--.

?: --those--.

BH: See, the thing that is in these movements: we always asked for what we want, we never got what we wanted, so it always felt somewhat like a defeat, even though--

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WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: --it really was a victory.

?: (50:05-50:06)

BH: So we sometimes didn't acknowledge our own victories. But the State strike grew out of two years of organizing.

WG: Hmm.

?: Okay.

BH: Initially by the black student union, and then to a lesser extent by SDS, which I was active with. And the demands were for a Third World Studies Department--

WG: Hmm.

BH: --which would have a School of Black Studies, a School of Latino—Chicano Studies was what we called it then—and schools for different ethnic groups. And you could get a degree in it. This was the longest student strike, most effective student strike, in US history. It started in the fall, I think it was in October, and we basically held that strike until January or February. There were, I think, nine hundred people arrested or six hundred, something like that. But it was effective because of the years of organizing [Hand smack] that preceded it. And because it was not just a student strike--. They had—particularly the black student union had been working in the community with tutorial programs.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: And we brought in support from the community. So you had people like Ron



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Dellums who later became a well-known Congressman—he was a city councilman in Berkeley—he's leading a march of Berkeley--

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --people across the campus in our support. Willie Brown, who became the speaker of the house of California and then the--

WG: Right.

BH: --mayor of San Francisco. He was a very small politician at that time. He came.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: With community people and church people. And because they were not successful in isolating us from the community and the radical nut-cases in our ranks were not successful in isolating us [Laughter] from the community--,

WG: [Laughter]

BH: --we won that strike. So, yeah. And in some ways it was familiar territory. [Laughter] I mean, they had the police and the cavalry. I mean, literally, the cavalry: horses.

WG: Mm-hmm.

BH: There on the campus and hundreds of cops and all the stuff.

?: Thank you.

WG: Okay.

BH: Okay?

Bruce Hartford

?: Great.

WG: That's good.

?: Thank you.

WG: No, I appreciate that, Mr. Hartford. Thank you for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Andrew Ritchey

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