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

Interview U-0557
Mandy Carter
April 10, 2007

Transcript – 2

TRANCRIPT: MANDY CARTER

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge
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START OF INTERVIEW

BB: Okay, Mandy. Well, we're starting over because my technical difficulties with [laughter] our last tape, but now we have this –

MC: Oh, yeah.

BB: fancy schmancy machine here. So we are at Mandy Carter's sweet little home in Durham. It's on Sheppard Street and today is April –

MC: tenth.

BB: 10, 2007. A fine rainy –

MC: Yes.

BB: cold day.

MC: We're sitting here around a – I don't know, low-key kitchen, but good tea and honey and it is cool.

BB: This – cozy is the word for your kitchen.

MC: I love this. It's very cozy.

BB: It's so nice. Little table and little lamp, it's very warm and cozy.

MC: It's got some water stains and what-not, but I love this place.

BB: [Laughter] It's a great place. And you can't beat your rent, Mandy.

[0:50]

MC: No, you cannot. [Laughter] I am never moving.

BB: Good. So let's start with when you were just a little baby pumpkin. You were born November 2, 1948.

MC: That's right.

BB: In Albany, New York, right?

MC: That's right.

BB: And you were in the Albany Children's Home until 1955.

MC: That's right.

BB: You have a brother named Ronald Carter and a sister named Delores, right?

MC: That's right.

BB: What order were you born in? Were you –?

MC: Third.

BB: Third. You were the third.

MC: Yes.

BB: Were your brother and sister with you in the Children's Home?

MC: Yes.

BB: What was it like for you there?

MC: You know it's interesting. I was actually born on 144 New Scotland Avenue, Albany Children's Home, and because my father was in the military, my brother was born in Raleigh, North Carolina. He's one year older than I. My sister was born in Shreveport, Louisiana. She's two years older than I. So apparently however what was going on that my father and mother ended up in Albany, that's where I was born. So we [1:53] were three different places. Long story short, I was born and not long after that our mother got up and walked out one day and never came back. So the way the law was written in New York Department of Social Services, if your father could not take care of you financially and provide for all of you, you become a ward of the state. So the three of us all went, which is kind of neat, to the Albany Children's Home together. We were there until I was eight, like you said. The Home was closing down to become a college, Albany Juniors College, which is still there. Which means that I can physically go up there and see what was the Home because it's just inverted into a college. But the Home was closing and in New York, the way they were working it was if you had brothers and sisters in the same institution, they would try to keep you together. But what was unique, Bridgette, was that there were very few children of color in the Children's Home – Albany Children's Home, and so they not only [interruption] had to find - Oh.

BB: Hot tea calls.

MC: Yes. [Laughter] They not only had to find…homes for all the children because they had to get all the children relocated, but the idea of finding a black family for three black

children was highly unusual. But they found a black farm family called De Messenies. Claude and - what was her name? Claude De Messenies and I don't remember her name. Chatham Center, New York, not far, but they were a black family–

BB: Chathams?

MC: Chatham Center.

BB: Oh.

MC: C-H-A-T-H-A-M, that's right. You remember you said you were – Chatham Center, New York, not far from Albany, but it was a black farm family and they [3:39] had no children. They'd always been adopting and/or getting foster children, so the three of us all went with them together. I was eight, Ronnie was nine, and Delores was ten.

BB: And you – let's see, you lived there for just three years?

MC: Yeah, I was actually there for four.

BB: Four years.

MC: I went there when I was eight. Delores – this family was interesting. They were more of an elderly couple. He had a farm, and because they didn't have children of their own, they normally only did foster care for boys. But because this was unusual in that they wanted to keep our family together – Ronnie, Delores, and I – they took us. But to be honest, he ran a farm and it was great to have boys for labor quite honestly. Delores didn't last long. She was only there for about a year and she got relocated back with our father, of all things, in New York. Ronnie and I stayed. I only lasted until I was about twelve. I found out – the reason why I found out really wasn't because, despite their report, because I got my period very young, and I think she was worried about a girl, period, but she just said this is not working. I hated it, and so it was a mutual agreement that at the age of twelve I would go and got to Schenectady Children's Home, but Ronnie stayed until he was eighteen. They had an adopted son there as well.

BB: Wow.

MC: Yeah.

Track 2

BB: What did you hate about it?

[0:02] MC: Well, you know, if I hadn't been in the Albany Children's Home first—there's just something about, and this is why I think I'm a good organizer quite honestly. There's something about living in a Home. The Home only had about one hundred kids, but

everything was structured around what was going to be best for the common good of everyone there, unlike a mother, and a father, and a family. So you got up at the same time, you went to bed at the same time; you had a very structured day in terms of how your day was spent. They mainstreamed us into public schools in Albany. You just felt like you were one of many. They would do it by age, so I was like being a baby and going to eight years old. You were kind of in this like a – they called junior – like a house. Like a - I don't know what you – like a house. So when you are living like that, to go from that to all of a sudden you are in this place where you know they're not your real family, and you know it, and they when they say you can start calling us Mom and Dad. I kept thinking, why am I calling you Mom and Dad? You're not my mom and dad. But also to go on to a farm situation, it was very – I loved the farm. It was great food. They had one cow, a bunch of chickens and goats. That was neat. Good food. But the structure was just so much different. There was "I expect this from you" and Ronnie's a boy and we're both girls, we got chores on the farm, but it just seemed so – I don't know, I just didn't adjust well. But I'll tell you the one thing that probably stood out for me that made me just devastated was on Christmas – in previous Christmas's you always spent them at the Home because you had no place to go. And I – that's – you can handle that. But then on the very first Christmas we were there, I was eight years old, we're all running downstairs, you know my brother, my sister, and me, the De Messenies and their adopted kid, and they have stockings hanging up on the mantle and I thought [1:51] this is so great. And then I started looking at my stocking and there was a black coal in it, piece of black coal. I said, "What's – why do – what's this black coal?" And he says, "You need to know this means you've not been a good girl and a black coal is our way of telling you that you have disappointed us." I'm thinking what the hell! I was devastated! I couldn't believe it. Why would you do something like that? So of course that ruined my Christmas, but it made me really think what an awful psychological thing to do to someone. But also if you got – did something wrong, he would hit you with a goat strap. So we got beat with a goat strap and I'm thinking I don't like – I don't need this. So it's all not just mental – we never went anywhere, we never got anything. When you're in a foster care system, the state pays you so much a month for your food of your children, clothing, and a budget for camp or something. You can't do anything. I mean it was nothing. I was really an outgoing kid, so all of a sudden to have this really kind of a clamp down on me; I was suffocating there and I just did not like it. And so – but I think the period in a weird way was a good – my option out because by having my

period, who knew that she was freaking out about it, so I got out of there. I have real issues about foster homes for that reason.

BB: Yeah. And what's a goat strap?

MC: You know a goat literally – when a goat – when you see a goat and they have bells hanging down from their collar – what do you call it? A collar? Yeah, that. They are very – they sting, they leave welts. And I'm thinking if this is the way he thinks this is how he's going to discipline – and I just got irate about that, and I thought no one will ever, ever hit me again when I'm old enough. I thought it was just – but he did it to [3:35] me, he did it to Ronnie, and he did it to Delores. I'm thinking what kind of – who lives like this? But it was the country. Maybe that's their style or something.

BB: Yeah. That's so interesting to me that you were just a little kid, and you got that the piece of coal was just not right.

MC: Oh, yeah.

BB: You got that being smacked with a goat strap –

MC: Yeah.

BB: just didn't sit – even though you were just a kid.

MC: Yeah. And I think maybe because you know again, having been in the Home, I think if I had gone in the foster home—I had no frame of reference so the only frame of reference I had was being in the Children's Home. But if I had gone right in to a foster home, I might have been different because you have frame of reference of how it – like why is this happening? But then when I got out of there and went to Schenectady Children's Home not that far, and it was really great. I think that saved my – literally saved my life and my psyche about oh, I like this. I can relate to this much better.

BB: And you were there about six years.

MC: Yeah.

BB: What was it that you liked –?

MC: Twelve to – well, you were going back to, again, a kind of situation in which you are one hundred kids in the Home, not many children of color, but you were in a – it's like a school in a way. You have your individual dorm rooms with two or three to a room; you had a housemother or houseparent. It was maybe no more than fifteen to a unit. So it just seemed to

be much more – again back to that it's what's good for the [4:56] common good and you just – I don't know, it just seemed like I could [Track 3] relate to it much better.

BB: Let me pause this and fix the settings here.

Track 4

BB: Okay.

MC: Cool.

BB: So you attended high school at Mt. Pleasant High School.

MC: Right.

BB: Right? Still in Albany?

MC: No, actually it was when I got transferred to Schenectady Children's Home. Actually because I was twelve years old I went to a school called Central Park Jr. High School – Central Park Jr. High School, and again because the Children's Home would mainstream you into regular school. So that was just a regular junior high school still in Schenectady. But when I went into my freshman year, that's when I went to Mt. Pleasant High School still in Schenectady. That's where I was.

BB: Tell me about your high school experience.

MC: I loved it. You know, I was just thinking the other reason why, now that I look back on it, I was always one of these kids that just loved everything. I wanted to know 'what about that?' and 'what about that?' I was a real people person. So when I was in junior high school – well, let me just backtrack real quick for a second. The other thing about being in the foster home and Chatham Center, because I was there between the ages of eight and twelve, I went to Chatham Center – Chatham Central High School that had a combination junior – what do you call it like when you are into? What grade would I have [1:18] been in? Eight to twelve, whatever that was, I had to go to a one-room school place that I could literally walk to from where I lived for the first year or two. But then when I got to be twelve, whatever school year that is Bridgette, then I went to Chatham Central High School for the lowest grade, however that is. And I had to take a bus every day. Ronnie and I did, and Delores. And because they didn't let us do anything, I was really athletic and at one point the gym teacher said, "Well, you should think about going out for something". I don't know what it was. I said let me go ask and see if it's okay. They said no, and I'm thinking – so I think that was one of those another indicator this is not great. When I moved to the Children's – Schenectady when I was in junior high school, I

broke the mile – who knew, but I got all of a sudden it was like all opportunities were opening up. Athletics were opening up. I was a very kind of wonderful people person and I loved it. So by the time I went to Mt. Pleasant, I was like in everything. The thing that probably changed my life – another one of those life-changing moments was when they were saying we had the cheerleading squad – in that school, I don't know how you were in school, but cheerleaders are about the ultimate. Because I knew all the cheerleaders, I was always hanging out. They said, "Mandy, you should try out. You'd be great." I said, "You think so?" This is a school that's 90% white, very few black kids. I said alright, I'll give it a try. I tried out and I got it. This is back in 1964, 65, 66, when the Civil Rights thing was going on. So few black kids were getting anything, but to have gotten to be a black cheerleader in Mt. Pleasant; that was like a crowning moment for me. It was such a validation.

BB: You were the first –

MC: Yeah.

[3:07]

BB: you're popular, you're –

MC: Yeah.

BB: you're outgoing.

MC: You were what it was.

BB: This ultimate status as a cheerleader.

MC: You got it. I was in every club. The interesting thing that made me also realize something wasn't quite right was that when I became a cheerleader at Mt. Pleasant High School, the way it was then you had to have straightened hair. You could not have a natural. So even though I got this wonderful gift of being a cheerleader and all that that meant, that meant going back to hot-combing my hair, which happened at the foster home. I hated it. If you had to grease your hair every single day, and take a hot comb and get it as hot as it could, and go through your hair and realize what that does to your hair and your scalp. It was very painful. They said no, there's going to be a code and one of those codes is as an African-American – and they didn't even use that word Negro, you have to have straightened hair. I thought ooh, I guess that's a small price to pay, but I look back on it now and I'm thinking interesting. Now afro or whatever –

BB: Did the white girls – what if white girls had curly hair?

MC: No.

BB: So it was totally racist.

MC: It was totally a racist policy. It was interesting. It was a racist policy and I'm sure that whatever the code was for why they thought being a cheerleader was you were supposed to exemplify all these wonderful things about whatever, being at Mt. [4:24] Pleasant, that part of that was how you looked and how you conducted yourself. So the hair thing was boy – that was like, "Oh wow, what's this about? And that's around "Black is Beautiful". They were coming out with these huge froes and then "No, Mandy, you have to" or whatever. That was the time it was.

BB: Wow.

MC: Yeah.

BB: Wow. Eesh. So any other things about high school that feels important to –

MC: Yeah, I would say to you when I think of my activist career, I've told this story a thousand times, but it was because I was sitting in Mt. Pleasant High School someone from the American Friends Service Committee was invited to come to my social studies class. And now that I think back upon it, that was probably unusual for someone from the Quakers to come to a high school and talk about non-violence and peace and social justice and what-not, but they came. It must have been my junior year, and I'm thinking that the teacher I had must have knew someone to have that happen. Anyway, that one visit to the class literally transformed my life. I was going – so like at the Home at the age of eighteen, you are on your own. When you turn eighteen you are no longer a ward of the state. You are own your own. I was going to be a doctor. My studies were great, college prep. At the Children's Home they said, "Mandy, if you get into college, we will pay for your entire education, but you have to stay in school and you have to have good grades." I said, "Great. I want to do that." But when I went to this one class and this person came in and talked about all this stuff, I said, "Wow." He was talking non-violence and the Civil Rights Movement. They were down south, Quakers, Power One, That of Good of Everyone, but at the very end of his yakking, and I was so [6:16] inspired, he said we have a one-week high school – what do you call a one-week high school – not a retreat, but a one-week camp in the Pocono's, and if anyone is interested, raise your hand and you can come. Well you know my hand went flying up and I got permission to go. When I went, Bridgette – oh, my gosh! You are up in the beautiful Pocono Mountains. You are with the American

Friends Service Committee, the Quakers who have such a rich tradition of non-violence. You are in a situation which you are living on a farm, you're living in these dorms, the food you eat is the food that you have to pick that day earlier, fresh meals, you are reading about non-violence, all this incredible stuff rolling around. Also, this is like smack dab in the middle of the beginning of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. I was too young for a Civil Rights Movement, but just the right age in terms of the Anti-Vietnam, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and all that. They would also then bring in these resource people to come in and talk about their experiences as being pacifists and all that. Have you ever heard of Guy and Candy Carawan? Does that ring a bell? Anyway, Guy (G-U-Y) and Candy (C-A-N-D-Y) Carawan (C-A-R-A-W-A-N). They came and they were folk singers and they said, "We're cultural workers and this is what we do." They were connected with the Highlander Center. So anyway, to make a long story short, that one week I said, I don't think college is going to work for me. I heard about Baez's school out in Carmel Valley, Institute for the Study of Nonviolence. So when I went back after that week, it changed my life. I said I think I'm going to be a doctor of social ills instead of being a doctor. I have a very weak stomach anyway. [Laughter] So Mt. Pleasant High School was certainly, in terms of my sense of worthiness and my sense of – what word am I looking for? – validation. That was very important; Mt. Pleasant. The sad thing was, without [8:29] parents, when you had graduating day you'd have a lot of people in the audience. There was no one. I'm a little teary-eyed here.

BB: Aw.

MC: I know. So I walked home. And then I think what it did it was it made you realize that you are like your person. You've got to figure out how you survive. If anything needs – these foster kids, it's all about survival. Mental survival, physical survival, how you understand that it really is up to you to create things and make things happen, but there's also times when things aren't that great. But I felt alright. This is cool. I could live with this but it's – I think that whole foster care system, that whole orphanage system, all that, if I wasn't in this, I would be so much into that because it has such a powerful role for people later on. And what I'm realizing, Bridgette, there's a lot of – did you see how many people talked about being adopted in that meeting?

BB: Yes, with NC Women United, the retreat [Mandy and Bridgette co-facilitated] last week.

MC: I was stunned!

BB: Yes, or had ancestors who were –

MC: Yeah.

BB: and how it really shaped the very way they were named.

MC: No one ever talks about it. I thought that was – I'm glad it came up. Did you mention – no. Who started it out? How did –

BB: My grandfather was adopted.

MC: Yes. Yeah.

BB: My great-grandfather was adopted.

[9:48] MC: Yeah. I mean – no one ever – but I think it does have parts to do with who we are. You saw that – when it went around, I was "whoa". Anyway.

BB: It's got to be even more poignant or powerful for you since you've decided to search for your family origin.

MC: It was. It was like "wow". But I think what has struck me was just how many people – I don't think they don't talk about it out of embarrassment, I think it just never comes up in the context of our work. We never talk about our personal lives. That's why I thought that name thing – I still can't tell you how I loved that name game.

BB: So say a little about what that is just for the record.

MC: Well, the name game is when you ask people to write out their full name – first, middle name, whatever. Then each person writes on a piece of paper, you show it to everyone and then you talk about your background of your name. And with that you really get more of a background of each person. It's not only the family history, but in a way about them. I think it's just a powerful tool. I just love it.

BB: Yeah. So people make decisions about – I decided I'm changing my name because my father's not a part of my life and I want to honor my mother –

MC: Yes.

BB: so the politics involved –

MC: Oh, man.

BB: and the sense of identity and sexual identity –

MC: Absolutely.

BB: and gender identity and *everything*.

[10:57] MC: Well, you know what's so great about it? I'm not so sure – I mean what's neat about the name thing is you just said to someone, tell us about your – what a creative way of getting to where you can know more about an individual, but also the choices they've made. I think that's – I've never seen such a tool that's so powerful. Also people are talking about themselves, there's a comfort level. And rather than have my name in Mandy, I live in Durham, that doesn't tell me anything. But it is just so rich. Oh!

BB: I first learned that from Gita Gulati-Partee [President and founder of OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc].

MC: Yeah, how did she hear about it?

BB: I'm not – I can't remember. I think she said how, but I can't remember her source.

MC: I'll have to ask her at some point.

BB: Yeah.

MC: I love it, but any way.

BB: So, I guess, two things I don't want to lose is one, do you still consider yourself a pacifist?

MC: Oh, absolutely.

BB: You do.

MC: Yeah. In fact, I would tend to tell you – in fact I was at a – I was somewhere the other day and we were talking – oh, I know what it was. I went to this – you know UNC Chapel Hill has this Southern Oral History Project and I went over there and spent a couple of hours. One of the questions that came up was "does it seem like some people now who do non-" – they don't even call it non-violence, they do civil disobedience. They commit an act of civil disobedience, they are back home that night because they can afford to bail out, and it's almost become more of a throwaway and we do it verses the old days when people did jail. It was a very serious consequence. And it happened before us. Gandhi did it both in South Africa and India. When you talk about the sense of conviction of that, you realize you are willing to put your life, literally, in this country, the worse that can happen is you can go into jail. So when people talked about that in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, you knew it was a very serious thing along with physical harm. But when the anti-war movement picked it up, there was an understanding that this is a movement that I thought was in a way very middle-class, but they wanted to follow the tradition of sacrifice, discipline. And when we did our act of non-violence

disobedience at these induction centers, because they still had the draft, we went in knowing that it was going to be jail. And if it was jail, we'd do jail, no bail on that principle.

I always enjoyed the concept of non-violence for also another reason. Gandhi was this little guy, walked around in this – I won't use the word diaper, but kind of like the Indian thing – very humble. And I'm thinking, look what this guy's done. It wasn't about Gandhi, it was about how he empowered other individual people to collectively come together and say we can make change without any act of violence. And here are some examples of what his words were and he calls it experiments in truth. But it was just so profound that I remember thinking, Bridgette, when I was in the 60s I moved – when I hitch hiked out to California, got a job with the War Resisters League in San Francisco, I remember a lot of my friends were Marx [Karl Marx] this and Mao that and oh, well. You'd have a conversation and you'd say things like what about this issue. Well Mao [13:57] would say or Marx said, and I said well, what do you say? Who cares about some red book or something? I rather enjoyed the concept of the thrill of I don't know, let's go find out and see. I thought that was very attractive.

I think the other final thing was – remember the Black Panthers? The Black Panthers came right out of California and they did believe in picking up the gun and they did call people pigs and they did talk about "off this, that, and the other" and look what happened to them. How many Black Panther members were murdered? When you set yourself up thinking gun verses – I don't know how many guns you think you can pick up in Oakland or California, but that's no match to a system that just says we will make sure we can literally take care of you and literally dispose of you, because you can't match up to that. I remember that rhetoric and I'm thinking they would do many incredible programs in Oakland. They were doing breakfast programs with the kids, they were talking about rent control, they were doing these amazing social change/economic justice issues, and so what was the deal with the gun? What was that fascination with this thing? I'm thinking there's no way. These are black friends of mine, and history I think has shown that was not going to work. It didn't work and yet you had non-violence as an example. And people got killed doing non-violent acts, too, but look at the huge difference. So to this day, I still consider myself a pacifist. Whenever I do my work I always think of a non-violent action non-violent philosophy. It's just too many examples of where it's just so powerful and works to this day. So yeah, I still claim it proudly.

BB: So the other thing I didn't want to loose before we go on is: do you want to talk a little bit about your choice to look for your family of origin and how that's going?

[15:41] MC: Yeah, I do. Actually, that was a long time coming. I moved – I got my job, just a background piece. My father, Leroy Carter, was born in Youngstown, Ohio. My mother, Emma Privett, was born in Edenton, NC, but I didn't know this until I moved to North Carolina in 1982, to get a job with the southeast office of The War Resisters League in Durham. And in order to get a driver's license and some other stuff I needed to in relocating here, I had to get some background information of me for some whatever. I remember writing to the Albany Children's Home – I'm sorry. I remember writing to Schenectady Children's Home and the person who worked there, and I said I need this information. Can you send me my birth certificate or anything? And they said yeah, and they sent me this paper and on this paper it said where I was born. And for the first time ever, I saw where my mother and my father and my sister and brother were born. It was unbelievable. I couldn't believe it and I'm moving to North Carolina. So when I found out my mother was born in Edenton that was in 1982. It's not until last year I decided to go look. I think it was just a real emotional – why did I wait so long? There's ways to find these people. If I can organize a demonstration can I not organize to find my sister? Anyway, but there had to have been reasons and I'm thinking they were very emotional ones. But now I'm at the point in my life at 58, I'm thinking Mandy, you better get on with it because your mother and father – I don't know if they're alive. I can't imagine. But my sister and brother? One's 59; one's 60. I said you better get on with it. So I made a decision that's what I'm going to do all this summer is just go look for them. And if they are not alive, either – any of them, I want to find out more about them. Her side of the family. Who are these Privetts? There are black Privetts in Edenton and there are white Privetts in Edenton. What's up with that? And how did they meet? How did [17:41] my mom and dad meet? What about his side of the family? I know I have other – I don't know who – whatever. So it's going to be an amazing journey for me. I'm excited. I'm scared. But I'm thinking now is the time to get it done.

BB: Do you have any hopes for connecting with your brother and sister particularly?

MC: More exciting about – actually, I'm more excited about tracking down my brother and sister. My father was a good guy. I mean he, he just, life just dealt him a bad hand. It would be interesting, I mean nothing he could do in terms of the law because of the way the

social service system was, but I want to know about my mother. What was up with that? One of the things that happened, while we're getting ready to leave the Albany Children's Home to go live with this De Messenies in Chatham Center, she did come and visit us and she walked in with a baby in her arms. And I remember my sister and brother and I looking at each other like, "We've been sitting here for eight years, nine years, ten years, and you walk in with a kid like – why, I mean she would have been better off not to have come in at all. That was one of the most disturbing things. We're thinking and you're leaving and we're staying? It's like total confusion. So at some point it would have been nice to have heard – I don't know what her circumstance was, who knows? That was one of those what the hell?

BB: So you at least have at least one stepsister also?

MC: Somewhere.

BB: Half-sister.

MC: Right. And who's the father? I mean this extended family could be who knows. I'm excited when I thinking what the hell. Anyway.

[19:14] BB: Did your mother and father do paid work? What kind of work?

MC: She was a Practical Nurse, which really meant that – you know you still have it today. Women could get these – what do you call it? You're not a Registered RN, you're not a – I guess I don't know what you call them. You go and get a certificate or something. He was in the military, so we know that he had that.

BB: So after the military – so I guess he wasn't earning enough to support you three, but at that time was he still being paid through the military?

MC: See, that's what I'm wondering as well, because I thought once you joined the military you are supposed to be in like a – I guess you call it reserves for a certain amount of time when you are out of active duty. I don't even know. I'm assuming he was in there in terms of the Korean War, in terms of how old he would have been. But I don't know. It would be interesting to get his – but I don't have any Social Security numbers to get any of that. So I need to find some practical way of getting brother, sister, mother, father to get that, because then you can go on and do that stuff.

BB: Well, good luck with that Mandy.

MC: Yeah. I'm excited.

BB: I hope it's – yeah.

MC: I'm excited. I mean even if it ends up being some stuff – I can't imagine – I don't know – there's nothing worse that can happen. If anything, it really gives you a sense of just something about like why/what, but also health. I have no clue about my family health, so if the doctor says to me "have you had any history of this, that, and the other" and I said "have not a clue". So I'd like to know that.

BB: So you graduated from Mt. Pleasant High School –

[20:44] MC: Yes.

BB: in 1966.

MC: 1966.

BB: Then – and so in your junior year you went to the camp.

MC: Yes.

BB: And so you go ahead and finish high school in 1966, and you did go to Parkson Valley Community College-

MC: Right.

BB: but just for a year.

MC: I tried it.

BB: And that was in Troy, NC, right?

MC: Right, Troy, New York.

BB: Oh. Troy, New York.

MC: Yeah.

BB: Okay, I got us confused. That's right.

MC: When Mr. Charton, he's dead now, but that's C-H-A-R-T-O-N, Mr. Charles Charton, he was the director of the Home when I was there. Remember I said he had said to me "if you go to school I'll underwrite all of that" – in fact, they paid for everything when I was in Troy. I was living at the Y. They paid for Hudson Valley Community College. So I said I'll try it. I'll give it a try. But there was too much rolling around about the War, non-violence, Baez, the Institute, and I'm thinking – and I really didn't like going back to school again because to me I was living at the Y, but you know what? The Y was no different then what I'd just come out of at the Children's Home. I'm [21:51] thinking all right, I'm in college, but what the hell. But I also knew that there was this drive like I really wanted to go and do something. So I went for a year, didn't really work, and I remember going to Mr. Charton. I said, "Mr. Charton, you need

to know that I'm so thankful that you'd be willing to pay for my college education, but I have such a desire to really move on and get out to California and do something". So he said, "Sorry, Mandy, but of course that means we can no longer take care of you". I said I understand that. My friend Bob [Salano] – Bob was in the same Home with me. Bob is the guy who lives next door. Yeah, he was in a home with me. That's how we met. Yeah, so it's a very rich story. The only reason why he's here is that he stayed, he was in the home with me, we both graduated in 1966.

BB: What's his name?

MC: Bob Salano, S-A-L-A-N-O.

BB: Wow.

MC: We're in the Home and we both knew we were gay in the Home. That's the – I came out in the Home, but coming out then is not like it is coming out now. There's no context. There was no – I knew there was something different, didn't know what to call it. There was not a movement that I felt a part of, but he and I became close friends because we're – this is a really short story – but we're on an outing – the Home always takes you on these outings, you know, you go to the fair, you go to a park, or whatever, and Bob is one year older than me by a couple of months, and we're all out. He was in the senior dorm for boys. I was in the senior dorm for girls. I almost drowned and he saved me. I don't know what the hell happened. You're out in the water and all of a sudden I went down under and I was going "help". He didn't realize it, but that was – I [23:30] just remember Bob so much from that, and we just became very close friends and we'd been friends since we were in the Home and I met him at 12, and now it's like how many years later? So he was gay, I was gay, and so even though he went on and got a great job at General Electric after he left the Home, I ended up hitch hiking down to New York and spend the summer in New York City, and that's when I ran into Tim Leary's place. He had that place in the west village called League for Spiritual Discovery – LSD. Blah de blah.

BB: [Laughter].

MC: I ran out of money and I said, "Bob I have to money", and he said "I'll send you down some money". He would come down and visit me and all that. So that was one of the best summers of my life. The summer of – what was it? It had to have been 1967, in New York City. And man, when the summer was over everyone said well what's to do? It's going to be cold.

We said – some friends said why don't we hitch hike to San Francisco and go there. So I said sure! So the three of us stuck our thumb out and went out and hitch hiked from New York.

BB: The three of you: you, Bob, and –

MC: No, it actually was not Bob. There were two other people that I had met at Tim Leary's place. A woman named Natalia, N-A-T-A – it wasn't like Natalie, it was Natalia. I don't know how you spell that.

BB: L-I-A maybe?

MC: Something like that. And the Japanese, both straight people, and a Japanese guy, a good friend of mine names Toshi, T-O-S-H-I, a guy. So there's a white woman, a black woman, and a Chinese guy, maybe Japanese, and the three of us hitch hiking out. [25:02] And I'll tell you Bridgette, living in New York City in the summer of [19]67, was amazing. It was all about the hippy and all that. We were going to hitch hike to California, San Francisco, go right to Haight Ashbury, but I'll tell you what. New York is one of the most diverse cities you could ever live in. We were hitch hiked out at the Holland Tunnel, got into New Jersey. The first place we went to get something to eat, we walked into this truck stop or something. The three of us walk in and the guy looks at me, looks at Toshi, looks at Natalia and says we'll serve you, but we ain't serving these two. And this is like '67. I was stunned. I couldn't believe it. This story to this day – I'm thinking what? New Jersey? Going – you know? But the reality check was that – now remember he said I don't serve you meaning me being black and Toshi being Japanese. At some point in our hitch hiking, it was great, not a problem. We get into Chicago, and we walk into a predominately black area, we're going into a black establishment, the guy behind the counter looks at me, looks at Toshi, looks at Natalia, and says to Natalia, we don't serve your type in here, because she was white. Talk about an eye opening experience. I thought oh, my god. Prejudice and racism exist in both. I thought what a value lesson. So we ain't serving her in here, and I thought didn't I just hear that? That was amazing.

BB: How did you meet Tim Leary?

MC: Remember when I said – well, when I first moved to New York I had eighty dollars in my pocket from money I had saved. You know, that was a lot of money back then. I moved to New York thinking maybe I could get a job at a grocery store being a teller – you know what I mean.

BB: Check out, a cashier?

[26:57] MC: Yeah. When I went there I stayed at the Y, yet another Y, and I thought I could get a job, just go out and look around because there were a number of places that had job openings. I had gone thinking if I can make enough money to be in New York, then I can figure out what my next steps would – that was going to be my plan. Well, I went to a store that had "help wanted," walked in and said I'd like to apply for a job. They said the only thing we have is being a checkout person and you have any previous experience? I said, "No, but I'm willing to learn." So the guy who talked to me said let me go talk to the manager and see if there is something we can go work out if you're willing to learn. Came back out and said sorry we don't have anything for you. And then my money started running out. I didn't know what I was going to do. So my money ran out and I started sleeping in Central Park literally. But that wasn't unusual. A lot of people were doing that, a lot of young people. I thought I'll go sleep in Central Park. At that point I didn't really know any one. Bob was the only one I knew and I said Bob, I'm running out of money and I don't know what to do and didn't want to burden him, but he did come through with a few bucks. I said let me sleep in the Park. I have a place to sleep at night, but then you realize there was just a fear about being out there vulnerable. So I would walk around all night and sleep during the day. I didn't feel weird about it, but at one point something happened in the Park. I remember hearing some screams or something so I said maybe I'll go start sleeping in Washington Square Park which was even neater because everyone was like the village back, right.

BB: The village what?

MC: The village, you know when you think of Greenwich Village.

BB: Yes.

[28:34] MC: That was more of the okay place to be. So I started sleeping around the Park benches in Greenwich Village at night. It was safer and people were doing it. And guess what? Newspaper is a great insulator. It makes a difference when you have it. But it was still weird. I finally said what am I going to do? I don't know. I happened to be one day walking, because the Village is – Greenwich Village is – have you ever been to New York?

BB: Yes.

MC: Have you been downtown to Greenwich Village?

BB: No.

MC: Well, it's like right there. NYU is there, all the art things there. In New York, there's this thing called West Side of New York, which is the Hudson and East Side which is the other side. And for whatever reason, I happened to be walking around the west side of the village, and there was this sign. It had to have been a sign that said something like "come on in" or something like a free meal or something and I remember walking in and going well, "I'm Mandy and I'm here in New York", whatever. It was almost like a combination drop-in center, but the whole need for Spiritual Discovery, why it was there is that a lot of people were taking acid. A lot of people were having bad trips. So they were a twenty-four hour – if you had a bad trip or had any kind of problems, you could call. And that's what they did. I remember saying well, I just need a place to sit down for a minute and I noticed you had something about a free lunch or whatever; not realizing it was Tim Leary's at first. It said League for Spiritual Discovery. So the first night I'm there I said – they said where are you going to stay and I said I don't know. And I couldn't wonder why all these guys were coming in because they [30:10] were offering people to have – to put them up at night. Well, of course it was all of these guys who were hitting on the women who were coming in to New York. It was disgusting. It was despicable. I said – the first night I said I'd go with so-and-so because I didn't know where to say, and of course the minute I get to this guy's house the first thing he does – I'm thinking what the hell. I go back the next day. They were named Diane and Joey. They were the ones who were the coordinators, Diane and Joey. I said you want believe what happened with me. He said Mandy, that's just terrible. What if we give you a place to stay if you're willing to be over night, just stay here – there's like a little back room, if you're willing to be on the phone if anyone calls a certain hour each night? I said I would love it because at least I would be safe. And through that one act of charity – I said, "Yeah, I'll do that." I got to do that all summer.

BB: So what were the phone calls like?

MC: Literally, if you were on – I finally took acid to find out what it was like. I did not like it. I started hallucinating and if you take Niacin, it would bring you right down. A lot of people didn't know how to come out of a bad trip so they would call – like a friend would call. They said you've got to give them vitamin B and niacin and it will bring them right down. It was that kind of call, just any one who was freaking out, basically. That was the whole purpose of the League for Spiritual Discovery. So that's what I did.

BB: Is it true that LSD was considered a bit of a sacrament, like they really – they were rituals around it?

MC: Well, I think what happened was in the beginning – and this whole thing with – it was Richard Alpert and Tim Leary who really came up with the LSD. They almost mainstreamed it though. People were doing peyote, they were doing – what else [31:46] – what other thing – it was a lot of Indian – it was that whole kind of Indian – Native American. So people were doing peyote, mescaline, but more – that would seem to be more of a sacrilegious- that was more of a ritual. But the minute LSD became the thing to do, I mean everyone was doing it. I remember saying well, if I'm going to sit here and answer the phone, why don't I try it? I tried it and it was awful. And if you are a control person like me, no way, because you have no control. I said I don't like this, you better bring me right down, but I had experienced it. But everyone was doing it. And then there was bad stuff. People were just flipping out, tripping out, and so for that service to be provided. And then I realized that Tim Leary, he had a huge beautiful home up in upstate New York. This was his place down in the Village.

BB: At that time he did?

MC: Yes, I got to go. And I thought, oh, this is the other Tim Leary, very wealthy. He thought he was doing society – remember tune in, drop out? What was it, tune in…?

BB: Tune in, turn on, drop out, or something?

MC: Yeah.

BB: Something like that?

MC: That whole philosophy.

BB: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, whatever.

BB: [laughter]

MC: That was a great summer. It was good and I met so many wonderful people. People would come in and then I saw the other wonderful side of – but I just realized [32:56] during that hippy days, men were just, in my opinion, I don't want to use the word pig, but they were – that's all it was.

BB: Lot of womanizing, huh?

MC: Totally. It was all about you know, and I'm thinking this is just about as sick as sick can get. And it was happening everywhere.

BB: Yeah.

MC: Because when we hitch hiked out to California, we ended up going through LA, and sure enough we had to – you know you ask it's like a switchboard. I need a place to stay. All men. I'm thinking how many young women went through all that crap and some of them probably didn't mind, some did. You know a lot of innocent people you thought it was great, but I'm thinking now, it was just disgusting. Anyway, blah de blah. It was a great summer. Then I said I'm out of here and hitch hiked out to California, then went to Joan Baez's Institute for the Study of Nonviolence.

BB: Okay, now I've got it. Okay. Was there anything political – overtly political about the League for Spiritual Discovery?

MC: You know, I would say political, little 'p', in terms of a cultural change. That's why I love SONG [Southerners on New Ground] when it talks about race, class, and culture. That – I think that's – I think that whole 60s kind of hippy, in New York you were called Love Children, you weren't called hippy, but that whole cultural thing because Civil Rights Movement's happening, but that's a very black/white, down south. Vietnam is certainly in terms of its – remember also what else was happening was the whole feminist thing was going on. Feminist, NOW [National Organization for Women] being so homophobic, that whole Lavendar menace. You had this interesting culture thing about women, anti-war, people [34:37] of color. Literally, if you lived in the south, you had a whole different perspective of what was going on, but living in upstate New York and moving to California, and – so I think it was a cultural thing that happened more than political. I don't know how many people you'll talk to, you know all of us are now of the 60s are getting older now, but it would be intriguing to ask people how many people did experiment with that? How many people – like what were you doing? But our campuses were – our college campuses were organizing amazing stuff and UC Berkeley with the whole free speech. It was an *amazing* time. Just culturally – I think it's so exciting. But he had a role to play in that; Tim Leary did, in that sentiment.

But clearly going to California and going into the War Resistance League, that was such a very – that was like our piece of how we take the anti-war movement done. You also had the Black Panthers going on. You had a very white middle class, throw the system out. What was that? I don't know, but yeah.

BB: A white middle class "throw the system out"?

MC: Well, they had a draft in those days. And the draft was very classes, because if you had money or resources you didn't have to go, so who was going there to fight? A lot of the kids from Schenectady Children's Home, they didn't wait, they just went down and enlisted to wait to get drafted. So it really was a have and have-nots about who got in. But at one point when a lot of the movements had this huge drop the draft week, it was going to be nation-wide. They were asking students on college campuses, there was this huge coordinated week of every one in the country was going to come and say. "Stop the war in Vietnam", and they were asking people to protest outside a draft instillations. In Oakland, California where we were, a lot of the kids were "do it, but [36:30] don't get caught". They were into property destruction. We were going "no", we want to go in and protest it, but we were going to commit active disobedience. So that's where the difference was. Do it, but don't get caught, or do it and be accountable.

BB: So did the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence play a big role in that?

MC: Yeah. They were one of the couple of groups that were coordinating the non-violence civil disobedience action and not at Oakland Induction Center.

BB: So did you feel like that was kind of a turning point in your life in terms of becoming a full-fledged activist?

MC: Yes.

BB: Is that when you first identified?

MC: First identified, but also saw it an action. One thing I forgot to mention, also in 1968, King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] had been killed.

BB: Yep.

MC: And one of the last things he had been working on was this thing called the Poor People's Campaign. And there was a pledge that even though King had been murdered, also Bobby Kennedy [Robert] was killed during this, they would still go ahead with the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C. And because I was living in San Francisco, and staying with a family in Palo Alto, CA, they were going and I went with them on a bus; took a bus from San Francisco all the way to D.C. And that was the first time words were put into action, because that was totally a non-violent action that they did. It was an awful mess. Literally, it rained every day. Now they were finding out that they did seed the clouds.

BB: They what?

[38:01] MC: Seeded the clouds. Literally seeded the clouds so it would rain because you are on the Mall and it was like I'd never seen so much rain in my life. It was – I mean everyone didn't want this thing to happen. King had been murdered, there was this whole new decision by the civil rights movement of the south to try to coordinate and plan with urban black communities. And when the government began to see this kind of "Wait a minute, we thought these were just from folks down South; there are going to start hooking up with Chicago and New York and they said I don't know. This is not – we're getting very nervous. King himself, Bridgette, had gone through his own personal transformation, because when it was just about civil rights in the South, everyone said that's good. But he began to say wait a minute. You've got black kids, young men who can't even sit at the lunch counter and they're going off to be murdered and kill people in Vietnam. So there was this automatic boom. And boy, people got nervous. They said you cannot connect Civil Rights and Vietnam. And he gave that famous speech that he gave at the Riverside Church about – what was it – something about Vietnam. And then he also said wait a minute, it's not just about civil rights in the South. Why don't we start to talk about the plight of black folk in the country, which meant urban blacks connecting with southern blacks—and they thought economic justice. Boom. So there was a real concern on the part of the government at that point about this Poor People's Campaign, but it happened.

BB: So this was – what month was this and what was the name of the march?

MC: It was called the Poor People's Campaign. It was in 1968.

BB: And was the name of the march?

MC: No, it wasn't a march.

[39:40] BB: Oh.

MC: I'm sorry. The Poor People's Campaign wasn't a march. It was meant to be an encampment –

BB: Oh, right.

MC: on the Mall.

BB: That's right.

MC: What were you thinking of?

BB: Yeah, that's – I was thinking instead of an encampment, I was thinking of a big –

MC: Like in '63?

BB: Yeah. The March on Washington.

MC: Yeah. Right.

BB: I got confused.

MC: Right.

BB: So it was meant to be an encampment –

MC: Right.

BB: and thousands and thousands of people –

MC: Oh, yeah.

BB: from all over –

MC: Yeah.

BB: came, so this was 1968?

MC: 1968.

BB: May, or what was it?

[40:08] MC: Actually I have the book in here, so before we go, it actually has the final year –

BB: Okay.

MC: and the month.

BB: I guess I'm just curious – I'm trying to connect it. It was definitely right – soon after the deaths of – or the assassination of –

MC: Oh, yeah. Well, King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] had been killed in April of 1968. Bobby Kennedy [Robert] didn't get killed until the actual encampment was happening. The encampment happened and then we hear – the news was all over Bobby Kennedy murdered– and what was weird was somebody said KKK: King – no, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy. Now, it's just an urban legend, but KKK, and we talked about that. It was during that when he got killed. What was the convention? What was he at some kind of thing in L.A.?

BB: He was at – oh, oh. You mean –

MC: He was at some –

BB: Kennedy.

MC: Yeah, Bobby Kennedy. But it was '68.

BB: Yes. Okay, tell me more about seeding the clouds. How do you-

MC: Well, one of – now D.C. – it's interesting. When you go back now, sometimes I think people who are conspiracy theorists sometimes you think they are out to lunch [laughter] but I think – when you find out later on for instance, one of the things we found out that J. Edgar Hoover was obsessed about King. He did everything he could to undermine this man to the point where he was bugging his bedroom, you know trying [41:25] to do this whole thing about King was a womanizer and all that other stuff, but if you think about what lengths people would go to in terms of the Civil Rights Movement, before then it was the Communists. If you think about the hysteria that the government and the tools that they had—one of the things we were thinking about how could we disrupt the Poor People's Campaign because they are sitting on the Mall in 1968, Kennedy had been whatever. So they found out later, a lot of people who were documenting all the undermining of what was happening at the Poor People's Campaign, it turned out that some people were being paid. Black folk were being paid to come in and be disruptive to try to undermine and destroy the unity within the thing. But also the weather. Someone said it never rains like this at this time of the year. Well, it turns out that by seeding – farmers do it all the time – by seeding the clouds in D.C., it would be enough rain and to be sitting in rain and mud, which we did, was just psychologically horrible. And so a lot of people didn't stay. The people, quite frankly, who were the big timers, they didn't stay. They didn't live on the place. Jessie Jackson wasn't living in Resurrection. They would go to these nice warm hotels –

BB: Resurrection City, right?

MC: Yeah, Resurrection City. So that was my first glimpse, too, of the kind of – what word do you use? Say one thing, do another?

BB: The hypocrisy?

MC: Yeah.

BB: So, do you think that's about class? Do you think that's about just – what is it about?

[42:49] MC: You know, it makes you wonder then when the Civil Rights Movement was being documented, it got way over romanticized, in my opinion, But who didn't get covered were the – and also it was about men; black men. We are so male dominated. What I saw, a lot of people said we are sleeping out here in the cold, in the wet, in the rain, and how come you come looking so good every day? And they had built things for them, but they didn't live in

them. And that's when I really began to think well, I'm not the only one realizing the inconsistencies with what people say. So it made me kind of think twice, but also didn't undermine my belief in non-violence, but it made me think who walked the walk. Talked the walk or walked the walk. That was disappointing, but any way.

BB: Who were some women activist that were really –

MC: You know that's just it. I can't – other than Hollywood – other than people like Nancy Wilson, huge big star then. She was – she walked by and you thought the place was – I don't know who would be comparable. Didn't see Coretta Scott King. The women – then you realize just how male dominated that whole Civil Rights Movement was. The Freedom Singers, Bernice Johnson Reagon, certainly they were out there, but in terms of a woman activist, I couldn't name you one because they didn't exist. No, not on that level.

BB: Okay. So how long did you stay in Resurrection City?

MC: We were there for maybe almost two weeks and then actually got arrested. There was a huge another non-violence civil disobedience action –

BB: This was at the Hugh Building right?

[44:23] MC: Yes! Yeah, and spent one night in the Women's House of Detention in Washington, D.C. Which remember it was "jail, no bail". And I liked that. We got arrested and got out. Then I think – then you know there were all these fights between urban blacks and southern blacks and then it really started to deteriorate really badly, Bridgette. Things were just – it wasn't going good. In fact, Chuck Fager, of all people, I didn't even know him, wrote this book about the kind of things you didn't know about that was going on. I have it here. We ended up taking the bus back. Even the bus ride out was scary. We had to go through the south and picking up people and I think things just got so bad. The weather was horrible, people were getting sick, and ultimately the bus had to go back to San Francisco, but that was one of those wonderful life lessons for me. That was before I got really active in the gay and anti-war movement. This was like my one touch and it was "wow!" It was interesting. A lot of white folk went and a lot of black folk went, but the urban black/rural black clash, different styles, King's murder, but more importantly the influence he had on the anti-war movement, people were still worried about that. Some stuff I didn't know. And what else was happening behind the scenes? That was one of those interesting "what was that all about?" But for me it was a life

lesson and it was very exciting and also non-violence in practice, not just reading. And then we went on to the War Resister's League and anti-war stuff.

BB: So were you all processing all this?

MC: Not really. We didn't even talk about it. People didn't – there was no – I don't remember anyone really having any – now I think the Internet. Look at the difference now. How would you communicate it and who would have access to it? [46:10] So, I don't remember a lot of conversation about it at all, but I remember experiencing it and thinking wow, this is interesting for me.

BB: And your first active civil disobedience? Do you remember it in detail?

MC: Absolutely.

BB: Was it powerful for you?

MC: It was scary. This is the time when – remember I said to you that in this society back then, the worse that could happen to you was to go to jail, and not just because you are in jail, but your career. You know? I remember going to the Institute for the Study of Non-Violence. Joan was great, but Ira Sandperl is really the person behind – Ira Sandperl. That's spelled S-A-N-D-P-E-R-L. He was really a good teacher. Joan was great, because she had such attention, but she believed in it. So we were doing this institute, and then it came up with this major stop the draft week, and how are we really going to do some collective organizing and the Institute was working with WRL and said why don't we do an organized, structured, non-violence civil disobedience a draft and/or induction stations around the country? And because we are in California, Oakland was the main – everyone went through Oakland. Have you ever been to San Francisco?

BB: No.

MC: Have you ever been to Oakland?

BB: Yes.

MC: Okay. And said why don't we create civil disobedience sanctions, and said yes, let's do that and we'll pick a date. But remember I told you about "do it but don't get caught" folks? Well, they are the first ones who went out into the streets of Oakland and were burning cars and tires and –

[47:38] BB: Did they identify as anarchists or - ?

MC: You know, no. They were just doing it. The police were so worried about – they said are you with this group of people. We said no, we are not. But they were the first ones out of that. It was happening around the country, so why that and do it but don't get caught? So we said no, we're going to be much more accountable. Name the date, the time, when, where. And I was there and walked around maybe an hour before I actually said I was going to do it. I was so scared. They had several hundred people getting arrested. So I finally said, "Mandy, just do it". And I remember – and these actions are really structured and organized; what time, where, streets. Well, where should I go? Well, here's an empty spot, Mandy. You sit here. We need someone to sit in this spot. I'm going okay. Not realizing the spot they wanted me to sit in is in front of the patty wagons that were bringing everyone. So then I found out I got an extra five days because I had resisted arrest because I was blocking the patty wagon from moving forward. Oh, is that why you wanted me to sit there? Yeah, because we didn't have anyone else who – had not a clue.

BB: How did you feel about that?

MC: Well, kind of like oh. But you know what? Jail – you know what jail was? It was like being at the Children's Home. Bridgette, the same thing. You got up at the same time, you ate at the same time. It was the exact – it was no different.

BB: So you're kind of digging the structure –

MC: Have no problem.

BB: and routine. And how many days were you there in all?

MC: Ten days.

[49:03] BB: Ten days. Was there lots of singing? Was it like a movement experience?

MC: No.

BB: Were you isolated?

MC: I'll tell you. To me – well, first of all, 99% of the people arrested were white women, and you have to give them kudos and mostly all white middle class. And the fact that they would purposely sit in, jail no bail, and put themselves in that spot was unbelievable. But you're going into a situation in which 99.9 of the people in that prison are what? Black. So there was an instant wow. What the jail did though psychologically, everyone was given a uniform to wear. It was a dress. I never wear dresses except when I'm arrested. [Laughter] In all the political prisoners that had been done ( ) we were given a different color – a denim color,

because they wanted to distinguish us from the regular, and we all noticed that. But one of the first things the black women said, well, why are you here? What are you getting arrested for? We said we just sat in. You did what? Well, you mean wait a minute. You're here because you wanted to get arrested? And that was such an interesting ( ) – well, we're here because I can't pay my rent or I bounced a check or there were some women who'd killed people in there. And so this instant kind of well, maybe we're all in this same boat. I don't think the people at the prison thought there'd ever be like a connection. They just thought white women. They won't get along. Just the opposite. It was like why are you here? And then we'd get into conversations with each other. And the routine was whatever. But I think the thing that really struck me was when some of the white women said – and the food was you're typical cafeteria food; white bread, number 10 cans of corn or [50:53] whatever. And someone said don't you have whole grain bread here? [Laughter] I laugh at it now, but you think about it. That was not a bad thing, but it was such a cultural – what do you mean whole grain bread?

BB: You are from another planet, lady.

MC: Right. And just like that. They said don't you have any fresh – but it was kind of neat because the women who were in the jail laughing at it, but then they kind of went well, why not. It was ten days, and at the end of the ten days it was an amazing transformation for everyone's lives, both sides. It was one of the best experiences. And Joan Baez, she was like the star.

BB: She was there the whole time.

MC: She was there the whole time. But I have to give her kudos because to have a major – who was like so major and to have her – her mom got arrested, she got arrested, her sister got arrested. That was major news. Bob Dylan never got arrested for nothing. So really it became such a stature, but she didn't get to do anything. She was like well, she can hang out with the lieutenant who was the person controlling everything. She'd come in and she'd sing at night. It was kind of neat to see her in that very like I'm just like everyone else, it was kind of neat. That was really amazing. And it was so transformative for the people who went in and the ones who were there. So, it was great.

BB: Interesting. Want to take a quick break?

MC: Yes.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

BB: Okay. So did – what was it that sort of the demographics of the Institute in terms of race and class?

[52:24] MC: Well, the Institute, when they did classes they were very small. I think there were only eight of us, and I was the only woman of color and everyone else was white. Not everyone was necessarily in terms of class because they never told you what their background was, so I know there were at least two southerners there and people came from all over the country. You had to apply. You just didn't get in. And by the way, the interesting thing about this particular class, we were the very last class of when the Institute was still in Carmel Valley before Joan Baez got married to David Harris and we moved to Palo Alco. So to be in the Institute for the Study of Non-Violence in Carmel Valley, California, at the very last session was extra, extra special. But yeah, it was more women than men actually, more women out of eight of us. There were like what, two or three guys and five women. And a lot of them turned out to be lesbians. Who knew? And Joan Baez, by the way, was bi-sexual, so I thought hum, kind of neat when you brought that whole faze of one's identity and all that. Looking back on it I thought yeah, Gail [Zermeno] is a lesbian, Sybil [Marcus] is a lesbian, I'm a lesbian when I thought –

BB: So were you out at that time?

MC: No.

BB: Oh.

MC: Not really. Conversations weren't going there. It was just interesting to note. It was more like we kind of knew it and talked about it, but not in any kind of substantial way. It was like everyone knew. And at that point, I think in 1960s, when I went there in 1968, it was like I don't remember Joan because Joan was seeing a woman named Kimi Chappell and she might have still been seeing her. It was so dramatic to [54:07] have a folk singer with her stature having a relationship with a woman was very kind of wow. So I don't know.

BB: And yet still kind of being explicit about the politics of sexual identity and sexual orientation wasn't –

MC: No, it wasn't even on the radar. It was really interesting. And to be living in San Francisco, I must say too, to be living in San Francisco, it was really there – remember how I said to you when I was in high school, I knew I was something. I didn't know how to articulate it, didn't know how to put my finger on it. And when I went to live in the summer in New York

City, I was old enough to go to a lesbian bar, but the bars are like you go in and women were very role playing. Women were either butched up or not. I remember thinking this doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel like – and it was some dark bar, some dark alley, some dark place on the end of the thing and it just felt like not good. But when I moved to San Francisco, there was a bar called Maud's in broad daylight like ten blocks down from Haight Ashbury. Here's this bar, broad daylight, people are like I am who I am, I like who I am, it was like the very beginning of that whole San Francisco kind of gay scene. And people didn't really use the word lesbian. I think everyone used the "g" word then. But I just thought what a difference it was; California, New York and just a switch. And also a lot of gay and lesbian, not as identified as such, but were very active in the anti-war movement, but not in a kind of way you would think of. It was more like we just knew who we were but it wasn't –

BB: It wasn't a queer constituency.

MC: Yeah, that's it. Yeah, it hadn't come into its own at that point, but certainly to be on the cutting edge of San Francisco with all that.

[55:48] BB: So did it feel like a bit of a double life or something? That your – that that identity – you couldn't really or did it not feel so separate –

MC: Well, I think the big difference was, and I now realize why it happened the way it did. When I moved to California, first of all, I had to wait until I was twenty-one to go into the bars. And I did wait. In the way the law is written in California, if you didn't own the bar, you are not allowed to have women behind the bar. The only people who could serve you were men. So if you looked at a town like San Francisco that was heavily gay and you had at that point – I mean there had to be about twelve lesbian bars, but unless you owned the bar you didn't have any women behind the bar, so you had all these gay men working in the women's bars – in the lesbian bars. Do you see what I mean? So it didn't have that same whatever, but I do remember that there were a number of gays and lesbians who were very active, high profile, but the bars was the only place you could congregate, Bridgette, so the bar life was sort of like that's night time when I'm doing stuff during the day. See what I mean?

BB: Yeah.

MC: In that kind of way. So it didn't have that – not the way we do it now.

BB: Okay. So what went on during the summer of '68 until the – the fall of '69 you were hired as staff –

MC: Right, right.

BB: with that western bridge office. Do you remember what was going on?

MC: I remember – remember the Poor People's Campaign, I actually had to work the –

BB: Oh right! That's right!

[57:16] MC: cause it was the Poor People's Campaign, the Institute for the Study of Non-Violence, and because I hooked up with people from the War Resisters League in jail, that's when I met the –

BB: That's right.

MC: woman who said to me "hey, have you ever heard of a group called the War Resisters League?" Never heard of it. What is it? She said yeah, you need to come check this out, and that's when I met her and that's how I got connected with the WRL.

BB: Okay, so then the – so early '69, but you were hired in fall of '69.

MC: Yes, fall of '69.

BB: So after you come back from the Poor People's Campaign, you're still at the Institute.

MC: No, actually when I was at the Poor People – remember I said I stayed with friends in Palo Alto, California?

BB: Yeah.

MC: When I was staying with friends in California, that's how I had met them, the Hobbson's – I don't know how, but I think we met because of – in San Francisco, when we first arrived, there's a place called the Haight Ashbury Switchboard. If you come to the city, they will hook you up with people you can stay with temporarily until you get settled. Well, unlike New York, there weren't all men hanging around the Haight Ashbury. I actually got placed, the three of us who had hitch hiked, got placed with a guy named Vince O'Connor, Vincent O'Connor, who was with the Catholic Peace Fellowship, who's a draft resister, who's a conscientious objector. And because that happened to be the home that the three of us ended up starting to staying with, that [58:32] opened up my door to Joan Baez and a bunch of other people, so that was that wonderful link.

BB: There's the link –

MC: There's the link.

BB: that was missing. Okay.

MC: That was it, the Haight Ashbury Switchboard.

BB: Wow.

MC: Right, amazing. Of all people and to be in that – that's why sometimes – I don't believe in predestination, but the likelihood. What's the likelihood? It's like of all places to be staying with. And Vince O'Connor was great. He was a draft resister, the Catholic Peace Fellowship, in the middle of all this stuff in San Francisco, and because of him got hooked in with Joan Baez, met her, got to go down to the Institute. And then after the Institute meetings, Jane Schulman from the War Resisters League who said you need to know about us and started doing some volunteer stuff there. When I started volunteering at WRL in San Francisco, cause I was now living in San Francisco with Vince O'Connor, guys were going to jail for being draft resisters and the only reason why I got the job because Randy Kehler, Randy R-A-N-D-Y Kehler K-E-H-L-E-R, Randy Kehler who was the director was going to jail for draft resistance. So when he left, who was going to run the office? And that's why so many women were so dominant in the anti-war movement because a lot of the guys were going to jail for draft resistance or going to Canada.

BB: Wow.

MC: So women all of a sudden were like –

[59:47] BB: It's like women filling the factories when the men –

MC: Right. Exactly.

BB: were shipped off to war. So what was your relationship to spirituality or religion then? Here you had these profound influences; a great Catholic, and that Quakers, and –

MC: Not on that level. And even – I think it really – one thing I appreciated about the Quakers, they had a spirituality, but it was really more based in not like some theology, or not some sort of ritual, it was more like part of your spiritual (little "s") was your belief in mankind or whatever. So I really wasn't that spiritual. I mean being a pacifist was more on that level, but the Catholic were – the Catholic you know, they were Catholic but they believed in the peace cause, so it was more that level, but it wasn't spiritual in the realm I'm thinking of spiritual at all.

BB: Institutionalized religion.

MC: Not at all.

BB: Did they – what about being at the Home? Did they – were you –

MC: Well, the way the Home worked, unless you were bona fide Catholic when you came in, everyone else went to that catch-all thing called being a Protestant, so you were expected to go to church on Saturday – on Sundays. So a lot of us – I hated it. What was the point? You are sitting in this boring - fall asleep, who cares. So a lot of us would hang out at the grave yard rather than going to church. We would just be congregating in the grave yard not far from where the home was because you would walk to where you were going to church. And then I thought, well, since then I've been to black churches and said if those churches had been like the black churches, I would have [61:17] loved it! But no, it was boring as h**l. And when I didn't have to go to church any more, I didn't. I didn't bother. Who could care?

BB: Uh, huh.

MC: I went to Friends meetings. Have you ever been to a Friends meeting? Yeah, you know what they're like. [Laughter] If you feel the urge to talk, you do it. If not, you just sit there. I got really involved with the Quakers, though, to the American Friends Service Committee had their main office in Philadelphia. So I did a lot of work with them because of that proximity. And then they had a major – they still do have a huge office in San Francisco, so when I moved there, I got very much involved with them, joined a number of their committees. They were very tight with WRL, War Resisters League, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, American Friends Service Committee, sort of like your usual suspects of your pacifist-based groups.

BB: And it strikes me that all of those groups are predominantly white.

MC: Yes.

BB: And they were then, so a huge chunk of your life you've been in predominantly –

MC: Exactly.

BB: white –

MC: World. And that's why I think I mentioned it at the – if I didn't say it here at this thing we just did, I always tell people you can not make assumptions about people's background based on what they look like, because my whole life – and the other thing about these Homes, they were very much middle-class value and I'm sure there are [62:35] other institutions that don't have that, but they have resources. So everything I've learned in terms of my value and how I look at life has always been middle class. So to come into my own about my own black is really happening in San Francisco and since that travel. But you know, what are you going to

do? That's your life story. What are you going to do, pretend it's not? Yeah, so when I have people come up to me and – I had someone go well, you're not black enough. You don't talk black, you don't act black. I said well ask me where I've been. You know? So.

BB: Interesting. Does that – is that hard for you to hear? Is it painful?

MC: It wasn't in the beginning, because I think – in the beginning for me – I mean this is intriguing to me, because I always thought the principle wasn't based on – it was more like what's in you, not what you look like or how you – and I do remember thinking if people don't ask about me and my background, I didn't often times volunteer my background. I do know more than ever. But I remember when I was in California, in San Francisco, you know you have – it's very colorful. You have a lot of racial mix in first the Black Panthers and all that other stuff and I'd be in meetings and people would assume about me being black, they would "you know what I'm talking about, right, Mandy?" Not a clue. So I think at one point I was doing something and I felt like how am I going to stand up here and I speak for the black community? Absolutely not, but then why would someone assume that I could speak for the black community. So I got really honest about no, that's not my experience. I'll be honest with you. So really it was not until I actually got into real activist organizing when I started being more honest with people. I got in fights with some of my black friends. You know, you're not black enough. Well, what does that mean and why are you saying that? I said no, that's not my [64:19] background, so I think I started being more honest the more organizing I got into it. I think maybe my late twenties, early thirties. Then I started being really honest about what's up, but I also felt more in touch with my own blackness as well, because if everyone looked at me and thought I was black, I got treated as black. Then it was like, wow. Let me get in touch with my blackness. So I feel more close to that, but still just being honest about how I was raised.

BB: Were there any supports for you as you went on that kind of journey to dig deeper into being in touch with your blackness; people or literature or movements or anything?

MC: Well, I think – and also I think the other part I think was really real, Bridgette, was that as being gay and being a black person, people just didn't even talk about that. So when the black gay and lesbian leadership formed – started, part of it was the reason I had to have a self-identified black gay movement, because what was the movement? It was all white. And so when you had people saying "but I want to be gay from my black perspective" then I went "oh". But then they had an organization for me to feel like I could be a part of. That's when things

changed dramatically. But think about it. No one talked about cultural stuff like that. It was just you're gay, but no gay Latino, no gay black, no gay country or whatever, so.

BB: Interesting.

MC: That changed. That's changed dramatically.

BB: Yeah. Well let's go back to the War Resisters League a little bit then. What was your work there? What did you do?

{65:46] MC: WRL – now, War Resisters League was founded in 1923, by three women, and I know the mission statement by heart: believe in war to be a crime against humanity, I therefore will not support any war, international or civil, and will strive non-violently to remove the causes of war. That has been the mission of WRL since 1923. And when you think about 1923, when you think about World War I then World War II, when you think about all subsequent wars to have a pledge that I so consistent and you are – what's the word? – staying with that pledge whatever, that's been a long haul. I mean, will it happen in my lifetime? I don't know, but anyway. And so the mission of WRL and one reason why it was based in San Francisco because of the proximity to Oakland, but also that huge military complex you have in the state of California, just like we have in North Carolina, is why they had it. So our main task when I first joined it and they started up was to be ending the war in Vietnam. So that was the huge purpose of it and we were like one of the main groups. So every day was spent – remember the draft was up? We had draft resistance calls, had people wanting to know about how else I can resist the war. I can not pay my war taxes, I can not pay my phone tax – so you had all these different direct actions of how I could implement personal actions to stop the war in Vietnam. Just like you had people engaged in their personal lives about how they could be instrumental in the Civil Rights Movement. So in a way, it was sort of like taking that whole issue of justice, anti-militarism, and how do we give it tools for people to be actively engaged in that. And that was that day-to-day work. It was like not just an eight hour day. I mean meetings at night, all these strategy sessions, draft resistage, women wanting to know how can I – what can I do, I'm not draftable. They ended up with this phenomenal campaign Bridgette, called A Call to Resist. And it was purposefully meant [67:52] for any woman or men who were too old, and said we are going to be the ones who will go out and we're going to tell you don't enlist, don't go, or if you get drafted don't go, and it turned out that that was a felony. If you aided and abetted anyone to resist the draft or not serve in the draft, you could be liable.

BB: Sounds like immigration now.

MC: Well, and I'll say one of the most effective movements, one of the most amazing strategies that came out of it, because everyone wanted to know. If not young men who were the only ones, what can I do? And that turned about to be a thing called A Call to Resist. A Call to Resist, which in now still going that gives grants. I think the Peace and Justice got one. Didn't the North Carolina Peace and Justice Coalition get a grant from the Resist? R-E-S-

BB: Yes! Resist.

MC: Yeah, that's the same group who started it.

BB: Resist is the same group?

MC: Yes, forty years later. They are having their fortieth anniversary this year.

BB: Huh!

MC: And that was one of those strokes of genius about how do you engage the average person to be part of an institution that calls for people to resist this thing called the military. And we were majorly engaged in that, so we were always constantly busy.

BB: Yeah, so you – let's see. Did you stay there from '69 to '74 –

MC: Yep.

BB: when you became the director of the Los Angeles War Resisters League.

[69:12] MC: Well, what happened was I was there from '69, I joined the staff in '69, stayed there until '73, but of course the war in Vietnam ended and a lot of people then said what's the point of the War Resisters League, and we said "hello", it's not just about the institution of militarism. But we then moved into things like the whole anti-nuclear – what do you call? – power movement way back then.

BB: Nuclear freeze?

MC: Yeah, you had – because you know they were going to build all these nuclear – so we're shifting from militarism as an injustice, and then you're going to economic justice, racial justice, and we just sort of shifted. But it was still under the principles of non-violence. But I was there until '73, and the reason why I left then was, remember I told you that the only place you could hang out was at bars in San Francisco? Well, alcohol became a problem. I know for me, it was a combination of being in San Francisco is not that big, I'm doing all this hard work, I'm hanging out at Maud's, and I'm thinking well maybe this – it's not – it didn't work well, and I thought maybe I needed to get a physical change of pace. I thought well, they have an office in

L.A., and they needed to have someone come down. I said I'll go to L.A. for a couple of years. I had to literally move. It was great to be in L.A. I'd stayed there for three years and did the director of that. L.A. was hard though, Bridgette. L.A. was too big, very territorial. You go to meetings and someone would say "who's running this meeting?" Well, it would be "I don't know, name a group". "Well, we're the only ones who are going to make this action happen." There was so much emphasis on not getting along. It was just so big. I just didn't – I didn't enjoy it. It was nice to be there, but I didn't really enjoy it. So I said after three years I want to go back to San Francisco and I said what about [70:54] women going in the military? I said what would happen if we asked women who weren't drafted, but they were volunteering? Could we challenge the idea about creating a counter-recruitment campaign of women? And Joan Baez had a foundation and I got a grant from her and did that for a full year.

BB: What was her foundation?

MC: It was – I don't know – it was – I guess when you have that kind of money it's like – you know when anyone has that kind of money you set up a foundation whatever it was. I think – actually I think she gave her money to a foundation that still exists, it's called the AGAPE Foundation; A-G-A-P-E. It still exists. I think she gave money to them to give to me through a – you know. So I did that for a year. That was very exciting, back in San Francisco. So I did that for a year.

BB: Did you feel like you had recovered from alcohol abuse or did you get the support you needed?

MC: I wouldn't – it was more like – well, first of all it was great being back in San Francisco because you know it so well, but also it's interesting to have something to compare it to. I did great organizing in the city, but there's a great quote: how can I miss you if you never go away? So I had to kind of leave it to realize how much I appreciated it. No, the bars were still there, but things were starting to change then. You know '74-'75, there was more sense of still doing activist organizing around non-violence, but trying to keep that part of what I was doing and the bar not being – because I'd had no family. The bars – Maud's was an amazing place. Maud's was, for all intense and purposes, it was home. Not just because it was a bar, but this a woman who ran that bar that understood about the importance of that bar in the politics of San Francisco.

[72:30] BB: Yeah.

MC: Yeah.

BB: And in 1967, it was the – it was the – they were saying then it was the oldest lesbian bar in San Francisco.

MC: It was. Yes, in the country!

BB: In the country?

MC: In the country. So when you had – and I have to give Rikki Striker kudos because she really got it about understanding about the role of Maud's early on. Very political. They changed the whole law about women could now serve behind the bar. They challenged the whole alcohol board in San Francisco, because there were so many gay people going to bars. They said you need to change the rules here.

When I got back I was glad to be back, got engaged in that. In '75 – then I'm trying to remember. Then it's like in '74 I was in California – L.A. for three years. I moved back in '77-'78.

BB: And that's when you were the founder/coordinator of the Women's ( )

MC: Counter Recruitment Campaign.

BB: Then in '79-'82 you were at the two bars, Amelia and Maud's.

MC: That's exactly – I got more engaged in it. [Laughter] But what was neat, I remember thinking – because you know that was also, Bridgette, when a lot was going on politically in the city of San Francisco in terms of the huge impact the queer community was having – we didn't use that term, but I remember coming back and saying wait a minute. Why can't I take the skills that I have as an organizer and because Rikki really wanted to have her bars in the middle of change, why can't I do that and just work at [73:52] Maud's and Amelia's – well, Maud's and then she opened up Amelia's. And that's what I ended up doing. It was great. So we organized the first ever gay games ever in the history of this world. The horror of Mayor [George] Monscone and Harvey Milk getting murdered – assassinated at City Hall. I mean this was just – it was the hay-day of all what you would call the San Francisco Gay Movement. And Maud's was right in the heart of it because of Rikki Striker. So being the bar manager, being a bar tender, I spent more time at meetings and organizing for the San – we had the first ever women's float in the Gay Freedom Parade. It was so cool! I loved doing that stuff so they were great days. They were organizing days, but I was organizing in San Francisco.

BB: And fun, too, right?

MC: It was. It was amazing. And – but I also realized too, alcohol was a problem and I think that when you have a society that tells you basically the only place you can have anything is in these bars and you don't give anyone else an option unless you start creating options, then you begin to think okay. But the toll was hard on a lot of women, including me. And that's why I moved from San Francisco to Durham because it was just beginning to be –

BB: So again –

MC: Again.

BB: So it's just your lifestyle! It's there –

MC: Yeah.

BB: it's your culture, it's the ritual. It's the – everything, right?

MC: Yeah.

BB: The core piece of all of it.

[75:11] MC: Yeah.

BB: So you moved to Durham.

MC: Yep. I said I'd have to physically –

BB: Yeah. Remove yourself –

MC: Literally, yeah. I don't – I mean I always wanted – I don't know – you know how people have – there're terms for people who have personalities, but I think some people are great. They can stay right where they are and they can do that change, not me. I get too attached, and it was just too hard. I thought, Mandy, if you don't get up, literally, and leave this place it's not going to be healthy for you. And of course I called WRL and said "do you have any offices anywhere east of the Mississippi?" And sure enough the only one was where? Durham, North Carolina.

BB: Why east of the Mississippi?

MC: Because I was used to being in that –

BB: Oh right, right.

MC: Albany. And also I missed the four seasons.

BB: Yeah!

MC: When you are used to having that, it was so hard to be in California, but the four seasons.

BB: Yeah.

MC: Who knew? Who knew? Here, Durham. I'd never heard of the place. North Carolina. You want to go where? Aren't they still lynching people down there? On and on and on. Whatever. Got the job and haven't looked back since. I'm still here. This is twenty-five years!

[76:11] BB: Wow!

MC: I moved here twenty-five years ago.

BB: Wow! A quarter of a century.

MC: That's so cool.

BB: That *is* cool.

MC: I love Durham.

BB: Yeah, Durham's great. Wow, Mandy! That's quite a story. And [pause] so let me ask about – I just want to – you were part of a documentary titled Last Call at Maud's right?

MC: Yep. Maud's was getting ready to close –

BB: About closing the bar.

MC: Yes.

BB: And then – wait. Just by the way, we you also a part of the Peter and Nancy Adair's documentary? I think I asked you –

MC: No.

BB: the one that's out.

MC: No, they asked me –

BB: Okay.

MC: but I didn't get in.

BB: Okay.

MC: Yes.

[76:46] BB: Okay. So I guess that's the – you know that's the one piece the Last Call at Maud's. I think it's pretty astonishing the list of media roles that you've participated in from television to radio to books to magazines –

MC: [Laughter]

BB: to movies. I just wanted you – you know as we go through this chime in –

MC: Right.

BB: with some interesting anecdotes or stories about your role in the media and becoming a public speaker in those ways. And I have to confess that I'm voyeuristically interested in this appearance on the Phil Donahue Show.

MC: Oh, yeah! [Laughter]

BB: What was that about?

MC: Well, you know what's interesting? One of the things that I thought was great, the other thing we learn at the Institute. It's just about how you as an organizer you have to play so many different roles, and that – and I'll have to admit because I was always a people person, I loved – I just loved people, so it was never a problem for me to start talking to a total stranger. But when we were at the War Resisters League, they have a training – they have like an organizer's training they do for nine days intensive. I never went through that, but one of the things they put out was this wonderful manual, Bridgette. It's called the War Resisters League Organizer's Manual. And one of the first things they say in there, if you think organizing is just about picking up the phone and organizing meetings, no. You are everything. You are the spokesperson. You are the – so all with so little money, you had to be creative. And so when you had to figure out how are we going to let the media know that we're going to do this demonstration day [78:18] around tax day? Well, we better find out who are the local media, started a data base, so all the practical things. And then they said well, who's going to be the spokesperson? Well, I think it's going to be someone who's in this office who knows what they're doing. So you end up learning that it's just one of many skills and some people are good at it and some are not. I loved doing it. It didn't bother me. But also, as you probably realize this happens, once your name is in a Rolodex file, they keep on calling you and calling you and calling you unless you expand it out, which I think we all need to do. I'm sick of the same one person all the time. But once you are in that, then that just leads to another one, to another one and another one. So it's really more out of practical –

BB: It's almost out of default. You become this –

MC: Yep, absolutely.

BB: spokesperson.

MC: Yeah.

BB: You're the talking head.

MC: Yeah. A lot of people were doing it. That's just how they did it. And the media – and also I think a lot of the organizers understood that there was always this sort of anti-media sentiment. Well, who are they and what do they want to know? Hello? How is anyone going to know what you're doing if they aren't covering it? And there was that moment where you had to realize what role they played or whatever. But I got it early because of WRL. I learned it from other people and it was just a skill that you brought every where you went. I also think quite honestly, in a predominately white peace movement, have someone African American who's doing similar work is almost [79:35] like a curiosity. Like hum, why are you here? What are you doing? And also being a woman. I'm thinking that's an anti-war draft, who's around? Men were no longer there, women were being much more the spokespeople unlike the Civil Rights Movement.

BB: So you were somewhat of a novelty.

MC: Yeah. And you just learn it and the more you do it, the more you do it. The Phil Donahue thing – that also came out of a lot of work. You know I went through all these different things. I was – that's the other consistent thing I'll say real quick. The thing about non-violence, and I think I had said this tons of times, this philosophy is always – this underlying principle of equality and justice for all. When that's your bottom line it don't matter what it is. So when I learned that, it meant you know, first it was Vietnam War. That cannon went, then it became that whole anti-nuclear power thing. Then it became getting out of this country, going into Central America and what was happening down there. Then it became the issue of hunger and biafra.

BB: Hunger and what?

MC: And biafra. There was a huge – name all the different social causes. So it doesn't matter what your different cause might be, you just have this principle of equality and justice for all so you're being flexible. I know other people are like the only thing I work on is the women's right to choose. If you come to talk to me about anything else, I'm not interested, I don't get it, I don't care. But when you have that single issue mentality, you get so isolated. That's all you know. But if you have this multi-issue, which is always been the sense of non-violence, what's the connector. Then you can be different things. So I got around a lot of different places.

[81:12] BB: I like that you – I'm glad you said that because it really explains why you often sign your emails "equality and justice for all" –

MC: Yes.

BB: and I wondered if there was a story behind why –

MC: That's why.

BB: it's so meaningful to you. Yeah. Yeah, I want to hear more about your thinking about kind of being multi-issue.

MC: Yes, multi-issue.

BB: So – I think like you said one benefit of being multi-issue is just that you can be relevant –

MC: Yes.

BB: to so many different struggles, right?

MC: Yes.

BB: Like you said.

MC: Absolutely.

BB: And also you've less of a chance of being alienated –

MC: Yes.

BB: or isolated. But the other thing is now it seems in today's current challenging oppression work or dismantling oppression work, people often talk a lot about the intersections of multiple oppressions and how they are all connected.

MC: Mmm, hum.

BB: And why it's so important for moving toward a more liberated and equal and just society for people to get it.

[82:09] MC: Yes.

BB: And does that feel like it's important to you?

MC: Absolutely.

BB: And how do you go about talking about those connections and why they're relevant?

MC: Well, you know I would certainly say that when we – when the six women who came together to become the founders of Southerners on New Ground and even before we had a name, it was interesting how we all knew each other from before we decided to collectively do

something. And what we all under – what we all figured out was that we all came into different doors of how we got into our social justice organizing. And even though we came through different doors, there was this interesting theme about – like Suzanne Pharr. Here's this white southern woman, didn't come from money in terms of her class background, was in the anti-Vietnam War movement, but also got really intrigued and totally engaged in this whole anti-domestic violence movement. That was her life. And yet, when I met Suzanne Pharr, what I knew about her was, here's an amazingly white southern woman, one of the best theoreticians you'll ever meet and has this incredible way of giving you that information in a very I hear and understand it way.

Then you have someone like a Mab Segrest. I don't know Mab from nothing when I moved here in Durham. I found out she's the white lesbian, went to Duke, but was a writer and started the first ever – there's a publication called *Feminary* and was instrumental with other white les – southern lesbians in putting out this publication called *Feminary* and was engaged in anti-clan organizing. And I'm thinking wait a minute, a [83:41] white lesbian in the south anti-clan organizing? And I'm thinking well, what's up – what's with that? So you have that coming together.

Then you have someone like a Pam McMichael. Have you ever met Pam? Alright. That's someone you need to meet. She'll be coming to Durham. She's the new co-director at Highlander after Suzanne. Then you meet someone like a Pam McMichael, white, another southerner from Kentucky, not wealthy, and as a white lesbian she's totally engaged in this whole economic justice stuff happening in Louisville –

BB: Louisville –

MC: Kentucky.

BB: Kentucky, right?

MC: Yes. So I guess what I'm thinking is then you have someone like me, who already came from this multi-issue, grounded in non-violence, grounded in the principles of equality and justice, and as a black woman, been there done that. Gotten that reaction as a woman, been there done that, so you begin – so then I'm sitting here and it was really thanks to Mab Segrest at a Creating Change Conference [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force] we had here, the first ever one in the south. And she's giving a talk, and we actually have a copy of it, and she's giving a talk at creating change about why we should be concerned about NAFTA [North American Free

Trade Agreement], you know the North American Free Trade right. And it's a white lesbian and then we all looked at each other –

And also the other thing that happened, Bridgette, was when we did this conference in the south, it wasn't meant to be in Durham, but that was the only place they could find, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. And we said yeah, we'd love to do it in Durham. Durham was very you know, back then 19 – what year was that? 1993. But we got phone calls from people around outside the south. Well, why are we having it in North Carolina? Isn't that where Jesse Helms is? Is there an airport there? Are the streets paved? I mean – these are our activists. And we realized there is such an anti-southern bias in this movement. We were stunned. So we said we're going to do. D**n it! We're going to do a workshop. And we knew who we knew; Pam, Suzanne. And we did this workshop and it went so well and Mab was so well received we said why don't we talk about connecting our issues? And that's when we came up with this idea. We said wait a minute. It's about race, south, class. And then we all said oh, my god. Bottom line, that's what it really is all about. Those connecting the –

BB: Southerners on New Ground.

MC: Yes.

BB: That's what you mean.

MC: Yep.

BB: Who were the other two women? You mentioned Suzanne, Mab, Pam, you.

MC: Pat Hussein, black lesbian from Atlanta, and Joan Garner, another black lesbian from Atlanta. And Pat was engaged – when we met Pat, she was very actively engaged in the gay and lesbian activism down in Atlanta. And Joan Garner comes from the whole non-profit sector. So three black lesbians, three white lesbians, and we did it on purpose, because we said why are we going to sit here and ask the question "Well, how do we get more people of color engaged in this?" when we already start out as a multi-racial effort. And coming from class backgrounds, coming from different geographically backgrounds. And we said yeah, maybe we'll model it because you begin [86:51] with what you are trying to strive for and see what happens. And so that was the birth of Southerners on New Ground [SONG].

BB: What year was that?

MC: '93.

BB: '93.

MC: So we strategized, we talked about it in ’93, but we formally started officially in ’94.

BB: As a 501-C-3?

MC: You know, actually when we first started, we were thinking what structure we would go through, and we went through Pam McMichael who, because she knew a group called Southerners – Southern Organizing Committee, SOT, and they let us use their ( ) until we got our own, and then we got our own.

BB: Okay, okay. So just to back up a little bit, when you first came to Durham, you started – you were working for the War Resisters League –

MC: Yeah, I got – that was how I got – I interviewed and got my job and got hired in 1969. I’m sorry, 1982.

BB: Okay.

MC: Right.

BB: And when did you work for the Ladyslipper Music? What year was that?

MC: You know, that was – I had worked – I started in ’82. By the time I got done in ’88, that’s six years. I had just about all I could do. [Laughter]

BB: Okay. So was it – were you burned out?

[87:57] MC: Well, I mean – what was happening – boy, I mean – the War Resisters League, before I even got here they were really active. And again you had Steve Summerford, white straight man who was the director.

BB: Here.

MC: Here in Durham. You had a woman named Dannia Sutherland. She was also working here. She was a white lesbian. And WRL interestingly enough, Bridgette, WRL has always, always had very active gay people working in the organization. And for some – and that was unusual during the Vietnam War Movement. Other than the American Friends Service Committee, they were the only two groups that said I have no problem with this. And so when I moved here I knew that we were going to be going into a situation. Durham, I didn’t realize, was huge on – Durham is huge in terms of lesbian presence. But I had worked for six years straight, and I was – the first two years I was with Dannia and then I was working the last, what, four years all by myself. And I just got tired.

BB: As the director?

MC: Yeah.

BB: Oh, okay.

MC: So after ’88 I said I need a job that has no responsibilities. I need a job where I don’t have to make any decisions, and I knew about Ladyslipper because they were next door to us at the 604 – they were at 602, we were at 604 building. You know that building that sits empty up here on Chapel Hill Street?

BB: Really?

[89:12] MC: That building used to be – everything used to be in that building. Everything; The Institute for the Study of Non-Violence, the War Resisters League, so many groups. That was like the central hub. The guy bought the building because he wanted to make into some fancy thing. Well, it’s still sitting there all these years later empty. Any way, so I said Laurie – I said Laurie, what about Ladyslipper? I mean –

BB: Laurie?

MC: Laurie Fuchs, L-A-U-R-I-E F-U-C-H-S. She’s one of the founders of Ladyslipper. And I said what about – don’t you have a job I don’t – she said yeah. You don’t have to do anything, Mandy, just fill orders and you don’t have any responsibility. Which I did for a whole year! I was great! But then Jesse Helms was up for re-election and that’s when it all went into the whole –

BB: So this is 1990, right?

MC: Yeah, so I worked for them one year in ’89, and then did conversations about ’90 and then ’90.

BB: Yeah. So I guess just a little bit more about Ladyslipper Music, they’re a huge – they focus on women’s music, right?

MC: Yes, women’s music.

BB: Yeah. So did music –

MC: Oh.

BB: play a big part of activism?

MC: Oh, absolutely. What I found interesting was I had not heard about Ladyslipper until I moved here. But when I moved here in ’82, this is that culture thing [90:30] again. Remember that whole women’s music thing, the whole festival. That was just huge!

BB: The whole festival?

MC: "Women's Music Festivals".

BB: Oh.

MC: Huge.

BB: Okay. In California or everywhere?

MC: Everywhere.

BB: Everywhere.

MC: I mean at one point –

BB: And of course Joan Baez –

MC: Yes.

BB: was at the center of all that, yeah.

MC: But you know what was interesting about Ladyslipper was you never used the word lesbian in terms of this is a lesbian, but when you had Women's Music Festivals as a cultural place for women to go. It wasn't just lesbian, but it was heavily lesbian, but it turned out Bridgette, women's music was almost like folk song. It was almost like folk singers of the '60s. Women's music became sort of the cultural identity for the whole feminist women, women identified. And they were putting out songs, and songs went on to records. So someone like a Holly Near, they realized well, Holly could put out a record. What would happen if Holly went to fourteen different Women's Music Festivals around this country and what impact that would have on individual women's regionally? So when Ladyslipper Music started, if you every talk to Laurie and Joanne Able, who [91:39] were the co-founders, the only reason why they started it they said we went to a concert of Holly Near's and we said we want to get her album, but I'm sure there's other people that would like to get an album, not just us. Well, that one little idea turned into this huge unbelievable institution. It's now in its thirtieth year.

BB: Wow.

MC: All because once again, someone says you know what we need? What would happen if -? Now that – those days have come and gone unfortunately in a way. I mean that whole Women's Music Festival, but there used to be about thirty of them. They're now down to four, but it played its pivotal role. And so by the time I got here I'd heard about Ladyslipper. It was founded in Durham, it was based in Durham which is another reason why I think it was such a strong lesbian women presence here. And people were ordering it from all over the country. This was the central place. So the women's music culture, concerts, festivals, that whole

subculture was just everywhere. And we got to know them because they also were pacifist. Joanne Able and Laurie Fuchs are part of this community called Coehania. Have you ever heard of Coehania? Well, it's down in Georgia. They went to it. They both were there. They came out, came to Durham, and then – so they had that kind of a pacifist kind of thing. And so I got to know them and blah, blah. I've been on the board every since. Yeah, so I worked that one year.

BB: You've been on the Ladyslipper Music board?

MC: Yeah.

BB: Still on the board of directors now?

[93:04] MC: Yeah. It's nice when you only go to a meeting once a year. [Laughter] But they play – they did, and I think they still continue to, but they were very pivotal. And also that was a place where – cause Joan Baez was on a major label, Vanguard. What's Holly Near on? Who was going to put her records out? And so when they had people who were great performers, Olivia – have you heard of Olivia Cruises? Olivia Music, O-L-I-V-I-A?

BB: Oh.

MC: They were like in the music industry too, before they became big in the cruise industry, but they were the ones who said we're going to create our own record label, Ladyslipper did, so we can produce the records of all these people; Holly Near, all the people from the Women's Music end. So they played a very pivotal, critical role in culture in my opinion.

BB: Wow. It just gives me the chills again. You keep naming all these moments of serendipity in your life. How things just –

MC: Amazing.

BB: It's almost like it's a sign you're on the right path, Mandy.

MC: Must be. [Laughter]

BB: That's the way I choose –

MC: North Carolina, who knew?

BB: Yeah. And Holly Near, the first time I heard her sing was at this year's Peace March–

MC: Ooh, really? Was that the first time?

BB: Rally in Fayetteville.

[94:07] MC: Oh, my gosh.

BB: I'd never heard her – she was –

MC: She's amazing.

BB: Oh, fantastic. She was beautiful and amazing, yeah.

MC: You know and Holly – the thing about Holly, which I really appreciate too, Holly comes from a whole kind of you know non – anti-war, I mean she was singing anti-war songs back in the Vietnam era. It is so amazing to see her in Fayetteville, North Carolina at that particular rally given the legacy she's had. And so her gift of song and her gift to be a great organizer and speaker, she says I'm a cultural worker. Just like Candy and Guy Carawan were. I mean they're organizers.

BB: Cultural workers –

MC: That's it.

BB: and organizers.

MC: They are so pivotal. That's why whenever I hear about repression in South America the first people they go after are the cultural workers because they are scared of them, and the educators, but any way. Yeah. So Ladyslipper was great. It gave me a mental break.

BB: Yeah.

MC: When I was there, I thought, I don't have anything to decide and then I'd kind of go maybe I want to get back a little bit into organizing and the next thing I know I said to Laurie when we started talking about the Jesse Helms work and Senate Vote 90 when we started that, I said Laurie, can I just take a break for a year and I'll be back. Well, I never came back. We did start all this stuff with Helms and all that great work.

[95:21] BB: And I love you described that as the first time ever state-wide, county-by-county, lesbian, gay, bisexual voter registration GOTP campaign.

MC: Unbelievable.

BB: And even though ya'll suffered just a heart-wrenching defeat in a race that was painfully close –

MC: Unbelievably close!

BB: you –

MC: We were robbed.

BB: you still made some historic strides in organizing that LGTPQ vote, right?

MC: Absolutely. Totally.

BB: So tell me about it. Tell me –

MC: Well, here again, I think this – I think it's not a coincidence is that when you start something based on the idea – this War Resisters League has this great quote: don't morn, organize, which is so true. Don't sit around moaning and groaning. Go make something happen. And then I added the line if there's a need, fill it. But it wasn't – it was really – there was a woman named Sue Hyde, H-Y-D-E, Sue Hyde, led the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. We really need to thank for what happened in '90. She was down here, she lives in Massachusetts – she was down here for some kind of a Durham City counsel. We had this huge Durham City counsel meeting around adding sexual orientation to protection based in Durham City. And they had all these examples of people just being totally discriminated against. And she was down here to give a national perspective on it to the Durham City Counsel. And I've known Sue forever. So when she was down here, she said well, what are ya'll going to do about Jesse Helms' re-[96:55] election for 1990? We said what do you mean? Nothing. What? She said what? She said I think we might want to have some friends over and have a meeting and talk about what ya'll want to do. So we had a meeting. Sue Hyde, me, it was all like Mab Segrest. It was all these activist types, Jim Baxter from the Front Page, Jim Duley, all these people. We met at David Jones' house in Chapel Hill and we sat down asked the question; so what *are* we going to do about Jess Helms re-election? What's been done in the past? And Joe Herzenberg, H-E-R-Z-E-N-B-E-R-G, who's very active in Chapel Hill politics, Gretchen – Gretchen, Bridgette, said in the past the way we've dealt with Jesse Helms is that we would certainly say his anti-gay position is that we really need to question and challenge it. And they had some people who were active in his – this was in '90, so he would have been – the race before that would have been '82? How does it go? Six years terms –

BB: Right.

MC: so it would have been '84? Right.

BB: Right.

MC: They had some sort of a you know not good on the gay thing whatever, but we've never done anything in a really structured way. We said what would happen if we were to think about looking at the state of North Carolina? We were very active. This was like '88-'89. We had our first ever Gay Pride March in '86 in Durham, so we already had some kind of a structured state-wide whatever. So we decided we were going to do some kind of campaign.

We didn't know nothing from nothing. And I said I have some extra time, I can take some time off from Ladyslipper and I'll take a leap of faith and hope we can raise the money. I called People's Alliance. Are you familiar with [98:31] Durham People's Alliance here in Durham? They're like a pack, right? And I called my good friend Carol Anderson, and I said Carol, you all are a – what do you call it? – a political action committee. What is that? What do you do? I mean we knew nothing from nothing. And we started from nothing. And it turned out that the magic name was Jesse Helms. We started North Carolina Senate Vote 90, and it was just – money poured in, people were volunteering around the entire state, and then we started getting calls from Time Magazine. They are going wait a minute. Then Harvey Gantt – you can't say enough. If we hadn't had Harvey Gantt – so anyway, people were saying well, what are a bunch of gay and lesbians organizing for a black man to run against Jesse Helms in 1990? It was one of those moments because it was like white/black south, old south, new south, Helms. Things were just changing. And that was a magic year. It just seemed to be – that was the year everyone wanted to know what was happening. And we did good. And even though we lost –

BB: Quote, unquote, end quotes. [Laughter]

MC: Yeah. In the long run we won. It really just transformed the state of North Carolina. And then we realized the other important thing I'll share – we're doing a strategy session and we said there's no way if we got every single gay and lesbian person in the state of North Carolina to vote, we don't have enough votes to beat Helms. So we then asked a practical question. Well, who else has a vested interest in why Jesse Helms shouldn't be re-elected? And we said well, what would happen if we looked at his voting record? Who else would have a reason for not wanting him to be re-elected? And all we had to do was pull out his voting record, and all of a sudden our allies are right there: bad on the environment, bad on the arts, bad on seniors, bad on women. And we said who in [100:21] the h**l is voting for this guy? He was bad on everything. Well, sad to say, they were voting for him barely. He wasn't winning by a lot and every time Jesse Helms would run, forty percent automatically for him, forty percent automatically against him, and it was that ten percent. That's what got him. And then we realized we have got to be more than just a gay thing – and then it went on dah, dah, dah, and we ended up with this huge, wonderful, broad base progressive blah de blah, blah, whatever. It was a – it was electrifying, absolutely electrifying.

BB: So if there are two kind of key lessons there that you feel you really took away that were most powerful and inspirational, it sounds like one is the – one might be the broad base –

MC: Absolutely.

BB: allies. You know really thinking outside the box about who our allies are.

MC: Absolutely. Yep.

BB: What else would it be?

MC: It really talked about the visibility and the viability of our lesbi/gay/trans in ally movement, because we have 100 counties and we did it by county. And if you were to think about if you were to run a campaign, if you're going to run something that talks about the entire state, you've got to be beyond just the Triangle. You've got to be beyond just the Triad or Charlotte. And so many people said thank you for setting something up in my local county, because I'm tired – I mean – so you realize when you think about the infrastructure when you talk about the state of North Carolina, you better d**n well mean it. Which is why I think North Carolina Women United better have this conversation. If you say that name North Carolina and all you ever meet is in Raleigh or [101:48] where ever, are you really? And we realized then it was all about the entire state of North Carolina, not just particular places.

BB: I think that's been a big barrier in a lot of movements in North Carolina, not just the rural/urban divide, but it's such a long state and there are such rich –

MC: Yeah.

BB: cultural diversity, class diversity –

MC: Yeah.

BB: I mean it's almost like whole different worlds in some ways in different regions so the North Carolina Peace and Justice Coalition has struggled with it. So many have struggled with it. How did ya'll overcome that barrier? Where did you get the people power to organize in 100 counties?

MC: And I'm wondering if this is not even true to this day cause one of the things – well, first of all you realize who votes for even Harvey Gantt or Jesse Helms is going to be in every single county. In other words, look at the infrastructure. It already exists. And so while we did temporary county chapters of mobilization or whatever, it was in the Senate Bill 90. But then we realized – we said wait a minute. If we have to take all this time to get people registered in the county of let's take – we did a lot of work in Asheville, so Buncombe County, that would

be great example. If you had to put all that energy into Buncombe County that meant you had to know who was registered, who wasn't, who was a Democrat, who wasn't. I mean all that practical stuff. But it also meant you had to use the – just the infrastructure in the county of Buncombe, not in Durham. So we purposely set up a local organizing committee. They would be the ones who would do the local work and then still have the community – this is before email, but [103:14] then have some way of having a regional breakout. And then we said wait a minute, why reinvent the wheel? The regional infrastructure is called a congressional district. Hello! I mean it sits right there! That's why you have them. So we went city, county, congressional district. Then when you thought about the geography of North Carolina, there's western North Carolina. So if you did a meeting, do a western North Carolina – you know. And that worked for us. But that was good because you had a time and a date like it's going to start on this date and it's going to end on this date and no guarantee that once the campaign's over that you can maintain that momentum. But it works because it was a local ownership. But I'm still thinking to this day, why or how would you organize the state of North Carolina in a way that gave you the autonomy of where you lived and organized and had a cultural check-in and still feel like you are a part of something broader. I'm going to be honest. Get the egos out of the way and let people do the work where they need to do the work and have an infrastructure that allows them. In fact, Julie's idea, when I talked to her – Julie Lapham [NCWU Board of Directors], she said, Mandy, we have this thing called the internet. I'm not sure why we don't figure out some way, and keeping in mind are people who don't, but how you literally – when you do your infrastructure of looking at the organizing of Women United, you better figure out some way that if you can't physically be in a space, that you better have the input and also the sense of ownership and a sense of yeah, this is something I can do in my back yard. She said if we don't then we just – we're not real, we're not being for real. And that's what she's going to try to raise is how can you do that in a way through calling, internet, whatever you need, and it's not relying on physical bodies sitting in a physical place called Raleigh or Durham or where ever. And I thought, [105:01] yeah, why not try it. I don't know how NC Peace and Justice – why didn't that work? What do you think was going on there, because we always had our meetings in Greensboro, not that people couldn't get there, but why not have the meeting in Asheville or rotate it to Wilmington or Charlotte or other parts?

BB: Yeah. That's a whole other story.

MC: I know.

BB: We could go [laughter] –

MC: I know.

BB: into it, but I –

MC: It's a rhetorical question.

BB: Yes.

MC: But it worked for us because we were using the infrastructure. And also the other important thing we said at the end of the campaign, we didn't spend all this time, energy, and money to have it end, so what was Senate Vote 90 is now Equality North Carolina. That was the genesis of that organization.

BB: Great. And that's Ian Palmquest –

MC: Yeah.

BB: is still the director of that.

MC: Out of that we got Mike Nelson, Mayor of Carrboro, because he worked on that campaign and said why don't I run for mayor? We got so much out of that. So in the long run I think we won long term. Jesse Helms ain't here no more is he? We're here. We're still going. [Laughter] I call that a victory. [Laughter]

[106:04] BB: Yeah. So do you think it's – I feel sure that the answer to this is yes, you think there is something important and significant about organizing activism specifically in the south?

MC: Absolutely.

BB: And you've touched on it some, but answer that directly. What's important about organizing and activism in the south? Why the south?

MC: I heard a great quote. It's not mine, but when I heard the quote "so goes the south, so goes this country" –

BB: [W.E.B.] Dubois, huh?

MC: You got it. That says it all. That goes on all levels. I think that certainly politically, the south when you think about the south, whatever – but in terms of the movement, I have to tell you, being born and raised in Albany, New York, and that's all I knew for the first eighteen years of my life and even more until I moved here and found out my mother was born in Edenton, I can now claim the south because she's a northern – North Carolinian, and I by

birth. But I'm thinking it wasn't until I moved here and I'm really getting it now. And the anti-southern bias is so ingrained, and I don't know how within our progressive movement, women's movement. I sat in a national organization of women's strategies session for whatever year election it was, and what they said was quote, "we'll never get North Carolina, we're never going to get the south, so we're not going to put a penny in it." And that's exactly what the Democrats said. And they said how can you sit there and write off an entire country because you don't believe it's doable? So by example of when you start seeing victories or you start seeing organizing focus in the south, and you start seeing it does make a difference, I think people will go [107:38] wait a minute. We better re-think our strategy. Also, funders – if funders don't get it about putting money down here, I am so tired of hearing these funders "oh, you can't do it". It's starting to change, but I think it's got to – but who's going to be here to do it? People can't be leaving, in my opinion. I wasn't born here, but the idea of doing work here and the challenge of it. But when you make a change here – when we got that – when we got the Domestic Partnership passed on Durham County level, oh my god. That was huge! We had people calling in from across the country wanting to know how did you do it because of course they were thinking if you make that happen in Durham, North Carolina, can we not do that where ever? So when you see those kinds of wins and you see that you can make change here, it's just in my opinion so important and very rewarding.

BB: Yeah. So what sustains you as an organizer and activist? And what shuts you down?

MC: I love this stuff. I can't imagine – I just love this. I don't know if I was born to do it or not, but there's a whole generation of me. I really do believe this whole 60s generation. I was listening to NPR yesterday and the demographics are for those of us born 1946, after World War II to 1956, all of that generation, what I call the 60s generation are now turning sixty. But there was a cultural thing. I mean there's something about being a part of whether it was the hippy thing or you know the anti-war movement or whatever, you have this collective sense that people can make changes. You have much more of an optimistic yeah, we can make a difference. And there's seventy-seven million! Seventy-seven million! If you quantify that based on health care or some other issue that people distinct the numbers weren't there, I think the potential [109:37] for making some major change is so critical now. That's a huge chunk of the American population, all voters. So my optimism is with so many of us have a culture of

change like that was part of our thing. You're thinking yeah, we can tap into this. And so I'm thinking that's why I thought our generation is in a critical moment to do another major, in my opinion, cultural shift in a social justice shift, just because a lot of us were active in that. I might be over optimistic on that, but I think there's a huge chunk of us that were ready to make that happen. That's me.

BB: So that's one thing that sustains you, just that sense of being connected –

MC: Absolutely.

BB: to a generation –

MC: Yeah.

BB: of social change factors.

MC: Yeah. When you realize – in other words the ages of change then are still the ages of change now. And you know, a lot of friends of mine who when the Vietnam was over Bridgette, said now that that's over now I can go back to school, I can start a family. There were so many people that put their life on hold just to be a part of that. I'm sure there could be a similar feeling about the Civil Rights Movement in a way, but a lot of the sense okay now that I have my degree – I don't know how to say this – it's like now that I have my degree it's still wanting to be socially responsible and conscious, but I'm doing it as a mom, a dad, a doctor, or whatever. So you still bring that same level of ages of change, but I'm bringing it with me with a whole bunch of other people, and here's the moment. And we'll see what happens with this election. I think 2008 is going to be intriguing to me, not just the national level but locally. We're already seeing a lot [111:07] of that happen. So when you see that and you see the results of the work and the potential for the work, I love it. And that's just me, but I think there're a lot of people like me, not just me uniquely. I was just blessed to be born in part of the 60s or something. [Laughter]

One the other hand I'm also thinking this is another moment for me I think with the family search. That sabbatical was so important. I wish every activist could have a built-in you get a sabbatical for one year paid whatever. Because if you don't stop long enough to figure out where you've been, what you've learned and looking ahead, if I hadn't done that one year off last year, I wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation with you. I was ready to just say I'm done. But when I came back from it, it was like there's got to be a better quality of life way as activist and organizers. We get to do this. We can integrate it into your life. You can have

family and all that. There's got to be a better way than being this tired, I'm beat, you know whatever. I mean –

BB: No money?

MC: Yeah, what is that? There's got to be a better model.

BB: Yeah, there's a lot of martyr syndrome in the activist –

MC: There is. And I have friends of mine who are like how can you live like that and how can you – like no life. They are totally unhappy. I should be unhappy? I don't think so. But there is. Where did that come from? What is that whole martyr thing come from? Why do we have that? What's the point?

BB: What do you think?

MC: I don't know. I think it's almost like – I don't know where that came from. I'm not sure. It's almost like – especially – now this is me. Maybe middle-class folks [112:38] who do have the resources but want to get into this intentional poverty or intentional "woe is me", I don't – that's like a guilt thing. What's the point of that? I don't get that.

BB: So what are some new insights you have about your quality of life and sort of having a loving relationship with your activism? [Laughter]

MC: Well, I think one thing is I'm realizing this especially around this issue of class, we've got to talk more about that in the movement. So few people talk about class. And a lot of my friends – I shouldn't say a lot, but a number of my friends who are well-to-do, they are so guilt-ridden about their money they don't want to talk about it, they don't want to – like I don't have it. I'm thinking you have it, go us it. Remember that conversation at the workshop? Remember what that one woman said? I feel – she felt – didn't she feel guilt-ridden? But if you have a resource, do something with it. That's what Elizabeth [Waugh-Stewart] said. Didn't she say that? She said I come from whatever and – so rather than feeling like you're totally guilt-ridden into total – what was the word – immobility? When you feel shut down? Go the other way. I mean just own it, this is what I have, and go do something with it. I think that would go a long way for a lot of people, I think.

I think the other reality is that I think as a woman of color now, feeling real comfortable with that. This country is more and more of color and I want to work with color, but I want to be a bridge builder. That, to me is so vital to me. And I have some friends in mind who are Mandy, why are you wasting your time? People of color; why are you – you're wasting your time on

those white people. And I'm thinking excuse me? And I just – no way. I've always been a bridge builder. So that constant how you just do [114:17] work is so important to me, and that keeps me very busy. And – I don't know, it's just great.

BB: Good. Yeah. So I just – let's see. It's 12:45. Let me pause it for a second –

MC: Yeah.

BB: and take stock here.

MC: I'm –

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by Denise Kelly, November, 2007