Constance Curry Transcription

Part I

Catherine Oglesby: It's Tuesday March 12, 2012, I'm in the home of Constance Curry pm 930 Myrtle St., NE, Atlanta, 30309. We are getting started in a little different way than usual but Connie is about to tell us something humorous that I want to get on tape. The editor of *Silver Rights* looked at some sort of abstract of your

Constance Curry: A couple of chapters that I have sent her from the memoirs that I'm working on. He name is Shannon Ravenoe, she is a wonderful editor. She is editor of my first book, *Silver Rights*, and that was part of my work with the Quakers, anyway she was such a good editor and when I sent her chapters from my memoirs she said, you aren't putting yourself in it. You know she said you are so used to telling stories about others and describing stuff about them but there is not enough of "you" in your memoirs, so I am trying to go back and be more expressive because what I am used to is telling other people's stories, and that led me to what I was telling you about my third book there, *Mississippi Harmony* there has been a woman here from Tokyo, that I met a couple of years ago, she is translating this book into Japanese. She teaches Japanese-American studies and she just went down to Harmony, Mississippi where this woman, where Winston Hudson lived, and took pictures of her house and did all this stuff and they are translating that into Japanese. It will be out next year! Isn't that wild!?

Dr. Catherine Oglesby: It's incredible. Isn't it wonderful though?

CC: The thing is she said that we want to teach about the civil rights movement, we don't just want civil rights history; I want the Japanese students to understand the people in the movement. The stories right so that will be out next fall translated into Japanese. Isn't that wild!

CO: And who is going to do that? Who is going to publish that?

CC: It's a Japanese [publisher] in cahoots with a university here. I can't remember the name of it. She said she was going to send me the stuff so.

CO: What fun!

CC: Yeah!

CO: That must feel good!

CC: Oh it's beyond anything I have ever dreamed of!

CO: Well this basic biographical stuff I hate to waste time with it, but I have to have it and so I've got this resident's home, but your date and place of birth I need that.

CC: July 19th 1933, Patterson, New Jersey.

CO: Okay siblings? And the birth order…

CC: First Eileen Curry, older sister, she was born in 1929. And then I have a half-sister, Anne Curry, and if she is 50, when would she have been born? 1960?

CO: Well I'm 58 and I was born at the end of 53, she's now 50? Do you know when her birthday?

CC: October 23rd.

CO: She might have been born in 60? 1960, okay. Is it the same mother or father?

CC: Father. My mother died early.

CO: Okay I have questions about them also. And then anymore?

CC: No.

CO: So you are between these two and your father?

CC: Ernest Curry.

CO: and his places and dates of birth and death.

CC: Belfast Northern Ireland, June 15, 1900. Died July 12, 1971. Mother Constance Hazleton Richmond. She was born October 15th.

CO: Her name was Hazleton Richmond?

CC: Constance Hazelton Richmond. Born October 15th, 1901. Died…

CO: Where was she born?

CC: Belfast Northern Ireland. She died on March 27th 1957.

CO: Wow, okay so your claim is Irish. Your ethnic background…

CC: Oh yeah.

CO: And how do you identify your religion?

CC: Well Christian.

CO: Denominational?

CC: Well I belong to an Episcopal Church. I don't go much anymore. I used to be Presbyterian but then I joined the Episcopal Church.

CO: Do you remember when?

CC: When I joined the Episcopal Church? Well my stepbrother, Phillip lives, who died in 95, um I guess I joined in like maybe 85, 1985ish.

CO: and how do you identify your occupation, a writer?

CC: Now yeah. I've retired from city government but…

CO: So city government was your job?

CC: Well no I've had a bunch of jobs? You mean before I retired?

CO: Right.

CC: I was just city government. I retired in 90 to start writing books for about 20 years.

CO: Okay I have a whole section on career/profession/jobs you can tell me if you will all about that. And you are not married….

CC: No, never married.

CO: [recorder turned off; resume at 52:15] What's the first thing you remember as a child?

CC: I've thought about this because I was reading a book, who wrote *the Road Less Traveled* and he said your very first memory as a child can be important…

CO: Is that Scott Peck?

CC: Yes, and I get tickled because his first memory is up on a roof where his mother held him and pointed out the Aurora Borealis, which is a great first memory. I think my first memory, you know you always have to distinguish between photographs and what people have told you, but I think my first memory is in Patterson, New Jersey where I was born, was probably two or three but I don't know for sure and we had just gotten a kitten. Cats are a huge, in fact when I am doing my memoirs I am almost going to have a chapter on cats because I've had 42 cats in my life starting out with Skippy, the one I am going to tell you about and I think I was reaching behind what was called an icebox back then rather than a refrigerator and I think I remember my mother telling me Toby, which was my nickname, Toby don't pull that kitten out from behind the icebox by his tail. 50:35

CO: That's your memory?

CC: I think that is my first memory and let me say this, I don't have a lot of memories about my childhood. I don't know where they are and I don't have any photographs you know back then 70 years ago. My parents didn't have cameras so…

CO: That's a good memory though.

CC: Not a lot of memories of my childhood. I think the other thing is also because we moved around a lot. The first, we moved six or eight times before we settled in North Carolina. So…

CO: You know what I did not ask you, was your parents occupation which would explain why you moved around, what did your father do?

CC: He was in textiles and he had learned textiles in Ireland and the linen business and came over here and got a job at, what was the name of it, at a textile company in Patterson and…

CO: Now when you say in textiles he was not a male operative I am assuming?

CC: No he was a worker. But he had that job to the best of my knowledge, when he left Ireland he came over here on a boat in '25 and my mother, whom he'd met in Belfast followed him a few months later, because they met in Belfast and, I think rumor has it, that they met at a boy scout dance. Daddy was active in the boy scouts, and mother just fell in love with him, and she was kind of caught in a relationship there where her mother had died when she was like 13, and she had two sisters, and one was sent to an Aunt in England to raise, and the other one was sent someplace in Belfast, and she was taking care of her father, and my grandfather, whom I never knew but whom I understood from Curry relatives had an alcohol problem, and I think mother may have had to take care of him or something so she was probably real glad to get out of there. Let me say this, which is one reason why I can't tell you much, my mother never talked about her past, ever.

CO: Did you ask her about it?

CC: Um, not really. She was not very forthcoming. I think she had lot of, and I've talked to a psychologist and several other people about this and my older sister thinks that mother may have been depressed, but people back then didn't know of what depression is and certainly didn't talk about it but she was very quiet and very withdrawn, very smart. She read all the time. She adored my father and vice versa. My father was just the

opposite. Ernest Curry was handsome, he was funny, he was outgoing, everybody adored him and including Mother, like I say and as far as, now that's a childhood memory. I remember my father being always so much more outgoing and affectionate. Like he would, when something would happen, he would get me on his lap, and I remember him holding me and saying, "poor little pussycat." So you know, they both loved cats. It's part of the identification, but I don't remember my mother. I mean I know she loved me, and she made clothes, and she was a wonderful cook, and she did all this stuff, and she loved going to the movies, and like I said, she would read novels and do all this stuff but she was very, she wasn't very outgoing…

CO: She was an introvert?

CC: Well…

CO: Insular, sort of?

CC: I don't know. She, they played cards a lot. Pinochle and stuff like that with neighbors that we had. She didn't go to church because she thought that most church people were hypocrites. She would say things like most people at the church wouldn't give a crust of bread to someone at their back door. And I remember we made her go to church with us one Easter, and she said that Easter time is when they are really hypocrites, because that's when they put big hats on, and I was sitting next to her at the church at the first Presbyterian church in North Carolina, and sure enough this woman in front of us had this huge hat on, and the price tag was hanging off in the back. And my mother nudged me and showed me the big hat, and we got so tickled over the dog gone price tag still being on the hat.

CO: Did you all know Minnie Pearl?

CC: Oh god I think I did after that. I mean not back then, but anyway I guess what I was saying is Mother was very independent, and in thinking back on it, everybody has always said you are just like your father, you look like them, you have that chin that he has this, all this, that and the other, but in retrospect, and thinking about this particular moment of my memoirs,

my independence, my ability to speak out, a lot of that stuff I got from my mother as a woman. Because I remember once when we were in high school and I brought a friend, Sarah Anne Taylor home with me and we were talking, sitting in the kitchen, and Sarah Anne said there was this really cute guy that she would love to date but he didn't have a car and my mother said, "You don't know how to ride a bus?" And you know so she just was used to calling a spade a spade, and a lot of that rubbed on both Eileen and me, plus the fact that there was never, Eileen never married either, my older sister, never had kids. She is 82 and lives in Greensboro, North Carolina. And I never felt pressure from either one of my parents that we had to get married. A lot of that they say is an Ireland tradition that women are not ---, I don't know whether or not it's --- we were Protestants, but there was not a lot of pressure on daughters that they had to get married. Now I went to Agnes Scott, to college and man, this is back in the 50's when, if you weren't pinned or engaged by your senior year, you were in deep trouble. It never occurred to me. I applied for a Fulbright my senior year in college, and went to France and then I came back and I had a fellowship to Columbia University, and the guy I was going with, proposed to me and wouldn't give me a diamond that Christmas, and I said I have to go back to graduate school. Then mother died and I came home and then I got this wonderful job offer to go work for this United Nations thing in New York, and I just never felt the compulsion that I *had* to get married in order to be a whole person. And some of that must have come from Mother. But from my generation that is unusual.

CO: I wonder what there is in that Irish Protestant background that might be worth exploring, because I don't think Irish Catholics were that independent minded.

CC: No that may just be hearsay. Well no, because Daddy's, Winifred Curry my Daddy's sister, she never married, and my two other aunts, died while they were in the 80's, and they had never married so there is a lot of…

CO: Did your mother do any…did she work outside of the home?

CC: No. But see she was only 56 when she died, yeah.

CO: But there was still something about her that was not, her independence wasn't undermined by being a domestic person, it sounds like. She just had that independent…

CC: Spirit yeah. So anyway, I don't have a lot of memoires about.

CO: Well it seems like it doesn't matter, because you are able to describe them, because my next question is can you first describe yourself as a child, but then to describe your parents and you are not having any problem being able to describe them. You might not have active memories of incidents and events but you are able to describe them very well.

CC: Yeah, and I can also say that as a child, and you'll love this, I don't know where this came from, but I have a really strange and lasting sense of humor. I don't know if you remember in the back of the book of *Silver Rights* it talks about me going to a comedy school in 1984.

CO: Yes I do because we talked about that when you were in Valdosta. You went to comedy school. Say something about that.

CC: With Julian Bond, he and I, he was 19 and I was like 24 when I first met him and we started telling each other 3rd grade humor joke level stuff, back then and we still tell jokes to this day. But that's somewhere in my background, because I can remember when I was like 8 years old, we were living in, we would move from Patterson to Hawthorne, New Jersey, and I can remember coming down in the living room, and mother had a couple of friends in the living room and I said to the ladies, "You know we have a musical toilet upstairs." And I said, "Yeah and when you go, it plays music." And I said, "Mother had a friend that was up there once, and she was going, and it was during the holidays, and she uh it was just great because they were playing 'We Wish you a Merry Christmas,' and she just loved it." And then I said, "But there was another woman up there going to the bathroom, one of mother's friends, and she was up there for so long and we went up there, and she was mopping the floor. And we asked her

what was the matter and she said, 'Well they started playing the star spangled banner.'" So she stood up, right.

CO: You told this as an eight year old?

CC: Eight or Nine yeah…

CO: Oh my God.

CC: But that's not the main one, the main one is that I can remember strutting out into the living room and saying, "Here is a poem for you. There was a man from Indiana, he came and played the Piano, His foot slipped, his fly ripped and flew out his banana." I didn't know what a banana or a fly was it just made everyone laugh so.

CO: Where had you learned that?

CC: I don't know, and I don't know where making people laugh, where that comes from, but certainly not from my mother. And Daddy comes from…Daddy was funny. He was always doing pranks. But he didn't tell jokes. And the only joke I ever heard my mother say, asked me, I was in the 8th grade, and I came home from school one day and she said, "Do you know what they call a women detective?" and I thought what did…I said no and she said, "A Dickless Tracy." Now that was the only joke I ever heard my mother tell.

CO: Oh my god. What a sense of humor though. And she told you that in 8th grade? Man she was open minded.

CC: So anyways I don't know…

CO: So you describe yourself as sort of a jokester even as a young girl.

CC: And all the way to now, I saw Julian in the airport a couple of weeks ago, and I was taking a bunch of materials out, and going through all of these, and stuff he didn't have and he said, "Connie, what's better than daisies on a piano?" And I said, "I don't know." He said, "Tulips on an organ."

CO: Oh my god.

CC: Ya know here he is 71 and I am 78 and we are still doing that.

CO: What does he look like now?

CC: Oh he is gorgeous. Yeah.

CO: Men get just so much better looking.

[recorder turned off] CO asks if she has a recent picture of Julian Bond.

CC: [Shows picture from 1990 at the University of Virginia. Points out in the picture Julian Bond; Max Kennedy, Robert Kennedy's son; and Connie all in picture. CC says, "Julian is gray now, but he's still good-looking." CC talks about JB's humor].

CO: You still do that?

CC: Yeah, and I don't know where it came from unless the freedom to be who I wanted to be. You know and there were no,…we went to church but we moved around so much that there was not any Sunday school lessons.

CO: Did you ever question or feel that you missed something by not having roots in a place?

CC: No, no.

CO: It didn't bother you that you moved around?

CC: No, we moved from, we lived two places in Patterson, New Jersey, then we moved to Hawthorne, New Jersey, that was where I started school. I remember the house there. I don't remember and I remember our neighbors; but I don't remember my first day at school; I don't remember my teacher; I don't have any recall of the school. I remember Eileen and I we had our tonsils out on the kitchen table. You now we didn't go to the hospital or anything.

CO: What?!

CC: Yeah, yeah.

CO: A doctor came and…

CC: Removed our…

CO: Surely you were anesthetized?

CC: Yeah and so was Eileen, but I don't remember anything at all about that.

CO: Oh my goodness. Was that common?

CC: I don't know. We were only in Hawthorne for a little while. I remember we had a really pretty house in Hawthorne, which was different from the kind at 23rd street and Patterson, New Jersey wasn't very pretty. Of course I didn't remember it much, but to move to Hawthorne, which was this really pretty house, was nice. And then we moved from there, because Daddy got a better job offer in Poughkeepsie, New York, moved to there. And the only thing that I remember about, it was near Vassar College I do remember that. But the only thing I remember about Poughkeepsie is, you know how you hear those stories of a little boy and a little girl playing doctor, and one of the things you do is you show me yours and I'll show you mine, and did that with a little boy whose name I have no recall of. We weren't in Poughkeepsie very long, then we moved to a place called Wappinger's Falls, New York, and I have some memories there, fleeting memories. The main one probably is Skippy the cat. He came with us to Poughkeepsie, then to Wappinger's Falls. I remember getting off the school bus. It was a snowy, cold, winter afternoon, got off the school bus, and was walking home, and Skippy was lying by the side of the road and I picked him up and took him home, and put him down because he was frozen and cold and…

CO: Was he dead?

CC: Yeah, but I didn't know. I just thought he was really cold. So I picked him up and put him on the radiator in our house when I got home and I went in the kitchen and I remember telling mother I said, "I just found Skippy and he is so cold, and he is frozen and he is hard so I put him on the radiator." Of course mother went in there, and he was dead you know so…

CO: What had happened?

CC: He had been hit by a car. But he didn't…I can remember because it still echoes in my mind when mother told Daddy about it that night she said there wasn't a mark on him. And that phrase stuck in my mind forever whenever I can feel and recall myself picking him up. Because ya know he just looked fast asleep, but very hard, but there wasn't a mark on him. Yeah, so wherever he got hit it didn't show up. Then I remember getting our second cat, whose name was Snooky, from somebody up in Wappinger's Falls, and I remember we had a little hand organ, and I remember Eileen and I put a little doll dress on him, and baptized him playing the little organ and naming him Snookadoris Henic Curry. Yeah so.

CO: Snookadoris, how do you spell that?

CC: 30:40 Spells Snookadoris. And Henic was the family we got him from. She talks about how she lengthened it to Snookadoris, and said that she had that cat for a long time. So Snooky was the second cat. [She said the cats were all outdoor cats. When asked by Dr. Oglesby if she has any cat's now she said] I have one named Delta, after the Mississippi Delta, who lived to be 22 and she died of Kidney failure in August, and 2 weeks after that, I had another cat whom I just adored whose name was SpongeBob. He was a stray, and he came up on my deck, and I'd told my nephew, Anne Curry's son, that there was a cat there who was sponging off me, and he was 11 years old. He said, "sponging off you. Name him SpongeBob." He was FIV positive and he got kidney failure and I had to have him put to sleep. This was a week after I lost Delta. So the only cat I have now is another stray named Midnight who is partially blind. All he does is cuddle with me and sleep on my bed. He can't survive too well outside. So he's the only cat I have left. But in the interim, there were 30 others. One, two, then three here, so that's the names of five of them. [CC says she remembers all of them, all their names, where they were, what became of them.] I can tell you more about them than I can about my early life, whatever that means.

CO: You probably have memories attached to each cat. Are the cats going to show up in your memoirs?

CC: Yea.

CO: You said you were going to have a chapter on cats. That will be cool.

CC: I'm reading a woman's memoir now called *Sleeping with Cats.* Marge Piercy is the writer's name. She intertwines her cats, but I'm not sure if I'm going to put mine in a separate chapter, or just let them intervene in life as they come and go. Anyway I don't remember too much about Wappinger's Falls, New York, except that . . . [pause] I remember my mother and daddy didn't get mad at each other or fuss too much, but I do remember in Wappinger's Falls that they got mad and Daddy picked me up, and put me on his shoulders and we went, and walked across a bridge going downtown, but that's all, and going to the little village there. But I don't remember what they would have fought about. They didn't fight very much. I know that mother was very outspoken, and was not afraid to. She was never subservient or never, she would stand up for herself and stuff. Then Daddy got an offer from the South, from Burlington Mills, you know the textile mills in North Carolina, and we moved to Burlington.

CO: Do you remember what year that was? Or roughly what year that was?

CC: I would have been in the fourth grade so however old you are in the 4th grade.

CO: 10 years old maybe?

CC: Yeah, yeah, and we lived there for only six months and then Daddy got an offer in Greensboro, so when I was in the 5th grade we moved to Greensboro, North Carolina which is where we lived until I went away to college. So Greensboro, NC, is what I really consider my home. Both my parents are buried there. Eileen, my older sister still lives there. I can still go by the houses. Two houses, where we moved, and the second one on West Market Street which is where I lived the majority.

CO: Okay now tell me again what your father did in the mill? Was he a supervisor?

CC: Yes he was a plant manager at the dyeing and finishing division of Burlington Mills. He had worked his way up in dyeing and finishing.

CO: 25:30 I don't want to forget to ask you why you chose, Agnes Scott but we will get to that when we get to your education. Because that's probably where your interest in GA came from?

CC: No, the interest in GA came from . . . when I was at Agnes Scott I got involved in a group called the United States National Student Association because I was involved in stuff, which I will tell you about later. I went to my first National Congress, and that was when if first got…everything of course was totally segregated back then. But that's where I got involved in, got interested in racial issues. The National Student Association which was integrated in the 50's [24:21]

CO: So back to your parents. You already said without my even asking you about what influence each parent had on you, and you feel like you used to, people used to tell you that you look just like your father, but in fact you think in later years, you've come to think that your mother had a lot of influence on you. Because she was an independent thinking woman and so…

CC: And very smart, and like I said she read a lot of novels, and I remember that she would read some novels that were kind of, "questionable," because maybe they have some sex in them, and I remember once, this was when we were living on Morton Street, and I would have been in the 5th or 6th grade, and I was sick one day and she'd been reading this book called *River God,* and I smuggled it in the room where I was sitting with a blanket over me, and I had a comic book and I would read the comic or whatever it was, and when mother would leave I would take out *River God*. I had learned to read, and had read veraciously all my life, but I must have learned to read quite early. But there was a sentence in that book where it was talking about a young man who was going with a girl, and one time he got on her, and I thought what in the

world could that mean. You know so I didn't ask anybody because who was I to ask. And then there was another famous book back then called *Forever Amber,* which was just so controversial and Mother was reading *Forever Amber,* but she read not just… she read novels and books all the time. She just was very, she sewed beautifully, and there were a lot of clothes, beautiful clothes that she made for Eileen and me, and she was a fabulous cook. She was busy all the time, but she would go to movies and you know she but she was very independent.

CO: What kind of movies did she like?

CC: Everything. Yeah. In fact she died in the movies. Yeah. She had a coronary occlusion, when she was 56 or 57.

CO: Do you know what she was watching?

CC: Yeah a movie called *Battle Hymn.* And I've never watched it. She was with a friend. I was in Graduate School in New York, and Daddy was up there visiting me, and I went to pick him up at the airport, and this loud speaker said, "Ernest Curry please call home, but do not call before your daughter is with you." That was the announcement on the…So we called home and Eileen said, my older sister, said Mother went to the movies with Uncle Harry, who was not a relative but we called him Uncle Harry, and he was visiting down there, and she and Uncle Harry had gone to see *Battle Hymn,* and she died of a coronary occlusion right there in the movie yeah. And Daddy and I had to fly home from New York knowing that Mother was dead so.

CO: That was 56?

CC: No 57. So yeah.

CO: Wow what a story.

CC: Yeah so anyway but she liked all kinds of movies. I don't remember what *Battle Hymn* was about but I meant to look it up on the internet when I was trying to think of for my own memoirs.

CO: Well what about your extended family? Were any of them here? No? So you didn't?

CC: I grew up with no contact except Christmas cards from Ireland, and a handkerchief, a linen handkerchief every once in a while.

CO: So no cousins, Aunts, Uncles.

CC: I remember I don't even know what grade it was in, but I remember I heard people singing, "Over the river and to the hills to grandmother's house we go." And I thought I don't even have a grandmother's house to go to. So except for letters. And I remember…

CO: So how did your parents, did they, how did they talk about their parents?

CC: They didn't. No. I don't know a thing about mother's childhood. You know I have seen photographs, and I've seen one where she is holding a cat. Now Daddy was really close to his family. He had three brothers and Aunt Winnie, who is his sister, and he was close to his family, and I remember he didn't get to see either one of his parent's alive because they all died off before Daddy got to go back to Ireland, at some point, but Mother never got to go back so but Daddy was real close. And Mother stayed in touch with her sisters by mail, and of course I have met them all since then.

CO: You have?

CC: Oh yeah and I am real close to all of my cousins everywhere. And I visit them all. A lot of them have come over to Canada, and I've been to Ireland 10 times. So I went over there after my Fulbright which was in 56, so I've been going to Ireland since 56. So I got to know all my relatives later. So it was great. Yeah.

CO: So you don't know anything about your mother's relationship with her mother? What about your relationship with her? You and you can talk about your sister if you want to. What was that? Did you have to, you know today there is this sort of common understanding that there is this

inevitable conflict between mothers and daughters particularly in adolescence. Did you have that experience?

CC: Um well I think Mother and I, Eileen and Mother got along much better than Mother and I did. I think it's because Daddy said in retrospect, I have a letter from him, that "you remind me so much of your mother," and I learned later that a lot of people said that Hazel, which is what my mother went by, was boy crazy, because she would go to these, she smoked when she was over in Belfast, and she would go to these boy scout dances, which I don't know what that meant, but anyway I always liked boys, and I remember once I had three boyfriends, and I remember telling Mother, Daddy, and Eileen that I really liked Bobby, and I really liked Jimmy Moser but Mickey Chambly was also cute. And I remember Daddy saying, there being somewhere in the air, that Mother was worried about me telling how cute all these boys were, because it may have reminded her of herself growing up, but she never talked, my mother just didn't talk very much, she never talked. I don't have a clue from my mother's lips about her past. Nothing.

CO: So then how did you know she was boy crazy? How did that come about?

CC: Daddy told me. Daddy said that some of the stuff that Mother may have noticed in me…

CO: and you think that may be why you all didn't get along as well as your older sister and your mother?

CC: Well I started to tell you, Eileen was very smart and she skipped a couple of grades when she moved, when we moved from the north. She skipped either the third or the first because they would take tests and they would put you in a class. So she was much younger. She graduated from high school when she was what 15, which was two years younger than most. She never dated; she is a lot different from me. She is a lot shyer, a lot quieter; I've always been very gregarious. Eileen was not, and it may have been because she was younger in school and more scared. She was very, very smart, and she went, and Mother and Daddy didn't have a lot of

money, but they were able to pay for her to go to Mary Washington. I was 13 and Eileen was 15 or 16 when she went up to college when we lived in North Carolina, but she quit some years later when I graduated and went to Agnes Scott. In retrospect I think Eileen always thought that I was getting the much better deal than she was, and that has been manifest, and I probably don't want to talk about this, because we are just trying to do some healing now, but in retrospect of the world of her. She was beautiful, she was a model, she was five nine and just absolutely gorgeous, but she was very shy. She didn't have very many boyfriends, and here I was going to dances. I was Ms. Popularity. I got a scholarship here, and I got this that and the other. Now at Agnes Scott I was student body president and I was in all the plays, and I was always doing stuff, and everybody was always laughing at me, and all this and I think that….and then after Mother died, and Eileen started taking care of Daddy, and I think that is about the time when she started, she may have resented me when I was little, I don't know, but I never resented her. I always thought she was wonderful. I never thought that I was the outstanding one. But we have a had a very strange relationship as we have gotten older, and it is really bad now, so probably I am not going to talk about that right now, nor am I gonna until I figure out what is happening. I'm not going to write about it either, so I am just going to leave any of that out until I know what is to happen about that.

CO: But you were talking about your sister Anne. And Anne is the daughter of…

CC: Marianne Curry, Daddy's second wife in Greensboro. And then, when Daddy was working in textiles in Chile and in, I have to get my years straight here but he and Maryanne and Anne were in Greensboro, and I was in there for Christmas vacation, and Daddy was always a big University of North Carolina Fan, even though he didn't go to college there obviously, and he didn't have much to do with it, but he loved the University of North Carolina. And he was a big Charlie Justice, Choo-Choo Justice who was a big football player. When Daddy came home one of the trips in Chile, this would have been in 70 or something, we went to see Chapel Hill play down in Jacksonville, Florida in the, it wouldn't have been the Super Bowl, anyways some bowl game. We were staying at the Roosevelt Hotel

there and the hotel caught on fire and we were staying on the 12th floor and Daddy---Eileen and I were in one room and Daddy and Maryanne were in the room next to it---and Daddy and Maryanne tied together, and Maryanne was pregnant, she had already had Anne Curry, but she tied together a bunch of sheets, because you could feel the heat, and Maryanne was on the end of the rope being lowered down, she fell and she was killed.

CO: Oh no! Oh no!

CC: Yeah, I watched her fall to her death you know.

CO: Connie, oh my gosh, what a story.

CC: Yeah so Anne lost her mother in that fire.

CO: Tell me when again?

CC: I think it was 71. So yeah, so Daddy had to bring Maryanne's body back to Greensboro. Maryanne Fletcher was her name. She had family in Greensboro, so yeah they had her grow up there.

CO: So Maryanne was being lowered and fell. How did the rest of you?

CC: Well there was an announcement that said the fire has been contained at the 12th floor so none of us were. Had we just waited a few more minutes…. So yeah she was buried in Greensboro and Anne stayed with Helen, Maryanne's older sister. Daddy went back to Chile, Eileen was living in Greensboro and she saw Anne and helped Helen take care of her, then…

CO: So she got along with Anne? Eileen and Anne got along?

CC: Well Anne was only 3. Yeah see she was little. Yeah she was a baby. Remember she is only 50 now. So and then Daddy went back to Chile and a couple of years later he met this woman at the church there, named Isabelle and they fell in love and got married, so Anne went to Chile to live with them and really considers Isabelle her mother, and Maryanne died when she was 3, but all of this…

(Cuts off tape and continues)

CO: Now we are back on.

CC: I am skipping some here and we may have to go back. But Daddy, well we were talking about Eileen. So anyway Daddy married Isabelle and she had three boys from a previous marriage, and one of them is, so they became my three step brothers and Phillip, is the one that I lost in 1995, and he had HIV and he died of Aids and…

CO: Were you close to them?

CC: Oh really close to them. Particularly to Phillip. He lived here. He lived upstairs and then lived up the street from me, and I was the one who nursed him through those final days and, my birthday is July the 19th. He died in 95, and I said "you are going to die on my birthday aren't you?" and he said "Yep!" and he did.

CO: You laugh about that. That's incredible.

CC: Well the reason is because that is just like him. For him to say, I said you are going to die on my birthday aren't you, because he was in Hospice, because he was in Hopsice, he knew the end was close but, so and he said, "Yep, I am," and he did, and he and Anne were really close because see they were raised together after Maryanne was killed. Anne went down to Chile to be raised by Isabelle, Daddy and the three boys, until Daddy left and they moved to Florida in like 65 or something like that, and they lived in Florida until he died in 71. So anyway it was . . . but all that to say that after Maryanne died, Eileen went to Chile to look after Daddy until he met Isabelle. And so then she moved back. So I would think that I was talking about sequences there that may have affected Eileen's attitude as she has gotten older.

CO: Well I have a question about what is the most significant even that happened in your life up to the age of twelve. Can you think of something that…

CC: The age of twelve…how…

CO: Well as a child…

CC: What grade would I have been in?

CO: Well that would have been 6th grade…middle school, what we would call middle school now. Basically it is just up til the time you became a teenager.

CC: Where would I have lived, let's see…if I was born in 43…(6:14 trying to figure out how old she would be. She says she does not remember any significant events. 6:02)

CO: And I have some questions about gender awareness, but you really already said that you didn't have brothers until your step brothers came along and then you were pretty advanced I mean…

CC: Well Phillip was 7 and I was like 30.

CO: But you did say that in your household, your parents --- there was never any pressure on you to be a traditional woman, to marry and have children, so you had a sense of…did your parents try to encourage you one way or another toward a particular job or a particular career…

CC: Well there is one thing that I want to tell you talking about Mother and me. When I was in high school I started going with this guy named Arnold Leery, who was a football player, he was a quarter back for Greensboro Senior High, and he used to come over and, my mother just absolutely loved him. And it may have, partially it was because the Leary's were also Irish from New Jersey originally, and so Mother and Daddy got close to Arnold's mother and father, and they used to do things together, and they used to play cards together and everything. But the funniest thing I remember about this is that at some point Arnold got some, I think he may have decided to take golf lessons, but he got some golf shoes, at this men's store where he was working and the four us, Eileen, Daddy, and Mother and I were sitting at the table and eating, and Daddy made some kind of, I was talking about the golf shoes, and Daddy made some comment about golf shoes being really expensive, and Mother said, well I am sure when they are getting older that Arnold will take the metal parts out of them and wear them just as regular shoes. You know how golf

shoes are they have treads, and Mother said I am sure he will take the treads off and wear them as regular shoes, and I thought, “God the guy can do no wrong in her eyes”. Oh they got along really well.

CO: So were you all “going steady?”

CC: Oh yeah, yeah.

CO: So he was a real boyfriend.

CC: Oh yeah, he was a real boyfriend. Yeah. And I went steady with him all 3 years, the whole time I was at Greensboro Senior High. But we had our ups and downs. He had another girl, Jean Garety, and I knew…See we didn’t have sex. I mean I was 25, or in my 20’s before I had sex, which was different from a lot of people in high school but, you know.

CO: You mean people in high school were having sex? Because we have this impression that, and in fact I have many women admit that they got married to have sex, and then of course that was a bad thing, because they discover later that that was not a good basis to choose a partner, but so how would your mother have felt, because many women of that generation did get married right out of high school. In fact they married their high school sweethearts. What do you think your mother would have said if you and Arnold….

CC: No he wanted to get married but I was in high school and I enrolled at a Woman’s College University North Carolina which is right across the street, to be a day student, because Mother and Daddy did not have a lot of money, or I would have been a day student just going across the street and then this friend of mine at church, First Presbyterian Church was telling me about going to Agnes Scott college, this college down in Atlanta, Georgia, which is a women’s college, it is really great and she said you ought to look into it. So I looked into it, and I got a fellowship, I mean I got a little scholarship, and they told me about a student aid program where you work, so my tuition was practically paid for. So Mother and Daddy sight unseen just packed my stuff up and took me down to Agnes Scott. Now mother and Arnold Drove down my freshman year to visit me, and this is so funny,

there was a little hotel in downtown Decatur where they were staying, and there was only one room, and so Arnold and Mother stayed in the same room, and I came down and all three of us slept in the same bed. Isn't that wonderful.

CO: Oh that is a story.

CC: and none of us did anything it was just, all of us, very, very straight and proper, but yeah…

CO: and it had to be a regular full-sized bed.

CC: Oh yes.

CO: That was close sleeping

CC: I know and I had not been in bed with Arnold Leery before in my life. We did a lot of smooching in the back seat and everything but…

CO: What was that like? I can't even imagine?

CC: I don't even remember. Do you mean being in the bed?

CO: Well yeah being in the bed with your mother and your boyfriend?

CC: I don't remember but…

CO: Who slept in the middle?

CC: I don't even remember, we were such an unusual family doing unusual things, I don't even really remember. So anyway right when Arnold realized that my college thing was it, we broke up, and he went to a Quaker College called Gilford College up in Greensboro, and started seeing an old girlfriend, then he got married and we sort of drifted apart. And I dated on and off at Agnes Scott but I remember, just to give an example of how my brain worked… (Tape Cuts Off).

Part II

CC: From Emory, from you know it used to be all male, and they used to send buses from there to pick up Agnes Scott freshmen to take them to

these Fraternity Parties, and I remember telling my friends, I am not going to be herded on the bus like a bunch of cows, and be taken to be dropped at the sorority row, so I didn't date anybody from Emory, that was not my thing.

CO: So who did you date?

CC: Well I would get dates from friends of mind who said Arthur has a friend and he wants me to get a date for you, do you want to go? But dating was just not a big, I loved Agnes Scott. I was busy and I was always doing something, and I was in the choir I mean in the glee club, and I was, I loved studying, and I was in a lot of activities, and I just never…dating was not a big thing.

CO: Can I because, if you feel like it, I would like it, since you've gotten yourself to Agnes Scott, to talk about that because it sounds like that was a transition period for you, and you had become aware of racial issues, or and was that not true of your, but before we get there, I would like to finish this up. Do you recall, was it clear to you when you were at home what your family's values were? I hate to use that term, but do you recall ever questioning that? Your, it sounds like…

CC: Value's about what?

CO: Well everything, religious values, their political values. Were they political? Were they political minded, were they outspoken about that?

CC: No, no they weren't. They didn't. I remember that my father, I clearly remember that my father used to treat the black men who worked at Greensboro dyeing and finishing, when he would bring them home to work he was always totally respectful. He wouldn't make them go to the back door. He just was…and I remember him telling me once along the way when I, somebody knocked at the door who was black and I said something like "Daddy, there is a colored man at the front door," or something like that, and he said that is Joseph Smith, that is not just a colored man. They were not preachy types or political types, or anything, they just didn't understand segregation. They didn't understand the

southern culture. It was just another world. They didn't talk about it. They just weren't, they didn't belong to ACLU, or any groups like that. Daddy and Mother didn't go to church. Daddy and Eileen and I went pretty regularly, but they were not preachy, they were just kind and caring people. And I never, the only person I have ever heard my mother talk bad about, you will love this, were the southern Irish. You know, and that came from the northern Irish Belfast system and she didn't go around saying those dirty Irish and treat them like that but she had been raised by the northern Irish, part of "the sun never sets on the British Empire" type and she wasn't even aware of that. They didn't go to college, so you know they didn't really learn a lot of history, but there was never any real. I was raised to care about everybody. To not look down on anybody. They didn't understand the segregation, and I remember my mother was, we had a friend Sadie Belle Robinson that used to come and help her iron and do stuff, and Mother took out social security and that was unheard of in the 50's. So it wasn't a preachy type of thing, but I learned early on that they care about everybody and everything.

CO: So they had a egalitarian sense about human kind that was way ahead of its…

CC: Yeah but it was never articulated as such.

CO: Yeah but that's even more interesting. So you didn't question that. You think that influenced you by . . . you admired it?

CC: Never thought of it. It was just a way of life.

CO: But that is a very different way of thinking from the culture surrounding you so.

CC: In the 50s yeah.

CO: Did you begin to not question it in the sense that you wanted to challenge it, but question where did that come from? Because people around you, and Agnes Scott is not known for being really…

CC: You know you will love this, my, when I was at Agnes Scott because everything was segregated, I used to have to get permission, written permission from home, so I could attend meetings at Morehouse or Spellman, or anything where it was integrated because it was against the law. And I remember that Mother wrote once and said, "Can't I give you blanket permission to go to these interracial meetings." And then of course Agnes Scott was trying to protect yourself. But you know that was Mother's practical way. To have to get written permission to go across town . . . it just wasn't in their frame of reference. So, but my freshman year, a guy named Pete Dunlap came over from Georgia Tech to talk to a group of freshmen about something called the, they wanted to start something called international news service at Georgia Tech, which is going to be a paper to send to college students all over the world, and it was connected to something called the United States National Students Association which had been founded in 1947 by returning veterans who were going back to college and wanted more say in their curriculum and values and all that. So they started the U.S. N.S.A. in 47, and Pete Dunlap and Georgia Tech-Emory, there are a lot of schools involved in it. Until 51 or 54, when the school desegregation decision was passed, and a lot of the white schools dropped out because they had decided that the N.S.A. was communist oriented and that you know, the whole white power and all that had something to do with…so a lot of them dropped out of N.S.A., Agnes Scott never dropped out. So when Pete came over in 51, and asked for people to come to meetings at Georgia Tech to work on this international news thing with N.S.A. I went partially because you know I get free transportation to meet cute guys at Georgia Tech, so it was a double motive. And then at the end of my freshmen year, Pete said we need somebody to go to the National Student Congress which was being held at the University of Indiana, they always held the national congresses in the middle of the country so the students could come from all over the country. The summer congress which lasted for 10 days, so I went out, and represented the international students at this congress, but my roommate was a black college student from Xavier and here it was 1952 and I have a black roommate right, so.

CO: You mean when you went to the congress, your roommate was black?

CC: Yeah, yeah. And then I came back and I met students from Spellman, you know all of the black colleges here, and that was when I would go to meetings. Student government meetings and that was when I had to get permission from home to go to these integrated meetings. And Agnes Scott was really great, because they weren't sure what I was doing but I was such an ideal Agnes Scott student. You know I would make straight A's, I was involved in stuff, and they never questioned what I was doing or why. They never called my hand on it. They were just very supportive you know when I was. And I got to go to an N. S. A. congress…

CO: Were you the only student at Agnes Scott that was actively involved?

CC: In the National Student Association? Um, I was only student body president one year, so I think the student body presidents the two years before me went to the congresses.

CO: And what backgrounds did they have? Were they Georgians?

CC: I don't remember? I don't know. But Agnes Scott stayed in N.S.A. even when Georgia Tech and the rest of them all dropped out, they stayed and one of the few white colleges, that and Barry College up in Rome stayed on, but most of the white college's dropped out when they decided the N.S.A., because of its stand on integration, or desegregation back then, that it was communist infiltrated. So…

CO: Which was the kiss of death to anything?…

CC: And back then yeah, yeah. So… (49:43)

CO: Ok, it's day two of Constance Curry's interview in Atlanta, GA and she's telling me a story that she remembered after we parted yesterday. And so we're just going to start, and I'm not really sure where we're starting but it does not matter, so Connie, what came to mind?

CC: Well you were asking me about growing up and any ideas or anything that might have happened about the racial situation and where my parents might have been an influence, and everything . . . One really key story that

I forgot to tell you about is when I was in the 4th grade in Greensboro, NC. Do you remember going down the cafeteria aisle and there was a guy named Doug who was a big class bully type, and he called one of the servers behind the serving thing, "Nigger." And I remember turning around to him and said, "Doug you should not call that woman a Nigger. That woman is just as good as your mother." Fourth grade. Now I remember, I don't know why I remember, because I wasn't that brave or striking a blow for freedom or for the fact that I had on---had worn a brand new, brown and yellow rain coat that day. It was brown and had a yellow collar and yellow lining. And at play period he pushed me into a mud puddle after the comment in the cafeteria. And I never will forget, I had to take my brand new raincoat home all splashed with mud. But there again, what precipitated a fourth grader to say that, except that I've already told you there's nothing specific. They were very . . . I don't know.

CO: Maybe that specific application of the principle egalitarianism, but apparently the principle, was just so strong and compelling that…

CC: Correct me now it did occur to me, . . . I have wondered if perhaps being a child of immigrants makes a difference in people, because I remember when I read the Constitution of the United States you know in school, we studied the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and I don't remember specifically, but it may have occurred that golly, here that they say all this that this is how it is supposed to be in this country, and I don't remember consciously ever thinking this, it may have been subconscious you know. I am wondering if immigrants pay more attention. I remember learning about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights because it's not their country, but that's just me speculating.

CO: Except for the fact that all of us are immigrants. So it had to have something to do with your parent's actual experience in Ireland, and so they were close enough to that past that the Constitution had more meaning for them than say two generations later, two generations removed from that experience in being immigrants.

CC: And then the other thing is, I have often wondered about the influence of Sunday school on people, because you know when you go to Sunday school and church, and you hear and you sing, “red and yellow black and white, they are precious in his sight.” I mean the whole white Christian ethic in the south just didn’t enter into daily life when it came to black people. You know, so I don’t remember specifically there again hearing that song and thinking, “Golly, God and Jesus say everybody is equal.” But I did go to Sunday school pretty seriously after we moved to Greensboro, and I remember you I know going to Sunday school regularly. But I don’t ever remember ever making any separation between that and equal rights or human rights or. I just was speculating on that last night yeah.

CO: I speculate on it endlessly trying to figure it out, you know. But there is, I wish I could figure out what is it that separates the people who . . . because I have a woman she can just use that very example of taking that song from Sunday school to heart, and believing it, and that shaped her racial values, but she wasn’t an activist. She didn’t get into the streets or commit her life to activism. I think you could say she was somewhere on that…if paternalism is somewhere in the middle, that she might have been slightly left of that. But what is it that takes somebody from being aware, and taking to heart those messages that are presumably from religion, and making them simply… There is a passage from a book I’ve read recently on how children in the south, in the new south have learned Jim Crow. Both black and white children, by Jennifer Ritterhouse and she says in part, it’s not an oral history, she is reading peoples writings, and she quotes one young man whose parents would not allow him to use the word, the N word, and so he says you know that was despicable, the whole lynching crusade, and people who are virulently racist. His father would dissociate himself from that. But she said just then on later, but the family did nothing to fight racism. They just, they were wed to decency. They didn’t like the violence. But there is something there, the gradations of understanding and gradations of application of that understanding, and so that’s what I am trying to probe to. And so your memories from childhood are telling and…

CC: Well particularly this thing about telling Douglas Gilly you know, you have no right, that woman is just as good as your mother you know.

CO: Yeah where did that come from?

CC: I have no clue, no clue. So anyway I think we, I want to go to Agnes Scott now, because that is where then that my conscious and activism, not activism but being involved in interracial stuff really started, and I was telling you about going to the National Student Association Congresses after my freshmen, sophomore, junior years and then, and then my senior year right before I left my Fulbright, I had a Fulbright to the University of Boredou in 1955 after I graduated. But it was at the NSA Congresses where I was actually in interracial situations because black colleges were members and because NSA was against segregation. They passed resolutions calling for desegregation in higher education, and all kinds of active things, and then in 19, when I was elected chair of the great southern region of NSA, it was I guess the summer of 55, oh no the summer of 54, because I think I told you that after the supreme court decision in 54 most of the white schools, in the south, dropped out of NSA, so when I came to be the chair of the great southern region, it was mostly black colleges that were members, and then Agnes Scott stayed in and Barry stayed in, but a majority of the white schools, like I remember Florida State dropped out, Georgia Tech, Emory, all of those, so it was just a few of us. And I held a meeting at the YMCA downtown that was predominately, mostly white people. They did hold integrated meetings there, and I was telling you yesterday that the, and I had been to many integrated meetings, and had gone to meetings…had gone to a lot of meetings at the black colleges and how tickled my mother got, she had to keep writing permission for me to go but of course, since everything was segregated by law, Agnes Scott was really just trying to protect their whatever. But when I held the regional, the great southern regional conference of NSA, when lunchtime came, and the student body president at Morehouse and Spellman, and a lot of people from Xavier and other friends of mine, when it came time for lunch, there is no place to eat together, including at the YMCA, which wouldn't allow us even to have a meal there. So when it came time and it is very vivid in my mind the black, my black friends came out and left to go to Auburn Avenue, and we came out and realized that we couldn't, and that's when it struck me so clearly

that my feelings were not only about the laws, and the what segregation was doing, and this that an the other. It was the fact that it was a way of life it kept me from being able to eat with my friends. So that was when it hit me that it was a two way street. That it was not just a system that hurt black people; it hurt white people as well. And that was kind of an interesting revelation you know. It didn't change my attitude, didn't make me do anything more strongly, just a slight revelation.

CO: Yeah that's a, you are an adult by then, a young woman.

CC: Yes, I was in college.

CO: So you had a much broader understanding. Do you think that the incident when you were in the fourth grade of getting-back lash to standing up for this. Did that stick with you? I mean did you begin to question the cost of…?

CC: No.

CO: No? So where did that courage come from?

CC: I have no clue. I told you that I was, because who knows because I have always spoken my mind. So and I guess I learned that from Mother and Daddy, to be myself. And I often in thinking back, and you will see this as I tell you the rest of this, that part of my doing what I have done in terms of racial situations, a lot of it has to do with being in the right place at the right time. I mean look at…so after I graduated from Agnes Scott, and I go on the Fulbright, and I am in France for a year, and then I come back and I have a fellowship to Columbia University. And I go up there to study, I was going to get a masters in history or political science. I didn't even have any strong goal, except I have always loved school, and I had a scholarship, and it seemed exciting to you know go to New York and I stayed in touch with NSA people who had become good friends, not on a, "what are you all doing now?" "What's going on in terms of your academic freedom stand, desegregation stands?" I just stayed in touch with them… Cynthia, what's Cynthia's last name? Anyways she and Al Lowenstein who was one of the presidents and other people I would call and stay in touch with them.

Several of them lived in New York, so I would see them and just keep up with what is going on. But when, in and I told you yesterday the story of my mother going to the movie with Uncle Harry, and dying in the movies, and then I left Columbia and came home to Greensboro to stay with Daddy and Eileen, and then the following August, Eileen was working and Daddy was working so I kind of kept the house and took care of stuff and then I got a call that August from Al Lowenstein who was from the University of North Carolina, and one of the past presidents of NSA and he had gone to work for the college branch of the American Association for the United Nation in New York which was called the Collegiate of the United Nations and it had been founded, one of the founders was Eleanor Roosevelt, and the whole purpose of that was to convince people in this country about the importance of the United Nations, and to get them to support this country's participation in the United Nations. And this would have been the late 50s and there again that as another if you were for, and particularly in the south, if you were for the United Nations, you bordered on being Comm…you know to the right. And I can remember when, after Al called me up there for an interview to take his place as field secretary, I remember him telling me about passing signs when he was traveling in Texas, saying get the United States out of the United Nations. It was just very controversial. And really, really, you know there as something wrong if you believed in the United Nations. It was so strange when you think back on how conservative. What a strange stand that was on the United Nations. But anyway, I got the job and moved to New York, and I worked there and there again, I stayed in touch with,… you know my job was to travel all around the county and organize model United Nations sessions which were funded, that was where students would…

CO: Colleges?

CC: Yeah. That was where you got college students to represent various countries, and then hold a mock United Nations meeting and have a talk on issues. And that was really great. I traveled all over the country from Seattle to the Mid-South to New England, and everywhere and then worked in, I had a little apartment in New York and I got to meet Eleanor Roosevelt. In fact she used to come down the hallway, and I would be sitting there on

my typewriter and I remember I would automatically stand when she would walk by the door.

CO: She is a saint to so many people, myself included.

CC: Well and listen do you know that I am trying to find John Bodiger(sp???) which is her nephew? To find out what year it was, that he was head. He was a student at a college in New England, and he was president of the Collegiate Counsel of the United Nations. We had an annual meeting and John invited the staff of CCUN over to Eleanor Roosevelt's house, at Christmas one night, and I can remember sitting on the floor. A little group of us with Eleanor Roosevelt in the chair, and she read us Charles Dickens Christmas Carol.

CO: No.

CC: Yep.

CO: Oh my God can I touch you.

CC: So yeah and I remember I always used to…

CO: Was that at Val-Kill, that home?

CC: I don't know! And that is why I am trying to reach John because I want to put it in my memoirs, yeah I don't know where it was. Val-Kill?

CO: Val-Kill. He built her…

CC: For some reason it seems to me as if it was an apartment in New York so I don't know. But anyway I just thought she was just so really wonderful. And of course there again that was 57 to 59 and I traveled to, I remember going, I don't have a list of all the colleges I visited but I know one of them was Arkansas AM&M which was all black, and I remember it was a Friday night, and I couldn't talk to the student body people because it was Friday night ,and they were having a big dance at the college, but I remember walking into that dance and being so acutely aware of here I was at this student, all black college, and on a Friday night, and it was a big dance. And it didn't feel out of place, but you know, I thought this was a very

strange environment. And I don't remember where it was [inaudible 29:16] and I didn't think strange environment in terms of the racial issues it was, just that I didn't know anybody, and I don't even know why I went to the dance. But I went to a lot of all black colleges. So…

CO: You would go alone? You would be the only person?

CC: Yeah yeah. And then at that point, so I did that for two years and then they were running out of money for the college field secretary, and I had stayed in touch with the NSA people that I knew while I was with CCUN as well, and you know my contact with NSA people helped a lot when I was traveling for CCUN, because a lot of the NSA people were on the campuses that I was visiting for the United Nations job. So in the meantime, Bray Farabee (sp???) from the University of Texas had been elected to one of the Congresses I guess in '57 to be the first southern of the National Student Association ever had. And he was beginning to sense by then, at the University of Texas that there was a, that the issue of segregation and race was beginning to be able to be talked about by college students. And specifically he must have heard something about the University of Texas, but he got money from the field foundation when he became the president of NSA to hold, it was called the Southern Student Human Relations Seminar Sistress(sp????), and he was able to bring – there was enough money to bring 18 students together two weeks prior to the NSA congress in the summer, to have these students do nothing but read and discuss. It was like often eight black and 10 white, or nine and nine, or whatever you had to apply for, and based on your interest and your statement and your letters of support, and all that you would get selected, so he held a seminar for 18 southern students, black and white the summer of 58 and the summer of 59. And then the field foundation based on the reports from those seminars and what these students would do when they went back to their campuses, black and white, write editorials or do stuff or whatever. He got a grant from the field foundation to set up a permanent office here in Atlanta called, and name it the Southern Student Human Relations Project. And as they called me and said hey we are setting up an office in Atlanta called the Southern Student Human Relations Project and we are looking for a director, do you want to go? And my job with CCM was

phasing off, and I said sure that is great. So that's what brought me to Atlanta in 1960.

CO: Fortuitous time.

CC: Yeah. And of course I was, and it is so interesting because I was in Greensboro, picking up my stuff, I can't remember if I already told you this story, but I was picking up my stuff at my sister's, at Eileen's, picking up some clothes and stuff that I left up there, and I was driving down one of their main streets and I heard on the radio, "Four students from A&T college are seated at lunch counters at Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro." And I thought that is so strange. And of course that was the beginning of the Sit-ins. This was February 1st 1960, and here I had already moved to Atlanta, right. So that changed everything. I came back to Atlanta started to settle down. Donna McGinty, my roommate, came to be my assistant and found a little office downtown, and then the next thing you know the sit ins are sweeping across the south, and I had an advisory committee that I had inherited from Ray Farabee, because this advisory committee helped him mold the two human relations seminars, and get professors to go to that, and stuff like that, and then I inherited that and Rufus Clement who was the president of Atlanta University was on my committee. Now in the meantime Lonnie King had emerged at Morehouse as the student leader for Morehouse, which was where Julian Bond was at the time. And he and Julian were talking and decided that they wanted to stage a sit-in here in Atlanta, and evidently Lonnie went to Dr. Clement, and Dr. Clement told him that me and the NSA project, and I quoted Lonnie who I talked to him the other day. He said Dr. Clement said you should look up Connie Curry because she will know white students as well because of this special project. So Lonnie called me, and that is how I got involved with the Atlanta Student Movement, and started going to all of their meetings, and trying to help them find white students to join in. I was not successful with the whole thing but…

CO: Are some of your Agnes Scott contacts still around? Or did you have Agnes Scott contacts?

CC: Well I remember maybe calling Carrie Standard who was dean, and she was very "medicine" about it. Now later on, I can't even remember if I contacted her, but there were a couple of students from Agnes Scott who came in and participated in the picketing at Riches, and I was there as an observer, and I will never forget it was pretty scary, because the clan was marching on the other side of the street. And there was a white…Anna Avelle (sp?????) was that her name? I can't remember, but there's a white student from Agnes, well there is a student from Agnes Scott, walking in the picket line across at riches, and I can remember being kind of scared for her, but I don't think I was responsible for getting her to that march. But anyway that was my. . . And then my other role was to observe. I was you know sort of the official observer at a lot of these evens because my advisory committee had forbidden me to get involved with direct action and to go to jail. They said, "Look Connie, we've got field foundation money." Which is fine with me I had no desire to be, you know, participate in direct action, and the interesting thing I observed, and I have written about it every time is, I was never made to feel, you know in the movement, what was the phrase, your body, you have to put your body into it. Lonnie, or Julian, or John Lewis, none of the SNCC people *ever* made me feel guilty, or like I was never really part of it because my body wasn't in it, and I never went to jail. I never got any of that. Of course I was older, and then quickly after the SNCC conference at Shaw University in 1960 where, you know which was when Eleanor Baker and I started getting close, when SNCC came back to Atlanta and organized the temporary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Noah and I were chosen to be the "adult advisors." And I was the first white woman to be involved in SNCC in an official capacity.

CO: Where does that rank in your official capacities in terms of what you consider a contribution?

CC: Where does it rank?

CO: Yeah, I mean you have done so much, and I am sure you know…

CC: Well it all goes back to my participation with SNCC, I mean those years that I was with SNCC, to me, that was the example of, a living example of, the Beloved Community. We had our little SNCC offices, we had several of them along the way, and everybody was welcome there. I remember I would get so tickled when I would go to meetings down on Auburn Avenue there would be people, women and men from the north, there was a guy named Jim Monsonis, the National Student Christian Federation, and Herlith(???) Jenson from New York who came down, he was from another national organization. There were students from abroad that would drop in that wanted to learn about it, and it was just always milling with people and everybody was made to feel so welcome. And my two lasting memories from those four years I was on the temporary, I was on the executive committee, and went to all the meetings for hours and hours and hours and we would sit there because Ella Baker was really intense, she really believed in consensus and she never said here is what we are going to do now. I never will forget when they were debating whether or not to do voter registration or direct action, you know they were arguing back and forth and Bob Moses was saying, "we've got to do direct action." And somebody else was saying but, "the Southern Regional Council just got money for voter registration, we need to do that." And Ella, you know in her wisdom finally said, "Why don't we do both?" You know so it was just, it was really, . . . and they would talk for hours and hours and hours trying to reach a consensus, and it was just such a great four years to be…now my real job of course was running the U.S. the Southern Student Union Relations Seminar. I don't mean the seminar I mean the project which meant I had to organize four more seminars the four years I stayed with them. And I traveled to campuses, but rather than just to get students to come together to talk about things it was now an option to have students be able to participate in what SNCC was doing, which was picketing, direct action, voter registration, all of these things so there was always a little cadre at the white colleges that I went to who were interested in becoming very involved. Yeah. So that, and then the other thing I noticed during those four years, besides this aspect of the Beloved Community and the caring-ness the sort of open caring-ness and not really being an organization. They weren't concerned about money. They weren't

concerned about publicity, good publicity, it was just sort of a movement, that is what it was called rather than you know the organization trying to perpetuate itself like in the NAACP or CORE or anything like that.

CO: Now in those four years, how many white people were involved, actively involved here in Atlanta? In SNCC?

CC: Well all over the south there were, I mean, like Penny Patch had well you know in the book *Deep in Our Heart*. They were all involved, some of them were just involved in 64, but there were others that were actually staff of SNCC, yeah. And I would see them, but here in Atlanta, involved with SNCC as such, I mean on the staff, or on the executive committee, I don't recall, I mean there were people with the Anti-Defamation League who were white, you know the Jewish guys, and then a few YMCA people maybe, but they were just supportive I mean they were…

CO: I remember seeing a photograph with the Atlanta contingent of SNCC and…

CC: You mean the Atlanta Student Movement.

CO: Yes, Julian Bonds is kind of right in front and it maybe, I don't know, 25 or 30 people. It didn't seem like there were many white folks.

CC: No, there weren't now, likeBob ZellnerI said, staff people came by because they all knew he was the first male white southerner. He came in 61 and he came in the Albany, Joan Browning went on the Albany freedom ride, Casey Hayden, who was and is one of my best friends still, she joined SNCC as a staff member. She was on the Freedom Ride to Albany. So there were…

CO: Was it Zellner that got beaten so badly almost permanently…

CC: Who?

CO: Zellner, Bob Zellner, who was beaten so…

CC: He was beaten several times. Yeah.

CO: Well this one time, he is featured in the *Eyes on the Prize*, but maybe it's not him. I was a white many but I am not sure this man is from the south. Anyways he's uh…his last name starts with a "Z." But he's in that, the Freedom Rides segment.

CC: Yeah he was in the Albany Freedom Ride; I don't think he was in the other Freedom Ride. Yeah. So but the thing I remember the most about those early years, which is true to this day, is the sense of humor. Like Julian and Lonnie, all of those guys, I wasn't as close to...well there weren't as many women involved, but I was really close to a lot of the guys. But Jim Foreman had a great sense of humor, and they were all so smart. Chuck McDew, all the guys I met they were, you know most of them hadn't even graduated from college, but they were very smart, and I know exactly what I mean by that except they just were. They were smart, they were funny, and then the third element that I remember the most about, that kept us all going, was the music. And when we, it was so touching when I look back on it, because when we stood and sang, "We shall overcome," we really believed it. It was one of the things that causes me, we were talking about it yesterday, there was so much pain. Not pain, but anyways, it makes me sad today, because we didn't overcome. You know. And we, but it doesn't matter, because we believed it so strongly back then, and so those are…the music, the humor, and the brains of the people that are involved in the movement are among the most outstanding. And then there are all kinds of stories. My role as an observer and some of the horror, like seeing people beat up, and when I was in Nashville, I actually saw the sit in at Woolworths when the white mob came in and burned cigarettes on the backs of the students at the counter. And Chuck McDew, who is one of my best friends from those days, used to, when we were in SNCC, there were the people who believed in non-violence as a way of life, and that was Jim Lawson, and all of the contingents from Nashville. Was Diane Nash and Josh Lewis, and Bernard Lafayette, to this day who is involved in non-violent movement. But they all believed in it as a way of life and Chuck McDew, particularly after he heard about the Nashville thing he would say, "Look! I believe in, I can do non-violence, and I can keep from hitting somebody, but don't ask me to love anybody that is putting a cigarette out

on my back. So I don't have to love them." So there was always this break in SNCC, or this difference in SNCC between people who really believed in it as a way of life, and thought that you needed to love who was doing this, and those of us who believed it as a tactic, because if we were violent, if we respond with violence everybody would have been decimated. Right so it is an interesting thing there and they didn't fight over it. It was just the way you responded to non-violence. But I observed a lot of demonstrations in my four years and it was between doing that and working on my own work with the NSA that I did for those years and then in, I guess it was the summer of 64 when freedom summer, they start organizing for the freedom summer, Al Lowenstein finally met with Bob and said, I think Al was at Stanford at the moment and he said, "I can help you get the students from, you know, Stanford and all over the country, to come down to Mississippi to work in Mississippi." And so that is what started freedom summer. And the summer before that, I mean and the spring before, so it would have been the spring of 64, I was thinking that it was time for me to move on from NSA, because I was getting, how old would I have been, well I was 30, and I was thinking that I am getting a little older from being a student, and it is time to think about change, and Jean Fairfax who was working for the American Friend Service Committee, whom I had met through various meetings down here. She was based in Philadelphia. And she knew that I had met so many people and was really active and was trusted by the movement people and she knew that I had met Dr. King at various times, and so they created a position called the Southern Field Representative for NSA, and they had an office, a regional office here, I mean an Atlanta office of the American Friend Service Committee, and that was where I was based in the Spring of 64 so that was my first…

CO: Now was that the Quaker?

CC: Yeah. And they are very low key, and they have been around for like 100 years and they, I am talking about if I do my memoirs, I think it will be called. *Proceed as Each Way Opens,* because one of their sort of signal sayings is that is the way you go through life, you proceed as way opens and to bring about change, but anyways, they were just a great group. And I had known Jean and I was familiar with the work of the Quakers, and the

American Friend Service Committee over the years, so that was what they wanted me to do and then, you have to remember that, in the June, in May of 64, was it May, that the Civil Rights Act was passed?

CO: Uh huh.

CC: And part of that Civil Rights Act was to say that if you wanted your school district to continue to receive federal funds you had to come up with a school desegregation plan. So that was Jean and her supervisor at NSA, Barbara Moffatt, who actually hired me at Jean's suggestion, but Barbara Moffatt and I are also very, very close. She was fabulous, she was head of the Community Relations Division and under the, whatever the Community Relations Division did she pushed school desegregation in there as a biggie and that's why they wanted to have a southern field person. So from 64, until 75 I was southern field representative from the AFSC, and that's what I mean about me never having to ever really look for a job. See the NSA said, "Oh why don't you come we just happen to have this thing." And then the American Friend Service Committee said, "Oh we just got this opening, why don't you come be our so and so." And then later on when I went to work for the city, the exact same thing happened. I had left AFSC because there was no more money and Maynard Jackson, who had become mayor of Atlanta was looking for somebody to be the director of a new thing he had started which was called the Bureau of Human Services, and this friend I had met at FCLC said, "Oh you know he's looking for a woman, and a white woman would be great. Why don't you come and interview for the Director for the Bureau of Human Services?" and I said, "Oh okay." So it was just right place at the right time. And of course Julian Bond and John Lewis gave me incredible recommendations to Maynard Jackson. And then when Andy came following Mayor Jackson…I had met Andy back in the 60's, so when Andy became mayor he said, " Why don't you stay on as my Director, Bureau and I said, "Oh okay."

CO: Andrew Young, okay.

CC: Yeah.

CO: Proceed as the way opens.

CC: Not the way, it's proceed as way opens.

CO: As way opens. Okay. As a, that's the sort of…

CC: That's one of the tenants of the Quaker thing.

CO: Okay, does that, in any way in your mind, conflict with protest? Because when you protest you have to, in some senses, make a way. And the way does not always open. You get a lot of backlash.

CC: Yeah but this wasn't a political thing, this was a, something about how you ran your life.

CO: Okay.

CC: I don't know, it was just…it's in the context of Quaker philosophy that I first saw it, yeah.

CO: I love that, it's just that when things seem to be in conflict, I don't think they actually are in conflict, but in trying to work them out, reconcile them with words, it is often difficult. But okay the really next section was all about your work so, and that's what you have been talking about. That takes through '70.

CC: You are saying what I did from 64-75, was basically work on making, trying to make title VI of the Civil Rights Act be real, and that was when I met Mae Bertha Carter, and that's when I met like worked with 100 families to let them know what their rights were, too, I traveled all across the south and we would go to visit when we would hear about something bad that happened to a black family down in, near Waycross, Georgia. Is it Waycross? It was near Valdosta. It may have been…I can't remember. There is a woman down there who enrolled her child, a black woman…I don't remember her name, but she enrolled her first grader, her son, in a white school, and when she got up the next morning there was a dead bear on her porch. I can't remember the name of the little Georgia town. The stuff that was going on after 64 to these families that tried to implement Title VI was terrible, and I would record every trip that I went on, and all of the reports of these trips, and I would write them up for Jean and Barbara

in Philadelphia, and you know that was how I met Winston Hudson in the book I was showing you, that was translated in Japanese because back, even before the 64 Civil Rights Act, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund was filing suits, and in Lee County. And but of course it took so long in court that it was wonderful when the, one Title VI said that you had to do it or you don't get any money, but of course a lot of them ignored it, and it had to do dumb things. They would pass things that they knew none of the black people would take advantage of.

CO: Where are all of those records? Where's all of that?

CC: All my reports? In Philadelphia.

CO: At an office?

CC: At the American Friends Service Committee National Office. Yeah.

CO: Because, Oh God, AFSC used to make you write the most detailed reports, and of course they were great in retrospect because it gave the name of every leader, everybody you know, and I would say today we visited so and so, and they told us that their uncle's child had been in two Mississippi counties that had desegregated, and they filed their thing to desegregate in August, but by the time school opening came in September, everybody had withdrawn because they had been threatened with losing their welfare or physically threatened, or to be moved off of the plantation, so those two counties did not have a single black child that first year. And this went on and on and on and I traveled those years from 64 on, and then another interesting aspect of my work after that was that we began to realize that the intimidation and everything was waning a little bit, so we started this project again using the grant from the Field Foundation that AFSC had gotten to do the school desegregation work with Ford's permission, we got to do this experiment called the Rural Income Development Project. And the idea was to try to get a black owned enterprise of some sort going on in…(Part ends).

Part III

CC: …worked on was called Lowndes Wood Products in Lowndes County Alabama to get a pallet factory going, so we got several consultants, hired several consultants, to go down the board of black people in the surrounding areas who were the board members for the Lowndes Wood Products and got incorporated, set up all the stuff, invested…We had a lot of investors that said they would help, and they started this wood project thing which make the pallets, and then ship them off and bring in…and they would hire all local people. So it became an income producing, black owned income producing, very rare. I have to go get some water…

CO: Sure. I have a bottle of water in the car? You want?

(Takes water break)

CC: (Cuts back in here) School?

CO: Well you told me you wanted to but I don't think you told me you did?

CC: I went to law school and I didn't really want to, I just did.

CO: Maybe you did tell me?

CC: In1984 I was working for city government, and I had been called to jury duty, and I remember the lawsuit. I was thinking, it was a young black guy who had been accused of robbing a filling station when he was out jogging one morning, and I never will forget it. In the trial, it said they were saying that he had done it. That he had stopped when he was jogging and he had stolen something. And there was no, there were no eye witnesses. There was no evidence that he had stolen anything and they still convicted him. This is 84, and I hung the jury. I tried to hang the jury but they still, I can't remember what the outcome was, but anyway, I thought, "Golly, even I could have done better as the defense attorney because there was no, there was no evidence." And about that time I had saw an advertisement about night school at Woodrow Wilson College of Law. Now I have never had any pretense, or dreams, about being a lawyer. I am not the type, I had a terrible stereotype of lawyers during the movement, because there was so few of us that, so few of them, particularly white lawyers that would even help us, few black. There weren't many black lawyers. Movement

people had a terrible time getting lawyers to represent them. So I didn't have any great pretense about what lawyers could do or anything but I loved school. I have always loved it, I have always, I remember everything, and I could read, blah, blah, blah and I thought, "I think I will go really just for the hell of it." So I went to law school for 3 years at night, every, three times a week for three nights, and I was much older than everybody there. It was a night school but it was still much older. And because I had no pretense, no desire to be a lawyer, once I got through with the requirements, I could take whatever I wanted, so I took international law, and I took the history of the law, and I took all of these great courses, and I graduated in 84, did I? Yea. So anyway and I took the bar in July and, law school was really easy for me, because I had lived through a lot of it. I never will forget, in Constitutional Law we were studying about a case at the Heart of Atlanta Motel, and I raised my hand and I said, "Oh yeah some of my friends were involved in on the sit in at the heart of Atlanta Motel." Of course all of these young kids looked around at me and thought, "Who is this crazy older woman in here." So anyway that helped bring about, you know the whole public accommodations desegregation. But I loved it and there were 600 people who took the bar, and 200 of us passed it. Yeah so anyway, I passed the bar and got my degree and I said in something I wrote for my memoirs I said, "I finally discovered in 1990 why I went to law school. It was so I could get a post Doc because you see you get your Juris Doctor. And even though I never say it in front of the court I have done a lot of work in the legal system getting people out of prison and stuff. But I would never make it in court, at all. But anyway…

CO: So why don't you think you wouldn't make it in court?

CC: Oh because I am too out…I don't have the control, and the step by step, I am much more about wanting to get things done, and over with and you know some of the junk that goes on. I would say, "Are you out of your mind." Or something dumb like that, so I've never…I'd write letters for people, and I've gotten money for people, and I do will…I do favors for people, but anyway the main thing is that it got me into as a post doc and into the University of Virginia.

CO: So in retrospect you realized what compelled you to go to law school.

CC: Yeah, but yeah so anyway, Mary Ellen and Penny were both there and we got really close. The three of us did.

CO: And "there" being Mississippi? When you were doing the civil rights?

CC: Excuse me?

CO: You said you got very close there, is this in Mississippi when you were writing *Silver Rights?*

CC: Now that was down in my beach cottage there. They came to visit there.

CO: Is that where you wrote the book?

CC: No, at the University of Virginia when I was with them. No I mean I started…I got a fellowship to Carter Woodson Institute as a Doctoral Candidate. They got two post docs and two pre docs at the Carter Woodstown Institute every year, and the year I got it, Penny and Mary Ellen had the pre docs. But I spent a year at the University of Virginia from 90-91 working on *Silver Rights* and trying to figure out how to write a book, you know.

CO: But so had you done the research for it? I mean had you gone down…

CC: No I hadn't done anything? What made me want to do it was, I think I told you the other day that I had gone to a conference in 1988 and Mae Bertha was there, and I asked her how everybody was because I hadn't seen her since 75 when I quit the American Friend Service Committee, and went to work for city government. We had this great reunion, and that's when she told me about all 8 of the kids graduating, and that seven of them graduated from the University of Mississippi. And that's when I said I have to write this story. Partially because I knew that the American Friend Service Committee had my day by day records of my work with them up in Philly, so that was when I quit my job and, went, in 1990, and went to the University of Virginia to try to find out how to write this book, and I don't

think I told you yesterday about Penny Russell who'd just absolutely thought I had hung the moon because I had done so much work in the civil rights movement. And we went to a cocktail party at UVA, and there were a lot of, this was remember it was 27 years ago, and remember now they were mostly white older history professors there. But Penny was milling around and meeting people, and she was dragging me around with her and she said, "This is Connie Curry, and she was in the Civil Rights Movement and she is writing about Mae Bertha Carter, who integrated the schools in Mississippi, in the Delta Mississippi, and Connie was there!" and this one professor said, "How can she write about it if she was there?" And I thought when you were talking about oral history the other day, this is when got oral history really "in" and popular bit by bit, and is so much more authentic than…Those professors thought, those history professors back in the day thought that it was the documents and what you could find on paper that helped you write history. And the idea of someone telling their story, but it was certainly threw me off when he said, "How can she write about it if she was there?"

CO: The next generation is the generation that wants to kiss your feet, because they feel that, you know, they just feel so indebted, and I realize that that seems like a real gap, but it's…those stuffy people, thank God, are dying off.

CC: I know that's what I am saying…yeah. And oral history now there is, you know, there is the Oral History Association, it's what you are doing, and it's really acceptable and is probably one of the most authentic thing, although peoples' recall can obviously get fuzzy and not good, but it is just as authentic in many ways as what you find in boxes and books and hearsay and all that.

CO: Something shapes what you recall; the experience is still valid no matter.

CC: Yeah so that's why Penny and Mary Ellen and I have stayed so close over the years, and they came down to visit me…

CO: Were they history? Were their PhD's in history?

CC: Yeah. Penny was writing about…who is the famous black woman besides Mary McLeod? Ida?

CO: Ida B. Wells?

CC: Right, but Penny had a slight stroke, and some kidney problems so she became sick a long time ago, and she lives in Arizona with her brother now, but Mary Ellen wrote a book about the prison system in Alabama, and she was recently on a television program with that guy you were talking about yesterday.

CO: Blackman?

CC: Yeah

CO: Oh good!

CC: Yeah, that's Mary Ellen that I was talking about. And you said it aired such and such dates?

CO: February 13th.

CC: Yeah and you told me I could get a DVD of it.

CO: Yeah.

CC: Well that's Mary Ellen. I believe she is in the DVD.

CO: I bet yeah. A lot of historians…I think that is his way of sort of bridging that divide…

CC: So uh where was I when I went to get water that made me think of these photographs? I think I had just said that I was telling you about the American Friend Service Committee work…

CO: Yeah.

CC: And that went on after we transferred sort of from school desegregation to the Rural Income Development Program, and we got the wood products back restarted, and we were working on some other stuff but by that time the Ford Foundation felt that things had let up a little bit in

the south, so they stopped their grant to the American Friend Service Committee in 75. And that's when I…Well things weren't as blatant as they were and people's houses weren't being bombed…

CO: But then it went underground and became insidious…

CC: Yeah, but how are you going to convince the Ford Foundation of that?

CO: Right.

CC: So anyway that's when I came down, came home, I mean, that's when I was here trying to figure out what I was going to do next, and I was down at my little beach cottage on Hunting Island just trying to figure it out, and that's when I got this call from Bill Rutherford telling me that Maynard Jackson was looking for a Director for Human Services, and I came home and interviewed Maynard and Julian Bond and John Lewis and everybody was giving me these pretty glowing recommendations, and that's when he hired me as Director of the Bureau of Human Services.

CO: The Director of Bureau of Human Services….

CC: Bureau of Human Services in the government yeah…

CO: So that's what you call your city government job. And that was in 75 or 76?

CC: 75 yeah…and I stayed there 'til 90 when I went to the University of Virginia and during my time the Human Services Director it was just great because I thought, how are you going to ever transition from you know, SNCC and the movement and AFSC where I could do anything I wanted, to a Bureaucracy. I thought, "You will never make it." Well having Maynard Jackson as your Mayor, he was such a great guy, and he was so willing to take on the white power structure, and willing to say, "If you don't have women and black sub-contractors to contractors, so you 're not getting any business in this city." So his affirmative action stuff and everything he did, and I could do anything I wanted and you know, homeless issues, I was able to keep open a downtown day labor center where people could go and get day jobs, and the daycare center for…see it was an 85 percent black

population, as when he was mayor, so he would have been working in this almost black community that had been ignored for many, many years by the white mayors you know, the poverty and all this stuff, and so it was really great. I couldn't do…I remember I called a couple of people in one of the southeast Atlanta neighborhoods, and I said, "Your bill is coming up, I mean the paper, the legislation about getting money for your community center is coming up today. Why don't you bring a bunch of people on a bus and sit in on the city council." So they did that, you know, and so it was just a great atmosphere for me to work in. I didn't feel constrained by a bureaucracy very much. Now City Council, particularly on some of my homeless issues of trying to open shelters and stuff, would say, "No! Not in my neighborhood." Generally speaking I felt free to do what I wanted. So in a way that was just an extension of my working in civil rights in a whole new world.

CO: So that was 15 years. Did they have good retirement plans and that sort of thing?

CC: Yea, that's what I am on now, my pension and social security. Yeah.

CO: And so in the end, in 1990, how old would you have been? Did you retire at retirement age?

CC: I took early retirement.

CO: To be able to write? Did you do that purposely?

CC: Yeah, to go to the University of Virginia and to be able to write, Yeah.

CO: See it's hard to keep it all together in my head as you are telling it. Do you have a VITA where you've got this laid out chronologically? Can I get a copy of that?

CC: Yeah, why don't I just email it to you?

CO: Yeah, that's fine, that's fine.

CC: And I want to email you an article I wrote recently that will being you up to date on the kind of work, and my concerns now about the schools to

prison pipeline, and about the criminal justice system and other stuff so I will email you about both those things.

CO: Where was that published?

CC: Oh, there is something called the Juvenile Justice Institute, and they published it in their magazine recently.

CO: I would like…does it have a bibliography attached to it? Or do you list some recent books?

CC: No.

CO: If you think of some will you send them to me as well? It would just be good to have. It seems like a part of a cycle. The whole prison phenomenon, utilizing the prisoners from their convict lease system. It would be helpful maybe.

CC: Let me borrow your pencil so I can remind myself.

CO: Okay you can't have this one. Did you keep that other one?

CC: Uh yeah.

CO: See it's gone.

CC: Oh! I used it to sign a book for the people, one of the black houses. I was helping Kirk move, and he heard about the book, and so I used it, and I probably took it back in the back. Well how about [uncertain ????] about the prison stuff now and it just happened. I think I told ya when I used to go to OHA, and all of these other things and I would say, why isn't anyone interested in writing about prison history and writing, because that was how we got where we are and there is more women, more people, and more minorities in our prisons than any place in the world. And then, last year, [Bam??Damn???], I start getting emails and these historians are wild. They are so militant.

CO: Well Blackman's book, may have really…I don't know if there is a direct influence, or anything or a direct connection but I do know there was a huge outcry over his claim that…Is that somebody for you?

CC: It's the mail man…yeah.

CO: Okay, so alright that takes you up to, as far as work goes, that takes you up to the writing of *Silver Rights*. So you took an early retirement to really do another kind of work.

CC: And to write this book. I didn't have a clue what that was going to lead to.

CO: So what? Where? When you went to Virginia, it sounds like you took the year to learn how to write the book? Is that what you were…?

CC: Well what was the year at Virginia about?

CO: It was to…the Carter Woodson Institute…a good friend of mine, Pat Sullivan, was one of the people there, and she is a historian, and I just thought I could learn to, I could do research, and I also could learn I guess and get some pointers on how to write a book about history that I have been a part of. And so I didn't do that. I don't think that I started it, so I just came back to Atlanta. Oh, no, because during that period the American Friend Service Committee gave me travel money, because it was their 75th anniversary, and they were trying to relive the part of their stuff like Mae Bertha's life, so they gave me money and of course UVA was happy to have me leave. They didn't go to classes or anything and I got to go to Mississippi and interview all of Mae Bertha's kids, interview her, interview the sheriff, interview the Mayor from back in the 60's, interviewed the teacher Ruby Nell Stansel, who was the math teacher at the white school who said she didn't care about their race, but she was determined that those kids were going to learn how to do math. It was very interesting because six, five, of those kids got jobs in math, in business and math worlds. And I thought if that goes back to Ruby Nell Stansel making them learn.

CO: To do that math?

CC: Do math yeah.

CO: So how did the rest of the people receive you?

CC: What people?

CO: The people in Mississippi who had been part of the effort to stop them from, you know, to challenge Mae Bertha…

CC: Well they didn't know…I mean the Carters had left then, they weren't living in Drew anymore. Well Mae Bertha was…but they were, some of them were hostile, and wouldn't be interviewed…

CO: Yeah, that was what I meant.

CC: Some of them were, but some of them would give me these shallow interviews or would uh…But that's why I, I traveled a lot, and to Toledo to interview Ruth, who was the oldest of the Carter kids, and she didn't stay. She didn't stay to go on to Ole Miss. She wanted out of there, because she was the one who had been the most hurt by seeing her little brothers and sisters dragged through all that and feeling responsible you know.

CO: And so how is she?

CC: She is okay. She is real thrilled about the possibility of the movie being made because of course she's had such a big part in getting the kids to do it. So she's doing okay now, but she was probably the most hurt of all of them yeah. And the others are doing…and I interviewed for the book I interviewed her first five. She had 13 in all, and I interviewed her and Matthew's first five. And so that's what I did that year at Virginia mostly yeah.

CO: Okay so that explains that.

CC: Yeah, and then I came back here in August of '91 and didn't have a clue.

CO: You've been in this place, this house right here since then?

CC: I've been here since 84 yeah, yeah. Did you have a chance to look up midtown? Yeah.

CO: I did not. But I am, it is on my list of…

CC: Where'd you eat supper last night?

CO: It's more complicated than my trip up to Israel.

CC: So I came back and I buckled down and did more interviewing. It is fascinating because the year that I was at the University of Virginia, an old friend of mine from Atlanta was the head of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. I wrote an article for the *Virginia Quarterly Review* about the Carters. And Matt Sobel, who is the publisher at, I mean not the publisher, but an agent, a literary agent in New York, read my article and he wrote and he said, "If you do proceed on, and write a book, we would be interested in publishing it." So that books a big, big, you know thing so I did a book proposal and he's sending it out and Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill said that, "We are very interested in this", and gave me a $20,000.

CO: That "way opening" isn't it.

CC: Yeah yeah. So that was a great help. But the biggest help of all in writing that book was Shannon Ravenel who is the editor at Algonquin Books at Chapel Hill. She was brilliant. And I would send her chapters bit by bit and she wrote me at the very beginning and she said you know, details, details, details. Connie, you have got to make people see what is happening. She said for instance, "What color was the truck that Mae Bertha and Matthew drove when they went to register the kids at the school. What did she have on that day? What did Matthew have on?" And of course what I got to do in response to that was to say things like, "Matthew had on Khakis and a shirt. He refused to wear overalls, because of the stereotype." and said "they went in their green pickup truck." Mae Bertha wore one of her Sunday dresses, you know, so Shannon taught me that, and then the other thing she taught me, which was really fun, which was, "Connie everything,"… and see part of it came from my training and year of reports for the American Friend Service Committee which was reporting, reporting, reporting and Shannon said, "Connie everything does not have to be in chronological order." She said, "The book starts with Mae Bertha's mother and grandmother, and you say and you start off by saying, "Mae Bertha learned much of her courage blah, blah, blah…" and she says,

"You have got to learn to catch the reader's interest." And so you…how that book starts is, *Silver Right's* first line is, "'Go back to your own schools niggers!' shouted the white crowd on the streets of Drew Mississippi in 1965." They were shouting at the bus that drove up, so you know, "Go back to your own schools niggers!" I mean you are into it immediately. Having Shannon as my editor was probably the biggest boon of…She inspired me and then it came easy, plus the fact that I love to write. Writing comes easy, having been taught to put in details and be conscious of color. I need to do that in my own memoirs because there again I find myself reporting, reporting, rather than …

CO: That's poetic prose, poetic prose is what you are doing with that, and you could I bet easily write poetry. Have you ever written poetry?

CC: Oh yeah, yeah a lot when I was growing up in particular. I haven't done anything since I was grown but I used to write some poetry…yeah.

CO: So did you carry that through into the next book you published? The Aaron Henry?

CC: Well what happened was you know people like Aaron Henry whom I met back in North Dakota and Mississippi during the civil rights is we used to…when Winifred and I were traveling around in…Winifred Green, who I met when I was working in Mississippi. She was a white woman from Mississippi, and we were trying to recruit women to try to keep the Jackson Public Schools open, and this was after I started working for AFSC, one of the projects was to try to keep the Jackson Mississippi Schools open, and Winifred and I were driving around, and one time we went to a plantation because we heard this woman might be interested in giving us money or helping us, up in the Delta, and she was not happy, and I don't know where that rumor came from but when we left that plantation, we noticed that there was a truck following us, and they had that rifle you know in the rifle rack, and that was always scary, so we went as fast as we could to Clarksville, where Aaron Henry owned the 5th Street Drug Store, and I had met him several times because he was so active in the movement, and helped bring the student volunteers in the summer of 64, and all that so we

would go to Aaron's drugstore, and I just adored him, and so when he read Silver Rights he contacted me, and said a lot of people want me to tell my story and do my memoirs he said, but I really love your writing, and I would love to work with you. So that was just wonderful because I always thought he was fabulous. But that was how that transpired. And then Winston Hudson, whom I had met in 64, knew about the Mae Bertha Carter book, and knew about my other writing and she said, "Connie this woman who is helping me with my book is letting me down. She is not going to do it. Will you help me do my memoirs?" So that is how that happened, so it was just, one thing led to another, and then in the meantime in '94 Bob Moses was talking to a group of us at the Anniversary of '64 summer, and Bob said, "You all need to be telling your own stories because historians are not always going to get them right. And you all are not going to write your biographies, so just write down your own stories. And that was when Casey Hayden, that was what precipitated *Deep in Our Hearts*. Yeah, I wasn't even going to be part of that at first because I had not been on the SNCC staff, or in the Freedom Summer, but Casey said, "Connie you were the first woman on the executive committee, and the advisory committee you have to be in it." So that is what caused me to be the editor and…

CO: Aren't you glad now that you did?

CC: Oh yeah. People love that book. Yeah, yeah, so anyway, and then Zellner, when he, Bob Zellner -- well you know I did his memoirs. Have you seen that book?

CO: No.

CC: I can show it to you. This was the hardest task of my whole life.

CO: The Zellner Memoirs?

CC: Oh yeah. And it made me realize, well I guess I shouldn't generalize, but, it made me realize why I really… (Fades away as she walks away)…

CO: Made you realize what now?

CC: Why I prefer to work with women. He almost drove me crazy.

CO: Now why is that?

CC: He was so undependable. And he is all over the place you know. He would say, "Oh we missed two publication dates." And I would say, "Bob you've got to send me…" plus the fact I had to go through 10 years worth of his…

CO: Wow this is recent…

CC: I know I had to go through 10 years worth of his stuff. And glean out and put in and correct and just all this stuff, and I would say, "Bob you have got to send me blah, blah, blah." And he would say, "I have to go see about something at Katrina, so I will call you when I get back from New Orleans." And I said… and you know I'm very focused and when I am working on something, so I didn't care about him going to do anything at Katrina. I wanted to get his book done. Yeah so this is but, you know…

CO: Did he ask you to do this?

CC: Yeah.

CO: Ohhh.

CC: It's a fabulous book, it really, really, is and his stories are just wonderful.

CO: Wow so he, see all of these people are celebrities to me because they are featured in *Eyes on the Prize*, and I have probably seen it 150 times and so he's got it. And some of them you can see the humor. The humor does come through him and really does make you wish that you knew these people. I have got this and I've got that, and I need this so I will definitely…

CC: I am trying to…can you tell me the publication date of Mississippi ??? …

CO: This is 2002, first. First published in 2002.

CC: Okay this is 2000. Yeah.

CO: Now how long did this one take to write?

CC: What is the pub date on…no I think that was 90….

CO: 95!

CC: Yeah, 95.

CO: So it took you 5 years? Or, 4 years?

CC: It took me 4 years, yeah.

CO: Wow. Yeah and this is out in paper back isn't it?

CC: Yeah.

CO: My edition is paper back.

CC: So then. So anyway the Zellmer book was the…

CO: So that's been the hardest thing?

CC: Yeah.

CC: Okay, yeah. Oh by the way I get to see anything that you write about right? Because I know I gave you some wrong dates. And so I want to be able to pick those, and give you the correct dates like the difference between 47 and when people were born and stuff…I hope I get to see it because then I get to make the corrections. Yeah.

CO: And then you can pull anything out of it that you want.

CC: Yeah, because I don't want anything in there about Eileen except…

CO: Sure, sure, yeah. Yes you will…but now the agreement that you have 30 days to do that. Will you be able to…?

CC: Sure, okay.

CO: Alright.

CC: And so um. Then the past couple of years I have been working on a lot of the schools to pipeline prisons and going to meetings to see about,

and showing the *Intolerable Burden*, which is the film that is based on *Silver Rights*.

CO: The *Intolerable Burden?* That's a documentary?

CC: Yeah based on that…

CO: When was that done?

CC: In…I think it came out in 2004. $275 it is mostly for libraries but if they give me a uh…They keep on reducing the price as it gets older, so I as the maker of it can get it, but…You can't get your school to buy it?

CO: Are you kidding? We don't have any money. I can't get anything.

CC: But this is wonderful. So anyway, all of that to say…in the meantime I have become…see this is 2004. In the meantime I had become interested in the whole prison issue thing. So this ends up…it tells the Carter story but it ends up with the epilogue is Education vs. Incarceration in this film. So after it came out I started traveling all the time, and speaking on the schools to prison pipeline and showing this all over the country.

CO: Have you worked with Elaine Brown on any of this? The last time I was, knew anything about her that was her project, but she's living here in Atlanta. Have you worked together at all over the last…

CC: Oh yeah. And not on this but she moved to Brunswick, Georgia and ran for mayor, and then was disqualified, and then she never came back to Atlanta. So about 4 or 5 years ago she moved. She moved to Brunswick, but then last year she is now back in California. And she called me and we worked some on the prison stuff that she is going out there. One of which was the hunger strike, and they had a big hunger strike here in Georgia so we've been in touch through email, yeah. So I have spent a long, long, time doing you know working on that.

CO: And when did the project with Emory to donate your papers, when did that come up?

CC: Ummm…well they've had, I don't know how many boxes of mine they have now. I guess I have known Randall Burke at the African American Collection for about 4 or 5 years, so I gave him a bunch of my stuff 4 or 5 years ago and the latest has just been more of my impetus on wanting to get some of this stuff out of here, and Randall has been nice enough to come over and give me some directions on this stuff, but like I said until I get some…

CO: Where did you have it before you pulled it out to go through it?

CC: It was all stuffed in that middle room, but now I have been sorting it and throwing stuff out. That's the main thing. I have been going through it to give stuff away and then I will either give it to Randall for him to organize or I will organize it here myself. Pull some stuff that I may need if I do my memoirs, yeah.

CO: Have you actually…you said you'd organized a table of contents already? So do you have an idea of when you will start writing?

CC: Well I've written a couple of chapters. I wrote one about my time at the University of Virginia, and I have written a chapter about Mississippi and I've written a chapter about um…

CO: And Mississippi, so this would have been 64? Were you there for the Freedom Summer?

CC: Yeah, but that was, I was working, I had joined the American Friend Service Community Staff by then, and that was when we were working on, when I was telling you about working with Winifred Green to organize Mississippians to have peace in the school desegregation. And then after that, the peaceful school desegregation in Jackson. After that it became apparent about the persecution, everything that was going on with what was happening with the black parents, so that was when we shifted to my traveling and working in rural areas with people who were trying to do stuff, yeah.

CO: Where were you when the 4 were murdered in Mississippi? In Philadelphia, Mississippi?

CC: Swarmer and Chaney, I was there.

CO: You were there?

CC: Yeah, and it was funny because there was the three of them, Swarmer, Chaney, and Goodman, and all my friends, Casey and Jane Stembridge, and a lot of my other movement friends were staying in the Freedom House out at Tugaloo, and when we all heard about it, of course we were all absolutely horrified, but I was living with Winifred Green. It was like I said, this white Mississippian, and we were working on trying to get Mississippians for public education organized as the group to have peaceful desegregation, and it was mostly catering to white people. So I didn't…it was not known my past and Winifred always introduced me as her roommate from Hollins College visiting because AFSC was considered a communist front, so they wouldn't have wanted to introduce me, but when I do know that when we heard about Schwarner, Chaney, and Goodman, I went out to Tubaloo College, and we all cried about the disappearance, and I did go out for that. But most of the time I was undercover, literally.

CO: Yeah wow.

CC: I got a report from the Sovereignty Commission who was following everyone in the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, and writing reports and all this and I had them when they were closed down and were made to open their papers, I got mine and part of it says, "Constance Curry was seen in a bar with…" Winifred Green's married name was Falls back then, "was seen in a bar with Sammy Falls, Winifred Fall's husband." They failed to mention that Winifred was with us. That is was the three of us you know. But anyway and then it goes on to say, "Constance Curry is a blonde who talks like a communist." Isn't that a funny thing?

CO: It's hilarious.

CC: Talking like a communist…

CO: How can you talk like a communist?

CC: I know, I love it. And where have they been that they know this?

CO: Where was this published?

CC: It was in the Sovereignty Commission Papers, the Sovereignty Commission papers that were kept under wraps.

CO: Oh my God.

CC: In Mississippi until about four or five years ago.

CO: Oh, I know when that came out! Have you seen that Secrets of Mississippi, the documentary on that, the release of those?

CC: No. no.

CO: That's really chilling.

CC: Yeah, so anyway. I was in Mississippi when they were killed. When the three were killed, yeah that was awful.

CO: That was such…it is just so…you can't make…It is more dramatic than any fiction.

CC: Oh I know, and then to be buried in a damn, a clay dam there until their bodies were discovered in August I guess. June, July, yeah in August…it's horrible, yeah, yeah

CO: Have you followed the sort of…let's see what we can call it legally, all the cases that have come back to revisit? The uh…

CC: Yeah, Keith Beauchamp, who is a good friend of mine, he is a filmmaker; he is the one that went to congress to get these cold cases investigated. He's got the FBI working on this, so we stay in touch, yeah.

CO: So did you make many connections with your law degree, with lawyers and people in the legal field?

CC: I don't like lawyers much…boring.

CO: Yeah, yeah, so…

CC: I hate to stereotype but…it's not my frame of reference.

CO: I have a question about…you largely just held forth without any questions, which is amazing, I can't believe…I don't think I have asked you a question since I got here, but apparently it triggered…yesterday triggered some memories, so it's all kind of coming back. But is there, I mean, it sounds like you've done so much and have still so many projects to do. Is there anything you would have done, you would like to have done, liked to have done that you didn't do, any profession? Did you ever want to teach? No? So you have done…you have really…Did you see yourself as a younger woman in this really active role sort of? No?

CC: No, it just all just happened. Being in, being open to stuff, being in the right place at the right time, whether it was when the Civil Rights Act passed, and AFSC says we need a field secretary, I mean it just all sort of fell into place, yeah…

CO: Okay. About money, well, are you better off financially than your parents were?

CC: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah.

CO: So, do you see that money has played a role…do you think of money as having played a role in shaping who you are today?

CC: No, no I've never thought about money. My father used to say, "throw your…" what is it…on the water?

CO: Cast bread upon water?

CC: Cast bread and it will come back to you a hundred-fold…I mean I don't have it consciously thought of that, but I mean I've lived on a hand to mouth…not hand to mouth, but I have never been able to save…Well thank God because when I was working for city government Shirley Franklin was a good friend of mine, who was in the mayor's office. She said, "Connie you need to get on…" I don't know what it's called, but it is where they deferred compensation, where they would take money out of your salary. But you know when I was working for NSA, I think I made $5,000 a year. When I was working for the American Friend Service Committee I don't know what I made but all I know is that my retirement is from the American

Friend Service Committee now $43.61. I wrote them recently and said, “It is keeping me in cat food and that’s about it.” When I went to work for, I don’t know what my salary was when I was with AFSC but…you know, I have only been able to rent a house and buy cheap cars…I have never had a lot of money. Now…

CO: But you own this house, do you not own this house?

CC: Yeah, but remember it just cost me $75,000 because my friend upstairs, back then she bought the upstairs. We were co-tenants. So if I could sell this house now, I would be rich, or would have been if I would have sold it before the market got so bad. But…

CO: This is prime real estate.

CC: Oh I know, yeah, yeah. But I can’t sell it now. But money has never been a concern to me. I have loaned---I was thinking the other day, if I collected on the debts that I have loaned people, because all my life hasn’t been much, but I have had a little bit more, I mean working for NSA, making $5,000 a year, my poor SNCC friends were making $9 a week you know so they would stay with me, I would give them money. I hate to characterize myself as being a generous soul, I don’t care about money. I am beginning to care about it now, because with the washing away of my beach cottage, I don’t have that as an income anymore, and so I am low on funds right now, but I still don’t worry about it you know. And um…

CO: So have you ever suffered with debt?

CC: No…

CO: No. So debt hasn’t been an issue.

CC: No. I have been in terrible debt and I try to pay it off as soon as I…I borrowed $100,000 …I guess this house, I thought my accountant was going to have a friend, or, have a fit, and I gave $25,000 dollars of it to Ann Curry, my sister in Savannah to help her pay off her mortgage on her beach cottage. I don’t care about money, you know. And I loan…I gave a friend, I loaned, this is stupid, I loaned a friend of mine…at the time my

credit card for her to pay off some debts…her boyfriend found it and they broke up…he took my credit card and spent $10,000 on it, which I will never see. But you know you can't …I mean you just can't, I don't. I just don't…I don't know…

CO: You don't lose sleep over money.

CC: No, I never have. And I am sure that is partially because Mother and Daddy didn't have much. We went on all these little teeny vacations. They lived, we didn't have big cars or expensive cars, you know. Daddy was never able to buy a house until I guess I was in the 7th grade when he bought a house for 15. We always rented. Money didn't mean much to either one of them, I guess because they weren't raised with it. So…

CO: What would you do if you won the lottery? A million dollars? What would you do with it?

CC: Well if I felt better I would say I would travel. You know I traveled a lot in my life and I would, if I had my health I'd say I would travel. I would love to travel, yeah. And I would pay off Anne's, I would help Anne, because she's my sister. And I would help Eileen, who is in much, more than my sister, my other sister, because they are in both, Eileen in particular, both of them, are in worse shape than I am. Because I at least have my pension, which is 20…which is $2500 a month, you know. Yeah, and then my 47 dollars from the American Friend Service Committee. Haha. Can you believe it…let's see how many years is that? 11 years with the Service Committee and 47 dollars retirement. I left right before they raised that retirement thing. But you know they are a nonprofit so yeah….and if they, I will tell you what I will get my ship, and I will get riches if they make *Silver Rights* into a film. Right. I got two really good guys working on that. They loved the book yeah.

CO: That is so exciting.

CC: So that's that about money. Yeah and then, the other thing is that I decided that I don't want to put anything about…what I said about Will Campbell and you know in these.

CO: So that's not even an issue but um, I think ---- a curious thing…you are only the second person I have interviewed who has never been married, and the other one, you will love this, was an African American, who, at the age of 8 in 1920 was apprenticed to a white family and has never left. She lives on their property.

CC: Where?

CO: In Brantley County near the coast….

CC: She has never left!

CO: Never left, never left. To this day, I had a four hour interview with her, and it is sterling…yeah…but she is the only other person who has not ever been married. Everybody has either been married or widowed, or divorced someone or whatever so…

CC: It just never has been a priority.

CO: I mean yeah I love that, but how do you do that? How do you get away with that? Especially, well maybe if as you say, it is your Irish Protestant, background. There is something in that that gives you an independent streak?

CC: Well and I remember no pressure from my mother and father. Their main message to me, and I remember daddy actually articulated this once said, "Half the time, you know, of your life we have known what you're doing, but we trust you, totally." And they did.

CO: But just because you never married, you have plenty of male friends and long term relationships and…

CC: And a lot of um…men like me and I like men…even to this day when I go down to…Gilbert's down here for a glass of wine, the guys down there, gay and straight, they all flirt with me, and I tell them dirty jokes and we laugh all the time and I like men. Period. Always have. And men like me yeah, so I never felt. I've never felt the need for a sustained, ongoing, relationship, particularly living with men.

CO: So, what is the longest relationship you've had with one person?

CC: Well probably the longest relationship…

[Recorder turned off]

CO: Why would you…why would that be something…I would keep that like front and center.

CC: What? My Ad?

CO: The file, that file.

CC: Oh yeah. But particularly at the age of 70. I wish I could think of the woman in California that wrote the book?

CO: I remember hearing of it. Yes I do.

CC: I thought it was in one of these letters that these guys that have responded. I just came across this, like I say, I did meet one guy in Chicago, but all he wanted was sex. He wasn't interested in talking or writing or anything and…

CO: Was this a younger guy?

CC: Yeah and I am not interested in just sex. I mean Kirk and I have so much more in common than sex you know….

Part IV

CO:…you know somebody besides just this ardent civil rights person. And you've really already answered this. Many times actually, but I'm going to ask it so you can just address it directly. And it's all about that cause and effect thing, and we have many ways of addressing this, like which is most important, nature/nurture that kind of thing, and so, my question for you: In your life, all of our lives are part circumstances beyond our control, or being in the right place at the right time as well as what we do with that. For you, what is your life more of? More of the being in the right place at the right time or more about your decisions and choices and you know the way that you have conducted your life? Does that make sense?

CC: No, and I don't know how to answer that?

CO: Well essentially you've almost, you already said that your life is about being in the right place at the right time and…

CC: With the additional personality that I am, which has left me free to respond to all kinds, and feeling free to respond to all kinds of things, yeah.

CO: And you see that as your personality, your contribution to this way opening. You respond with your own individuality and…is that? Okay. Um what period of your life was the most gratifying, the happiest, the most rewarding, or whatever?

CC: Um, well younger years it was from the 7th grade through graduating from high school in Greensboro, North Carolina. Then Agnes Scott was the most, my 4 years at Agnes Scott was probably…

CO: The happiest?

CC: Yeah, Yeah.

CO: Alright. What…so the opposite of that…what was the unhappiest, the most difficult? Or however you want to phrase that.

CC: Probably well unhappiest, there was not…I have had so many losses in my life, beginning with my mother; you know the first dead person I ever saw was my mother in a casket. I have had so many losses that…. but it didn't cause me to be unhappy, I just went on, you know, which is probably a mistake, but um…

CO: Why would you call that a mistake, because so many would give their right arm to just be able to go on…

CC: Yeah. Well I'm probably the unhappiest in my life right now. Yeah. Well because I didn't let that stiff upper lip. I just kept on going. And I don't know, I can't…I'm probably glad that I didn't let myself be in pain and suffer blah, blah, blah, and all that after Mother's death, after Daddy's death, after Mary Anne's [Marion????] death, after Phillips death, after several best

friends who have died along the way when I was much younger plus recently deaths of people from movement days so…um.

CO: So is it difficult now because of health? Is that the problem?

CC: And growing old and being surrounded by all this stuff and wishing I could do something.

CO: Well I didn't ask the questions about aging, but I have some questions on aging and that and I won't ask you but it sounds like that…

CC: Well you can if you want to?

CO: I just, it is just how you know we have different ideas about what being old is. You know when you are 12, 30 is old. And then you get to be 30 and 50 is old, but I guess…how old do you feel now? And I'm not talking about the body. You sound to me like you are still very young? I mean…

CC: In my mind I am pretty young, I flirt with guys, I don't feel any different. I was thinking about this the other day. I don't feel any different than I did than when I was in my 20s. I really don't, I really don't. I mean I tell dirty jokes, I flirt; I don't feel old at all, except my body. Yeah.

CO: That's what I am asking, because some people just don't get that. They don't know how to answer that. If they are 90, they say…oh I feel maybe 65 but I don't think that is true, I think in their hearts they still feel 30, or 25…

CC: Yeah, yeah

CO: So um but there's got to be some reward to aging. Of course it sounds like…some people say that they can say whatever they want to but it sounds like you have done that all your life?

CC: Yeah.

CO: That's not really been a benefit…

CC: I am so, except for the physical thing, I am so unaware of aging. I don't even think about it, what the rewards of it are.

CO: Okay. And so, I asked you about the happiest time of life. Would that be…like if I asked you what age you recall the most nostalgically, does that mean anything different?

CC: No.

CO: So except for the…except for some health issues now, you don't mind being the age you are now, which is 78. Is that fair to say?

CC: Yea. But I don't ever think about it?

CO: You just don't think about it?

CC: No, I don't.

CO: I love that answer. Um, what have been the crucial decisions in your life?

CC: I haven't made any. That's what I'm telling you. I can't think of any that was called crucial, because I never decided to become involved in the civil rights movement. I never decided to do any of these things. I have never pondered and pondered something, and then made a decision. I am very…you know, that's why the "proceed as way opens" and my intuition has guided me a lot you know. Um so I'm not much of a "ponderer and a decision maker." I don't even know. Yeah.

CO: Well maybe this question won't mean anything to you but um people who do life reviews say that what they are looking for are turning points in people's lives. Have you had any that you recall? Turning points where life has just significantly altered?

CC: No?

CO: No. So you are satisfied with the…except for health now, the outcome of your choices.

CC: Yeah, because if my health were better I could probably get through this stuff yeah. And move on to be able to write my memoirs, or there are a couple people who want help writing their book. You know but I don't have the energy yeah, yeah.

CO: Have you, are you going to write those…are you going to do the memoirs before you go and help somebody write a book?

CC: Umm I don't know, I haven't made up my mind on that. Until I feel better I'm not thinking about anything much yet.

CO: Do you have any regrets?

CC: Nope, I was thinking about that the other day. Do I have any regrets…um and I couldn't think of any. I know that must sound strange but I don't.

CO: Is there anybody you would like to make amends to. Anybody you feel like you've done something, that you have hurt them and you would like the opportunity to…

CC: No…

CO: If you could live your life over again, is there anything that you would do differently?

CC: No, this sounds really egotistical, but I don't think so.

CO: Well…

CC: I've had a really interesting life. You know I really have.

CO: What do you consider to be the most valuable lesson you've learned?

CC: Well you know as I've intimated, I think that humor and a sense of humor, and the ability to laugh at things, is really you know…one of the most important lessons yeah.

CO: Okay. Has there been a single individual or even more than one, but two would you identify as people who've influence you, had the biggest influence on you in the course of your life?

CC: Well my mother and father of course, and Ella Baker, who worked with me in the civil rights movement. And…

CO: How did Ella Baker influence you? Can you say?

CC: Well she was the other adopted advisor at SNCC but she was like 50, she was double my age, but I learned so much from her, sitting with the SNCC people, like I say because she just listened and listened, and never talked much. And she was just so good with those young people, and so wise and so…you know making speeches like more than a hamburger, which is what got all of the students interested. She…she was just so wise and so…making speeches like "more than a hamburger," which is what got all the students interested, and she was just so wise. But I could make her laugh, which I really liked, and we spent a lot of time together. She, she wasn't, but she wasn't at all like my mother, so it couldn't have been that I was looking to her for any, you know, lost maternal things. She was just a big influence in my life…yeah.

CO: Did you ever consider doing standup comedy, because comedy comes so naturally to you?

CC: You mean as a career?

CO: Well no, it's hard to make a career in a standup comedy but…

CC: Well I went out to Jerry Farber's Comedy Club with Kirk and with James Bond a couple of months ago and Jerry said, "Here's one of my old students." He's 74 now you know and he has his own comedy club, and he said, "Connie come up here and say a few words." So I went up there and said, "Well it's been a long time since I went to Jerry Farber's comedy club." And I said, "I realize that I am getting old, and I am getting lonely so I put an ad in the *Creative Loafing*, and it said, 'I am looking for a man who will not run around and who will not hit me and who will not run around on me, but who is still interested in sex.'" And I said, "My doorbell on Myrtle Street rang once, and I went to the door and there was a guy sitting out there. A nice looking guy", I said, but "He was in a wheel chair, and he didn't have any arms or legs," and he said, 'I read your ad in *Creative Loafing* in the paper and he said I just wanted to come see you.' And I said 'You don't have any arms!' and he said, 'Well I can't hit you.' And I said, 'But you don't have any legs?' and he said, 'Well I can't run around on you.'

And I said, 'But what about sex?' and he said, 'I rang the doorbell didn't I?'" hahahaha.

CO: Did that bring the house down.

CC: Oh yes. I thought people were going to absolutely die! So…

CO: Well now how long have you been carrying that one around…?

CC: That joke?

CO: Mhmmm

CC: Oh. I don't even remember where I heard that but…see everything, any little thing will remind me of a joke. Well now I learned in comedy school that….

CO: You went to comedy school?

CC: Yeah. Did I not!

CO: You did not tell me that!

CC: Well, it's in the back of the…

CO: Oh we talked. Okay yes…you did tell me that.

CC: The year I graduated from law school.

CO: But it was oh…I didn't realize when it was.

CC: It was in the 80's.

CO: So you were a mature woman.

CC: Oh yeah. Yeah. And so yeah I went to comedy school and…

CO: Do you graduate from comedy school?

CC: Yeah and I have a video but I can't find it of my appearance on stage. But I will tell you something very interesting…I had never thought of myself as a standup comedian. In particularly in going on stage and I was terrified and Julian had to go out of town so he didn't…so he didn't do it with me so,

I was up there. But I was working for city government at the time and so a lot of friends from city government, Nancy Boxolla, was the commissioner of Fulton County and all of these people came to see me, and I got up there and I told my first joke and they roared, and clapped and I never will forget, I got this rush, and boy was it…I thought that this was where it is man you know. I can do it. I told three stories. The lessons you learn in comedy school is 1) you never say joke. You always say, "Lemme tell you a story." 2) You personalize everything. You don't say, "A man was standing on a corner." You say, "Jim was standing on the corner and he had his hair up in those spikes, those all colored spikes and he had an eye ring on, nose ring, teeth ring, all this stuff and he noticed that an older person, a man standing down at the bus stop staring at him. So he went up to the guy and said, 'Hey what's the matter with you old man. You didn't ever do anything exciting or different when you were young?' And the older man said, 'yeah, I had sex with a parrot, and I thought you might be my boy.'" [laughter] So anyway you see you personalize Jim. You see it was Jim who did that. Yeah. And so…and then the third thing is never laugh at your own jokes. I told Jerry Farber I said forget that. I said you know why tell them if you can't laugh at them. I laugh at my own jokes all the time. Particularly if I'm making someone else laugh you know.

CO: Oh how could you oh. I couldn't obey that.

CC: But I'm trying to look for my video from '84.

CO: From graduating?

CC: Yeah.

CO: Did you have to do a stand-up, a video, of your act?

CC: No, they videoed my act and I desperately want to see it. I wish I could go to Kirk you know. He is much more conservative than I am. He thinks that I am outrageous. Are you through? Do you have anything left?

CO: Yes okay hang on.

CC: Sorry.

CO: Just a couple of minutes? Five minutes? Um. What has been the greatest source of inspiration for you? That's got to be…you can't write books without inspiration?

CC: The people that I have met in the freedom movement, black and white, and in the civil rights movement.

CO: And you all made that distinction in the book *Deep in Our Hearts* that it's the freedom movement. What are you proudest of in your life? Not proudest in sort of the sort of the "sinful" sense but what accomplishment, you've got so many but what…

CC: I guess my books. Yeah, because I never dreamed of being a writer. My sister said, "Connie you've written 5 books, you're a writer."

CO: Yeah I think you can call yourself that. Um how do you want to be remembered? What do you want your legacy to be?

CC: Um…I don't know. I guess…I guess being one of the first white women in the 60's freedom movement.

CO: And you already said this because you said what you are going to title your memoirs but…What would you title your life story?

CC: Ummm…I don't know…but that reminds me I've got to tell you a funny story briefly…I had a um brain scan a couple of years ago, and as I said Kirk can read all of these…they had a DVD of it…

CO: Of your brain scan?

CC: Yeah or a print of it…something or the other. He could read and he said, "You know you've got some small frontal lobes or smaller than usual frontal lobes." And he said, "That, your frontal lobes accounts your sometimes being out of the ordinary, taking different kinds of steps and doing…It may account for some of the unusual things you have done in your life." He may have said strange, I'm not sure, but unusual things you have done in your life. So in my last thing to Shannon I said, I told him about this reading of the thing and said, "Kirk was saying that having small frontal lobes may have influenced some of the decisions that I have made

in life." So I said, "I haven't changed from 'proceed as way opens,' but if I moved I might call my book *Small Frontal Lobes.* Hahaha.

CO: That's a great story.

CC: I know. But that obviously wouldn't attract many readers but…

CO: Oh I think it would raise a lot of curious people's…you know it would get a lot of attention that way.

CC: Well and people might think…I'm holding this up because it has a sore here and I am bearing down on it…so yeah. The sore is because I had a tissue taken for a cancer, skin cancer…it's not skin cancer but this is rubbing on it so I have to go put something on it…but anyway, suppose I name my book *Small Frontal Lobes.*

CO: I love it!

CC: You do?

CO: I just love it. It's in line with everything else you've done…

CC: Well and I could say somewhere, "It wasn't courage, it wasn't bravery, it wasn't wanting to be on the cutting edge, it wasn't anything but small frontal lobes."

CO: My. I'm going to shut this off…(shuts off and restarts 5:16)

CC: He was taking a bunch of people on a civil rights tour, Julian was. And she spoke to their group. Yeah I couldn't go.

CO: Yeah you remembered that you had forgotten to tell me about your association with Dr. King. Do you want to just run me through that?

CC: Yeah, I met Dr. King early on in the 60's because of course he had moved to Atlanta, and was with SCLC and we, he came to a lot of SNCC events, and he…then I worked with him most closely when I was asked to represent the American Friend Service Committee on the committee that he had gotten organized, the Poor People's Pampaign. So in the 60's, late 60's early 68 I saw more of him. But he was very warm, very kind, very

funny man. And the image that they have made of him today as this guy who takes a little white kid and a little black kid by the hand and says I have a dream, and walks gently into the sunset, is very eloquent and brave and every house that I went into in Mississippi in the sharecroppers places they always had a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King on their wall along with either John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, because these were they people, as Mae Bertha said, "We know somebody cares about us." And so I just thought Dr. King was a wonderful man on every level and these places that have during his birthday week where they would say, "Celebrate the Dream over a mocha latte." You know they have made him into sort of this symbol with this holiday and have lost the brilliance in what a revolutionary he was and he was radical on so many levels but anyway. We had a meeting of the Poor People's Campaign Committee at Ebenezer, right before he went up to investigate the sanitation workers strike, and it was in the basement of Ebenezer church up here on Auburn Avenue, and we were in there, and he talked to us, and when it was over it was like, he was sitting right here, and somebody came up to him in his chair and he put up his hand, and was shaking this person's hand, and he saw me approach on the left and he put out his left hand to me and he said, "Excuse my left hand but it is the one closest to my heart." Then he left for Memphis and I never saw him again. So that's…

CO: Nobody ever saw him again…

CC: That's right. What a wonderful thing…"It is the one closest to my heart." To be his last words to me. So I just wanted to say that I thought he was a wonderful and inspiring person, and I'm glad…

CO: And you knew him at a time when…because the Martin Luther King that children get in high school is the Martin Luther King of 1965 and before. They don't get the radical Martin Luther King, you know. Thankfully now we are examining more in his life from 65 to 68 when he does become, as you call it, a radical because nobody would put radical with his name. But thank God that you know he was. He had become and it would be so interesting to know if he had lived how much further that

would have gone. Do you think about that sometimes because he was becoming so…

CC: Well see I considered him a radical from the get go because when he was leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott that was radical. But a…of course I consider him a radical all the way, but it was certainly more radical to begin getting Appalachian workers, Mexican, I mean Hispanic farm workers. I mean the Poor People's Campaign was gonna be very life-changing if it had gone on the way he planned it. Of going and having Tent City at the federal government saying you've got to do something. We are here to get our checks cashed at long last.

CO: But I mean that was a dramatic shift from what…from race being the prime focus to becoming…

CC: Economic…yeah yeah. I agree yeah.

CO: I just love that image that you have. It's yours it's nobody else's. How many people can say that?

CC: It's the one closest to my heart. Oh God I know. Yeah. So I just wanted to add that.

CO: I'm so glad you did. Yeah.