INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: LOUISE STANFORD

INTERVIEWER: Sibyl Jackson

PLACE: St. David's Episcopal Church, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

J: This is Sibyl Jackson from the LBJ Library and I'm here with Louise Stanford. Mrs. Stanford, can you tell me a little bit about your background in civil rights, particularly how you became involved with SNCC [Student National (formerly Nonviolent) Coordinating Committee].

S: I was a college student at Drew University in New Jersey and was in the class of 1964. My senior year in college in Madison, New Jersey, it was brought to the attention of the university community that barbershops in town would not cut the hair of people who were black. It was decided in the university community, with some help from people that lived in the community, that there would be an attempt made to enforce the civil rights laws, public accommodation laws of the state of New Jersey by picketing the barber shops and asking them to cut the hair of anyone that came in. I got involved in that; got a lot of publicity. The human rights commission in the state of New Jersey eventually did enforce the laws where if you got a barbers' license you had to accommodate everybody, but it was my first involvement with any kind of human rights issues.

I got involved in it and began to work with people who were my professors and students in my class and other classes and someone suggested I contact the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in New York to see about working in the summer in Mississippi. The project in the summer of 1964 was being organized at that time so I--three of us did. One was a graduate student named Allen Lingo, not related to the guy at Alabama who's so famous. He was a graduate student in theology. A person in my class named Lynn Hamilton and myself made the contacts and then went to several meetings in New York and was signed up for the summer project. The barbershops led to the other involvement and it's basically how that started.

The contacts we made were with SNCC as far as we knew, but the summer project was an organization called COFO, Council of Federated Organizations, which was made up of SNCC, NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], Congress of Racial Equality [CORE] and, I think, some minimal involvement by what we called Slick, the Southern Christian Leadership [Conference]. That was a tease way of talking about Martin Luther King's organization. Their organization hated it and that's what we called them. But those four groups, basically, and then the National Council of Churches and their delta ministry with Will Campbell was involved also. There was a lawyer's project--by the way, I understand it was organized by Mickey Leland, a medical project organized by him and then there was a lawyer's project with the national ACLU and another national organization.

J: Was the COFO project an effort to unite all of the civil rights organizations since it was an umbrella entity for the civil rights movement at that time?

S: That was my understanding that it would bring in people from all these different organizations, the limited professional staff and bring all of that to bear on one place, to

make that kind of a showplace of what it was like to live as a black in the South. Mississippi was the worst place and the organizers apparently wanted to bring the national attention down in one place, bring in all these organizations and have them work together. The way it turned out in practical terms, the NAACP was sort of involved and Martin Luther King's group was sort of involved. They had good relations. They contributed a little, as I understand it. But the two major groups that worked together were CORE and SNCC.

J: Whose idea was it to form this organization, and not just so much the organization, but to have this summer project? How did it come to be?

S: Well, I wasn't involved in it at that point, but my understanding is that Robert Moses, or Robert Parish is what he's known as now, he is a math professor I think at the University of Massachusetts. I think it was his brainchild, and I don't know, maybe people like Stokely Carmichael were involved. I think James Farmer was involved to some extent. I met him on several occasions but never talked to him all that much. John Lewis who's now congressman from Georgia was very much involved. Julian Bond was involved. But my contact with these people was after all the basic groundwork had been laid and I simply signed up as a student, one of the one thousand students that were going to try to get in for the summer to do a variety of things.

J: What were the goals of the project? What did you all hope to accomplish that summer?

S: Well, I think there were a number of things. One was to bring the nation's attention to the situation for blacks in the South using Mississippi as the focal point of concentration, because things were bad. I think the hundreds of students that they hoped to bring in,

college students, were to make contact with blacks in Mississippi that had had no contact with what we would consider average American culture. To bring some of the resources of the students into the families and the children through freedom schools, establishing community centers, recreational programs, kind of big brother, big sister, counseling type programs. We developed relationships with the younger children to give them the kind of educational experience that summer that there was no way in the world they were going to get in the public schools and had never gotten in the public schools in Mississippi. To register people to vote as to what extent that was possible and at that time in many of the counties of Mississippi where you would have a majority of blacks in the population, they might allow one or two or three people to register to vote out of the black community.

J: When you say "allowed them to vote"--

S: Allowed them to register to vote. What was going on in Mississippi at the time in terms of voter registration was that Mississippi, like Texas, has a very complex state constitution. There are some horrendous paragraphs that are four or five inches long and maybe one sentence and almost impossible even for the finest legal scholar to interpret. If you were white, the voting requirements were that when you went down to register to vote you had to interpret part of the Mississippi constitution. So if you were white or were one of the one or two favored blacks in the county, they would give you something relatively simple to interpret if they went through that process at all. If you were not one of the favored whites or one of the few blacks that might be allowed in to even begin to register to vote, they would give you one of these horrendous paragraphs. And the thing

that was ludicrous about it is that many of the voting registrars couldn't even have interpreted the simplest sentence much less--some of them were illiterate, functionally or otherwise, and here they were keeping tens of thousands of people off the voter registration rolls because they were black. Whatever else they might have been in terms of level of education or economic position or whatever, they were simply kept off because they were black. It was an economic issue in many farming communities, but that's a whole other thing. But they did not just restrict who could actually register to vote, and vote, they restricted who could even go down to the courthouse to attempt to register to vote.

J: What do you think the fear was there in keeping the blacks from registering to vote?

S: Well, when you register to vote you have a say in what happens in the community, politically and economically. When you're in a farming community, which is what most of Mississippi is, when you are registered to vote you serve on juries, you serve on agricultural commodity committees. When they allocate how much cotton you can raise that's an economic issue. You have to be a registered voter, you know, a substantial citizen to sit on those committees to make decisions about who gets what cotton allotment. So if you can keep the blacks away from these things then you retain all the basic political and economic power in the community to yourself. You don't give it away to people that are not like you. Quote, unquote.

It goes back to the Civil War with reconstruction where I think the mistake was to swing all the way to the other side and give the blacks all the power as opposed to trying to work some compromise out and there was that white reaction to it in the nineteenth

century and that was the myth that was perpetuated and once that power was grabbed back they were not going to share it with anyone. And it determined if the children went to school, if they were educated decently. Because you held all the power you could say that the black children didn't even deserve a schoolroom, which they did in many instances, or that if they had a building there were no windows, no textbooks. If there were any funds to be distributed either from the federal government or the state government, you can't participate in that. If you're not a registered voter you can't make decisions about it. You can't participate in a legal system as jurymen. So if you keep them off the voter registration rolls then you keep them out of many of the basic things that in this country determine how you survive and how well you survive.

J: The decision-making process.

S: Yes. And what chances your children have of surviving.

J: Was the summer project the first effort of COFO?

S: The organization was developed specifically for that summer, was my understanding. It was put together by people like John Lewis and others specifically for that summer project. I don't think these groups had ever worked together in any kind of a structured, organized way. I think they participated or worked together to some extent on the freedom rides which had taken place before that, but basically SNCC worked on their thing in the black colleges in the South and in some of the very poor communities where more power to the people kind of orientation. NAACP did their thing among middle class blacks or potential middle class blacks. Everybody had their little piece, but they never really said, "Now here is an organization that we're going to put together and these

are the structured kinds of things that we'll do and we'll all contribute our resources." When they came together it was ad hoc.

J: What was the relationship like among the civil rights organizations?

S: It was very cordial between CORE and SNCC. The others--I saw it from a perspective of being a twenty-one-year-old college student and not on the wild side, but I was associated with the CORE/SNCC side of it. And I think SCLC to what limited extent they were involved were--I think they were in the churches primarily. That's always been their orientation which is very valid because that's a solid foundation in black communities then and now. The NAACP I think was more on the legal side of it and just in terms of some middle class values. My relationship with SCLC was cordial, but I still was on the SNCC side where we teased about Martin Luther King being the Lord coming because we were there in the trenches and then he would come in with the FBI and the newspaper and the media and make a big splash and then leave and we'd be back in the trenches.

J: So he got more attention you think or he brought, in essence, more attention to his organization by being who he was?

S: Yes. We saw very few people from SCLC working in the field full time. James Bevel was there. There was some work that they did I think in southern Mississippi and Alabama with trying to work with economic, lower-class whites saying, "You're in the same situation as some of these blacks. You don't have the power either. The friend of mine from--the minister, Al Lingo, that was at Drew University, joined King's staff and went to Florida and was jumping into swimming pools all summer, integrating the

swimming pools in St. Augustine, Florida, and that made kind of a splash. But where I was we saw very few people and when we did James Bevel would come through for a week or two and then leave. They didn't have a regular presence that I knew. There were not people that were associated with him that were on site all the time working and bringing some of their resources and contacts to bear.

My only contact with NAACP other than the local chapter president was when all of the stuff started to happen in the summer of 1964, the national board of the NAACP came down and there was a big dinner at the local president's house and they needed people to serve dinner. So a few of us, who were white, middle-class college students served dinner to them and got to eat in the kitchen. I thought that was hysterical. But that was the only contact with the NAACP. However, my understanding from other people that I worked with was that one of the practices of SNCC was to send somebody into a town with just the name of one or two contacts and invariably it was the president of the NAACP in a local town or someone associated with the NAACP. They found them housing and helped them with some of the basics so that they could work in the poorest communities. This was not my experience with them, but this was my understanding that in many cases they were good contacts in each of the communities to help a full-time civil rights worker who was getting paid nine or ten dollars a week to survive.

J: Was one group more militant than the other, do you remember?

S: Yes. SNCC was much more militant. I think CORE was next in line. SCLC would be next in line. I put NAACP last. This is not a value judgment. I think they were doing different things and we were--I mean, we the white college students, black college

students that worked together--we had, I think, a much more assertive image of how things needed to be changed. Just young blood running hot kind of--and we could take more chances than I think the church leaders could, the middle-class blacks could, and some of these other more community-established organizations. It wasn't that we didn't have a stake in these communities because many of the people I worked with were people that had a stake and an interest in the communities. But they didn't have any establishment, personally or as a community, that would be at risk if they did some things that were a little bit more assertive or aggressive or maybe even outrageous.

J: What type of reaction or reactions did you get from the black leaders of the various organizations? Were they concerned about the outcome of the project or the safety of the workers involved for that summer?

S: Yes, I think there was a great deal of concern. I didn't get it directly in many instances. I did have contacts with people like John Lewis and Stokely Carmichael and James Farmer and others. There was a great deal of concern. I think Robert Moses put it best in talking about it in later years, that the students that were being sent down were in essence sacrificial lambs, that they were terrified that people would get killed [or] seriously injured in great numbers.

I think on my side being twenty-one years old I think I'm still immortal. I knew it was dangerous, but I never thought anybody would die. I think that's a normal reaction for that age and the circumstances I was in. Others might have felt the danger more intensely or more deeply than I did. It may have been the same age or may have been more emotionally mature, but it was done--we were told what the dangers were. It was

hard to have a gut feeling about it to me because of a young person's sense of immortality. But we knew--we were taught how to protect ourselves and how to take precautions, what to look out for because the danger was real, however we emotionally responded to it. We knew if we let it hang out that we might get picked off.

J: I've read that the project was faced with mixed emotions from the black leaders, in fact, that Roy Wilkins had opposed it and Martin Luther King had supported it. Do you remember anything about those emotions at that time?

S: Well, again, I didn't have contact with these people. I heard indirectly that, yes, it wasn't a thousand per cent something that everybody agreed with. I think some of the people involved may have agreed with the idea of it and not some of the particulars. There was a great deal of discussion about should we do this or should we do that, but again I wasn't in on the planning stages. I was in as we worked it out, you know, kind of winged it as we went along that summer. When the project started and my three co-workers disappeared there was no way to tell anybody that something serious was happening, they were missing, there was a great deal of danger. I got on the phone and couldn't convince people that something serious was happening. That's an indication, I think, of a gut-level belief of how dangerous it was. Yes, there was a lot of words tossed back and forth and a lot of discussions about do we go along with everything? Do we go along with a particular thing?

I don't know how to explain it. We're operating on different levels. You've got the top leadership I think publicly for the most part in favor of it, and expressing the danger and expressing the fact that this danger needs to be taken in hand by some of the

more privileged young people in the country in order to express what the problems are because they weren't just in Mississippi or the South, they were all over the country. And you have others saying, "It's too much of a risk. This is not the way to do it. There needs to be alternatives tried. We can't just confront." And I think SNCC was on one side saying the confrontation has to take place because gradualism has not worked and others saying, "Now, wait a minute, we haven't tried everything. Let's try some other alternatives."

What was interesting about this summer project is that it all came together in one dialogue and yes, there was some confrontation--I mean--not actually egging on white southerners to do the violence they did, but just the presence there was the confrontation in setting up the schools and the community projects for the confrontation was intolerable. And yet there were other things we don't--contacts we made in the white community with people that did not agree with the violence that went on. I saw both sides. People were coming after me just because I was there and yet could talk to an assistant police chief from Meridian who was very deeply disturbed, knew there were quite a few members of the [Ku Klux] Klan in the police department, but he was not one of them. He was deeply disturbed by what was going on and worked kind of undercover to iron out some of the problems that occurred between law enforcement that was Klan oriented and some of the people that were more reasonable.

Will Campbell of the National Council of Churches, his brother was a pharmacist in Meridian, Joe Campbell. He had worked for many years in the black community. There were people in Philadelphia, Mississippi, who were violently opposed to the

violence that was going on. There's a man now that's the Methodist bishop in eastern Tennessee. A month before the summer project started he was assigned to the Methodist church in Philadelphia, Mississippi. His congregation literally split over what was going on, the murders of [Michael] Schwerner, [Andrew] Goodman and [James] Chaney. Half the congregation cheered it and half condemned it. So you have some people saying, "Let's do all confrontation," and other people saying, "Let's try some other things." It was this curious blend that summer and it went sometimes in one direction of confrontation with the presence there and do our own thing and other times the wave went in the direction of, "Let's make contact with the decent people in the community."

J: Let's back up just a little bit. You mentioned about the preparation that you had prior to coming to Mississippi. Tell me about the workshops in Oxford [Ohio]. What were they like?

S: I think I would have a hard time describing it. I had never been involved in anything like that. We went out there not knowing what to expect and these were--we had the large meetings where someone like John Doar would come in and say, "You're all asking to be killed and there's not a damned thing we can do to help you." Or one of the few black lawyers in Mississippi coming in and--I don't remember his name, a little man, he must have been about sixty years old. He was a character, a real wit when he talked. But he explained the dangers and said, "If you get in jail you're facing Mississippi justice. You're not facing justice."

Everybody was there in the auditorium and then we broke down into the smaller groups. How to protect yourself in a violent situation. How to physically protect

yourself. There was role-playing, confrontation. I'll play the white sheriff this time and you play the black. I'm the black this time, you're the white sheriff. Or I'm the white student facing the white sheriff. For people that were going to work in the freedom schools there was a lot of curriculum development. I was in communications and there were a lot of security things that we worked out: how to keep in contact, how to work with national people that might be contacted if something happened, that kind of thing, how offices ran.

Once we were assigned, and I think it was about the middle of the week, to a specific city--I was assigned to Meridian--we met together as a group. There were eight of us. We talked about what the local situation was like, what Michael Schwerner and James Chaney had done so far, the reaction they had. We talked some about the people we would meet when we got there who worked in the office, who the community leaders were, kind of little personal sketches in addition to procedures and what the local situation was like on a variety of issues.

J: Were the workshops frightening in the fact that they depicted what could be reality?

S: I wasn't frightened. I think this goes back to not really understanding on a gut level how dangerous it was. In the years that I've talked about it it's like saying--it's very strange to be in a war kind of situation, which this was, when what you're seeing are Americans on the street, you know, there's a McDonald's on the corner. There's a schoolhouse and a courthouse. You don't grow up being afraid of the community you live in and there's so much similar between the American communities of the South [and] the American communities of the Northeast where I grew up that you don't quite--how do you go to

war in your own country? How do you sort out who the enemy is? How do you confront him in a loving kind of way to say this is a situation that has to change. This doesn't get through to you because it's like in the years since I've thought about it as, "It would be a bad dream to walk down the street in Austin, Texas, and understand that somebody's trying to kill me." Any American city. How do you--

J: So in a sense you didn't quite believe that all of that was what was really happening?

S: You believe it intellectually, but how do you have the gut feeling enough to be scared? How do you blend together what people are telling you about what the situation is going to be like and how you need to survive literally in your own country when the first twenty-one years of my life the community hadn't been that hostile? I'm going to another part of the country that I've never been to--in fact I'd never been west of Pittsburgh--(Laughter)--how do you sort it all out? How do you understand the seriousness of it given the age that you're at, the limited experience you have versus your social concerns and knowing what they're doing to people, knowing that for years they've killed in a variety of ways, either killed economically or killed socially or just killed outright? How do you put that all together to have a sense of "Boy, I'm really stepping into something that's very dangerous"? I don't know that you can do that and I don't think I did it. I understood on different levels and never had a feeling of really deep down being scared.

J: You've mentioned John Doar at the Justice Department a couple of times. What contact did you have with the Justice Department or the White House during the planning of the project? Do you know?

S: I wasn't in on the planning so I didn't have contact. I had contact with them afterwards to a limited extent simply because I was in Meridian and the story that summer was the murders of Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney. So the FBI came in, but they were--it was like a business deal to them. They wanted information and that was it. There was no protection from--John Doar was someone that I had encountered in Oxford, I guess it was Oxford, Ohio. And he seemed like a fairly decent, concerned person and concerned that there wouldn't be any help, that the Justice Department wouldn't be there to help in any way. They couldn't. They just were not equipped either as an organization in terms of philosophy or staff, never made the commitment to do any help and yet he seemed like a person that had agonized over it. I kind of picked that up and I didn't know what to do with it, but a sense that here was a man that cared and was there to do whatever he could but he knew he couldn't do much. He wasn't especially apologizing about it, but he was in a sense saying, "I'm sorry that we can't." I don't know that he used those words.

The other contact I had with the Justice Department were FBI agents who came to the office in Meridian after the disappearance, before it was known actually that the men were killed. They made a few contacts, got some information. I know that they were really satisfied that we could tell them anything. Then there was contact with them in Philadelphia about four days, I think, after the disappearance. Thursday afternoon they supposedly invited Rita Schwerner, Bob Zellner, and Sherwin Kaplan, the young attorney up there and they asked me to go along with them and I did and we had difficulty finding them. They denied who they were when we found them and then they picked us up and interrogated us for forty-five minutes. It doesn't make for a lot of good relations or any

kind of relations at all and it was really--these were business contacts with them. Other than that I can't think of any contacts that we had that were anything other than they're doing their job because they're being publicly forced to do their job, not because they or their superiors agreed with it.

J: What were your impressions about President Johnson's commitments to civil rights during the time that the project began? Did you think much about him and what he was feeling or what he thought?

S: Yes, I thought a lot about President Johnson, especially those first few days when the disappearance of those three men took place, I didn't think in terms of the White House. I thought in terms of who do I call to convince that something serious has happened, but the following day as he started to take action, as he met with people and it became a news story and he reacted to it. I think he reacted very swiftly, very positively. Probably I'm here alive today because of some of the things he did; that's my thought during the years. I think that he did what he needed to do at a--I don't know how to describe it. I really sensed it was a personal commitment or simply a responsibility. I think the presidents of the United States have to be committed to the will of the people, to kind of sense what is going on out there and respond to it because that's the real responsibility.

People talk about responding to public pressure. I think that's not quite what they're doing and I think Johnson did a marvelous job on it. He sensed the will when the story broke, this horror of horrors that happened, he responded [inaudible] that responsibility to the American people that he sensed there was something out there in the public saying, "We can't allow this," and he responded. That's not responding so much to

public pressure as saying, "This is my responsibility as president of the United States." And I think he did an excellent job on that. I have missed that in succeeding presidents. I don't think they had the sense he had of the public will and I think he saved the lives of many of us that summer.

J: Some future workers that came down, civil rights workers?

S: Yes. Nothing had every been really done about this group of people doing this kind of thing until those men disappeared and Johnson responded, and after that as much as some of the people in the Justice Department hated to have to work with us and protect us and deal with civil rights violations. I think what he did forced them to in succeeding years and now some of the things that grew out of what was happening, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Those probably never would have happened if it hadn't been for his talent as president, as a politician. I don't mean that in a negative way--his sense of responding to the will of the people, his sense of timing historically changed so much and I think we're still seeing the fruits of it today. He started the process and nobody else ever had before.

I didn't know the man. I never met him. I saw him one time at the LBJ library when they had a civil rights conference in the early seventies and I've never talked to anybody that was very close to him. But my sense of it, looking at it from being down in the trenches--being a young college student, young college graduate--is that if some of the things he did hadn't been done I think a lot more of us would have been seriously injured, would have died. We would have simply been picked off one by one or in groups. I think the black community would have suffered a lot more in terms of the

revenge the white community took on. The number of churches burned, there were 130-something was what I heard recently. I think it would have been every black church in the state of Mississippi. Had not three lives been sacrificed in the beginning we'd have a president that responds to it that way.

J: On June 21 of that year your co-workers, Mickey [Michael] Schwerner, James Chaney and Andy Goodman disappeared while investigating one of the bombings of a church in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Was that investigation part of the function of the project or were they investigating on their own?

S: No, it was a project investigation. They had burned the church [Mt. Zion Methodist Church] and it was a little community outside of Philadelphia in Neshoba County called, I think, Londale or Longdale or Lauderdale [Longdale is correct], something like that. It was a small Methodist church on an old red clay road and it had been burned and the members of the church beaten and the burning and the beatings took place I think on Tuesday night when we were all in Ohio. Mickey Schwerner was informed of that and that was the first thing on his agenda when we went back to Mississippi. And that's what we talked about to some extent on the way down there or before we started in on the way down and it was decided that Andy Goodman would go with him and James Chaney the following day to talk to the church members and find out what had happened. I was left in charge of the office and told that if they didn't return by a particular hour, which was four o'clock in the afternoon, to assume they were in a great deal of trouble and in danger.

But it was an official function of what Michael Schwerner did as the project leader of Meridian, that James Chaney did as community worker there, and it was Andy Goodman's first responsibility as a volunteer for the summer. It was not something that they personally did. They were very concerned about the people that had been beaten. Apparently they had some long-term working relationships with people in that church and they mentioned them by name. They had heard that they had been injured and they wanted to talk to them to find out if they were okay, if there was anything they could do.

J: So they were familiar with the people there? They had a relationship with the people there, a working relationship?

S: I think one or two of the badly injured church members, broken legs I think were mentioned in one case, and you know, having their head badly beaten. Those people, Schwerner talked about them as if he had had long, very good working relationships with them and cared about them and their families and they were leadership in their very small community, very small farming community outside of Philadelphia.

J: How did you know that they had disappeared? You mentioned that if they did not check in by four o'clock, was there a check in system? Did you have some type of system that allowed you to know immediately that they were in danger?

S: I had to assume that they were in danger--before they left--this took place Saturday. We arrived in Meridian Saturday evening and we went to the office, the COFO office. Schwerner and I went aside and talked about the next day, what he intended to do and he was absolutely adamant that if he and the others had not returned by four that I must assume that they were in a great deal of danger. He said, "I absolutely assure you that if

there's any way possible I will return by four o'clock the next afternoon, Sunday afternoon. If I don't [return] I don't want you to wait a minute before you try and find us. The absolute deadline I will be back is four o'clock in the afternoon."

J: What's the distance between Meridian and Philadelphia, do you know?

S: I think it's forty or fifty miles. I don't know. See, at that time I didn't drive a car. That was a problem in the succeeding days. I grew up in New York City and a lot of people don't get a driver's license and I didn't, but it's thirty to fifty miles. It's kind of northwest, more north than west, of Meridian.

J: What was done immediately at four o'clock when after having the conversation with Schwerner and the clock had ticked to four o'clock. What was done at that time?

S: I watched that clock tick down to the last second and I got on the phone and I called the office in Jackson and, following orders because Schwerner was just so absolute about it, at the stroke of four I got on the phone. I think they had an eight hundred line that I could call or I don't remember if it was an eight hundred line going in or out, but I called one of the numbers in Jackson. I talked to the person that answered the phone. I said this is what the situation is here and these are the orders that I've been given, that if they didn't return by four at the absolute latest that I was to tell you that they were in some kind of serious danger and here's where they've gone. The only response I got was, "Maybe they had a flat tire. Maybe the car broke down. Maybe they stopped for a coke."

J: The Jackson office being--

S: The Jackson, Mississippi, COFO office. They didn't take it seriously and I was at least aware enough of the danger. I had had enough of that drummed into me that all of a

sudden I began to feel that there's something terribly wrong here with the response I'm getting out of the Jackson office. They're telling us for the week in Ohio about the great danger we're in. Somebody tells me that they're going into a dangerous situation and they absolutely assured me that they would be back at a certain time or they were in great danger and I call and people kind of just piss it off. What else can you say? There was no way in the world I could argue or convince this person. They said, "Well, why don't you wait a few minutes and call back, twenty or thirty minutes." All I could say was yes. I didn't know what else to do. I had no other contact.

J: Was that the communications office in Jackson or was that the one in--was it located in Atlanta?

S: No, it was located in Jackson. I didn't have information to contact people in Atlanta.

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S: If we needed anything we were to call Jackson. I think if I had probably thought about it more I might have tried calling someone in Ohio, but it confused me when I hung up on the phone and didn't quite know what to do. They were telling me to wait and here I've got one set of instructions on one side from a man that's onsite that may be in a great deal of danger and the headquarters saying, "Well, you know, maybe something happened that's not real important." And I waited and I don't know whether I waited twenty or thirty minutes and I called them back and I said, "They're still not here. You have to do something." And again, they put me off.

My understanding in reading *Freedom Song* [*Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*] afterwards is that at some point in there, not too long

after I started making the two or three calls to Jackson that Mary King got involved. From what she said in her book she sensed immediately that there was something terribly wrong, that in reading that book my sense of it is that maybe our feelings matched. We didn't know. It could have been that they stopped for a coke or were temporarily detained or had a flat tire or whatever, but there was just an awful feeling that something is terribly wrong, that it's not an incidental kind of thing, it's serious and no one would believe it.

I had arrived at town less than twenty-four hours before. I knew no one there. I had supposed contacts and help in Jackson and they're turning me away and it was--I think about the third time I called somebody might have suggested in Jackson that I start calling around to the various jails and stuff, hospitals, jails--maybe they had been picked up. I started to do that and I did call the Neshoba County jail and I talked to the jailer's wife and this was five-thirty in the evening. She told me that she would have known if they had three extra prisoners because they fixed a real special meal on Sundays. She described the meal down to the English peas and mashed potatoes and the fried chicken and she cooked it herself Sunday afternoon. She would have known if they'd had three extra people. She actually denied anyone was there. Of course, I hung up the phone and went on to--

J: Believing what she had said?

S: Sure. I mean, as I said, I couldn't drive a car. The men that were killed had the only car that was on the project. Even if I had had a car, what could I do? Jump up and go up there and see what was for dinner? I had to do it by phone and rely on other people and

the Jackson office was not about to do anything from what they were telling me on the phone. I continued to call every place I could think of and there was a young black girl in the office, Sue Brown, who had worked on the project for a while and we got Schwerner's card files out and started calling every place we could think of. This included white people in Philadelphia that Schwerner had had contact with and just continued all through the evening and night to call on our own and to try to stay in some periodic contact with Jackson. It got dark, nothing was going on, these people hadn't shown up, we couldn't find out anything. Here there were some threats to--one or two of the guys had gone out in the afternoon and they thought they had been followed and we were staying with individual families here and there around town. They wanted to go home in the evening and I said "No, until we find out what's happening and because you might be followed. We don't know if we're going to be picked off. Let's all stay here." And so we stayed in the office, the community center.

J: Followed?

S: Yes. They'd thought some cars were tailing them when they went out. I think they went out to get a coke or lunch or something like that, but it was sometime that Sunday that they went out and came back and said that they were suspicious of a car that might have been following them. They weren't real specific about it that I remember. It was either afternoon or evening that they did that and everybody was kind of in a state of shock. I was confused. I was doing something, which helped, trying to work with Sue Brown in making these phone calls and figuring out what to do. And my suggestion was that we all stay in the office until we knew something about what had happened to the only real

live contacts we had in town were Michael Schwerner and James Chaney. We didn't really know anybody else.

At one point about eight or nine o'clock in the evening this black minister came and--we hadn't had anything to eat, they wouldn't let anybody go out--and he came with a huge box of drive-in hamburgers and a shotgun. I don't remember what his name was, but apparently--I didn't remember him until I read Mary King's book. But apparently Mary King had called him and told him that there were some students that might need his help and I don't know whether I was in contact with somebody and said we weren't going out, we weren't going home, we were just going to stay there, kind of hold up. But he brought a huge--a two foot by three foot box of hamburgers for us of the kind that I wasn't used to eating in New York; they had lettuce and tomatoes on them which I thought was really strange, but he brought his shotgun too. And he sat at the top of the stairs because the stairs--we were second floor. The stairs went up maybe twenty, twenty-five steps and then there were a few steps to your left; the stairway turned, and he sat right on the top of that turn with a shotgun across his knees. He was our protection for the next few days.

J: Did it surprise you that he brought a shotgun because it's my understanding that the organization had adopted a nonviolent approach and everybody had agreed that you would take a nonviolent approach, which meant that you did not have weapons to defend yourselves.

S: No, we didn't have weapons. I thought about it and I said, "I think that it might be a little bit better to have that man sit there with that shotgun over his knees than us get killed

because about the time he showed up it was dark; it was about eight or nine o'clock at night and something terrible had happened. We couldn't--nobody could locate those missing men and it looked like the horror stories they were telling us were possible before we went down there were beginning to come true. I'm terrified of guns. I absolutely will not be around a gun, but that's one of the few times in my life when I was glad to see somebody else with a gun in hand. I didn't want him to use it. I hoped under no circumstances would he ever have to use it, not even to have to point it at somebody. But I think when you weigh five of us up there, seven of us, you know, including some community people, being whatever, threatened, killed, beaten, during the night as we were alone by ourselves, versus somebody with a shotgun that may have just--. His presence may have deterred whatever might have happened. I don't know that I gave up my nonviolence, maybe I did, but between the choices of allowing more people to possibly die or be seriously injured versus just the--he was at the mountain pass and not one person could get past him without knowing that they would die. And I thought, "If that's enough to--if that's violence then maybe it's worth it." I don't know.

J: Was the local FBI agent contacted?

S: Yes.

J: You said that you made several phone calls.

S: I contacted or tried to contact the local FBI agent and I don't remember what his name was; it was something like Herring.

J: Hegelson?

S: I remember it started with an H, but I tried to contact him and there was no answer at his office and at some point--I don't know whether I got his name out of the phone book or something--I called his home. I'm not real clear in my memory on it, but I think somebody said he'd gone fishing that weekend or he was unavailable. But it was incredible to me that you couldn't even talk to an FBI agent because they knew it was coming that Sunday, that everybody was going to be in Mississippi Saturday night and Sunday was the first day. And here the representative of law and order in this country takes off and is unavailable. I thought that was very strange, but we called and tried to contact him and nothing and I understand that other people from Jackson and Atlanta were trying to contact Justice Department people and weren't getting much of a response.

J: What about John Doar? Did you reach him or was that left to the Jackson office to contact the Justice Department in Washington at the time?

S: It was Jackson or Atlanta that were making the contacts on that level. I was simply trying to find a local agent and couldn't make contact with them. But I did talk on the phone with those offices about what contacts they were trying to make in Washington with Justice Department officials and they were reporting that they were not successful and that they were getting brushed off and that basically nothing was being done. And then through the night, these conversations continued among us and so I was kept up pretty well with some attempts because as the hours passed Jackson and Atlanta started to understand that, yes, something is happening. These people just have disappeared off the face of the earth and that's never happened before. I was kept informed about what was going on, but I wasn't trying to make contact. At three o'clock in the morning I talked to

Rita Schwerner in Ohio and this is one of the major things that we talked about, what was being done, what could be done, what kind of response was being gotten from various people that they were trying to contact.

J: How did the parents of the missing men react to the news of the disappearance? You mentioned that you talked with Rita Schwerner. Did she, in that course of the conversation, mention how the parents were taking the news?

S: We didn't talk about that. I'm not sure that she had even talked to her husband's parents or her own parents. What we talked about was what might have happened, hoping that these men were still alive, that nothing serious had happened to them. I was very concerned about her feelings; she was very concerned about mine. I kept apologizing that there wasn't anything more that we could do except that we were holed up in the office and she kept trying to reassure me about that, that what I had done was more than adequate. She was reassuring me and I was trying to apologize to her that I couldn't do more, that we couldn't do more and it was that kind of conversation. It was personal. Other than briefly going over and over again here and there in that conversation what was being done, what might be attempted, there wasn't a whole lot other than the reassurance of each other. I think she realized that we were really frightened as just strangers dumped in town. I think she expressed concern about that in spite of her concern for her husband, which I thought was a marvelous thing to do at that point and I was concerned that here was her husband that has disappeared and how do you talk to somebody about that? I don't even know how to explain what my feelings were but you can't--other than I hope he's okay, we'll find him, what can you say to somebody?

J: Were you frustrated at all by the lack of urgency in the Justice Department to investigate the case?

S: Yes. That didn't last very long because President Johnson got the troops out pretty fast, both the navy troops and the FBI. They started to come in as fast as possible it seemed. Of course there were a million media people around dealing with all the speculation of what might have happened to these men and how dangerous the situation was so there was just a groundswell response. It started, it seemed, almost at dawn on Monday and by Thursday afternoon it was what everybody was thinking about, talking about. I called my home Wednesday or Thursday and they said, "Oh, yeah, we're watching you on television every ten minutes." They'd done brief interviews of people and I said, "They're running the same thing over and over again, and we had the television on twenty-four hours a day," and I thought, "Oh, Lord."

J: Were you surprised of the national attention that the case had gotten?

S: Yes. Because we were basically isolated. We didn't have television. We knew something was going on. When the *New York Times* is there and *Newsweek* and everyone else. Yes, and NBC and CBS is interviewing you; you know something is going on, but to have somebody actually mirror that back to you when you call your family and say, "This is serious. I seem to be doing okay. I'm surviving this." "Oh, yes, we're watching you on television right now." (Laughter) I was surprised, but I couldn't respond to it in any kind of like, "Oh, yippee." It was like the saddest thing in the world for a reason for being on television.

J: When the FBI became involved were you or any of your co-workers ever questioned?

S: The only time we were questioned was that Thursday when Rita Schwerner and Bob Zellner said that the FBI had invited them up to identify the burned station wagon. We were to go to Philadelphia. They invited me along on the ride and we went up and stopped on the side of a cotton field and the young attorney, Sherwin Kaplan, and I were left--it was his car, he was driving. We were left with his Monza on one side of a cotton field and Bob Zellner and Rita Schwerner walked through the cotton field. What they were going for was a house on the other side, they said, where some of the injured members of the church lived and they were going to go talk to them, kind of on the sneak, to find out how they were doing and what their contacts were with the men that disappeared that Sunday afternoon. It was known that they had gone to see these people, so Rita and Bob were going to go talk to them about what happened on Sunday. What they did, when they were there, what they talked about when they left. Then there were military helicopters flying over us and we didn't--Sherwin and I didn't know whether we ought to crouch down in the cotton and try and hide. We figured it was ridiculous because the car was there so we just watched the helicopters and then after a while, maybe thirty or forty minutes, Rita and Bob came back through the cotton field and we all got in the car.

We promptly got lost looking for the burned church and Sherwin stopped the car and between him and Bob, they decided they'd ask this white farmer passing by for directions to the community where the church was. The guy started screaming at us about being Yankees and civil rights workers and how we're all going to get killed, obviously not on our side, but we finally did find the church. It was early afternoon and

we got out and looked at the foundation that had been burned so badly that I touched part of the mortar and it crumbled. There were melted nails on the ground and the bell, the famous bell of the church, was there, and just the smell of burned wood and we spent about twenty, thirty minutes there looking around the church site. We then got back in the car and the road leading up to the church is very narrow, red clay with what they call bar ditches here in Texas, you know, those drainage ditches on the--. They were very steep and we were talking about if you got in the bar ditch you'd have to find some farmer with a mule to drag your car out.

We got in the car and drove out the driveway and looked to the right and there was a blue pickup truck blocking that road, and so Sherwin Kaplan, who was driving, drove to the left. We went down the road a ways and there was a--I think it was a stake paneled truck of some kind coming towards us and we were effectively trapped on that narrow road which was the width of one car with these very steep, two or three foot deep bar ditches on either side. We saw that other truck in front of us and the truck behind us was following us and we didn't know what to do and we drove into the front yard of this black family. They had a driveway there and we drove into the front yard. They were sitting out in the front yard; they saw all white faces, were scared to death, we were scared to death, and the two trucks were down on the road. They didn't follow us into the yard and then after we sat there the family that lived there was terrified. We were terrified thinking, "This is it. We've been picked off and we'll be killed." Then after a while that stake bed truck, the one that we were going towards, backed up and the other

one backed up a ways but didn't leave so we very cautiously drove out the front yard and drove down that road into Philadelphia.

The blue pickup truck followed us and we went to the only motel in town, the Delphi Motel, which is where Rita and Bob said the FBI said to meet them to go identify the car. We started knocking on doors because the pickup truck followed us and they had guns in their hands. It was like the final scene from *Easy Rider*. And we thought that was going to end that way and we--they parked in the parking lot of the motel with us. We got out of our car and started knocking on doors and the nice, clean cut, crew cut, young man that answered the door denied that they were federal agents. And we finally made our way around the corner and found Claude Sitton and Nicholas Von Hoffman and a guy from--the Los Angeles editor of *Newsweek*. His name was McDonald I think or something like that, a big old tall cigar-chewing guy.

J: These were all media reps?

S: They were media reps and they had a room down at one end of the hotel--it was L-shaped--and they were at the top point of the L and we--Nicholas Von Hoffman and this editor from *Newsweek* were in the room and they invited us in. We pointed to the pickup because they followed us from the church and they had a map spread out on this desk or table in the motel room and they were showing us where the federal search was taking place. At that point Claude Sitton of the *New York Times* comes in and says, "Get them the hell out of here; they'll get us all killed," thinking that these characters in the pickup truck and others to follow would come in and slaughter us all. So he threw us right out back in front of this pickup truck and slammed the door behind us, this *New*

York Times correspondent. We were all terrified and here we are out on the sidewalk, they're going to save their skins and throw us to the dogs and at that point from around the short end of the L, here come these crew cut guys around the corner, identified themselves as federal agents. They take us back around the corner of that L into their room and interrogate us and ask us why we were there.

J: Who were the people that followed you?

S: Klan. They were just white guys with guns in the pickup truck. It was one, blue pickup truck. Anyway, the FBI grabbed us and interrogated us for forty-five minutes about why were we there, what were we going to do, and everything. We kept saying, "You asked us to come up and identify the car, the station wagon." They did not respond to that. This went on over and over again for about forty five minutes and then they gave us directions for--I think it was Bob Zellner they gave directions to--the garage where the burned out station wagon was located. They refused to go with us, told us we'd have to go on our own, and we were back out on the street again and at that point the blue pickup, as I remember, was gone.

We got in the car, drove to the garage. When we got there—everybody knew we were coming. There were guys hanging all over the fences leading into the wrecking yard and on cars and everything all doing the rebel yell as loud as they could. I don't think I'll ever forget that. It was kind of like running a gauntlet into the wrecking yard with all these guys doing rebel yells and waving confederate flags. When we went into the wrecking yard and looked at the burned station wagon, which was outside, I think up on blocks, and I reached under the middle of the front seat and pulled out a zipper. What

had happened was that when we went down there I had one of these kind of nylon windbreakers and it had a pouch in front with a zipper on it and on the ride down it got hot during the day so I tucked the thing under the front seat. I was sitting in the middle of the front seat at that time and I tucked it under the front seat and forgot it and I remembered when we got there. So I reached under and pulled out the zipper and I said, "Yes, this is the zipper to my jacket."

J: What did that feel like to see that station wagon like that and to know that you had been in it at a previous time?

S: I think I just shut down completely at that point. I think when those rebel yells and those confederate flags and the whole incident, that pickup truck following us and the FBI denying who they were, the media people throwing us back out in front of these shotguns or rifles or whatever they were--I think at that point I was just in--how much shell shock can you stand before you close down completely? It was like the calmest, most rational thing in the world to reach under that seat and pull out the zipper and say, "Yes, I think this is the car. Here's my zipper from what was a wind breaker." But I remember it clearly and it's like I think the psychological word for it is dissociate. At this point you're saying, "They haven't shot me yet." And you don't have any feeling about it.

After all this there was a discussion--there was a guy there from I think the equivalent of our department of public safety in the Mississippi State Police. His name was Snodgrass or something like that and he came by and he wasn't real polite. I don't think he was nasty. He may have argued with Rita Schwerner.

J: The highway patrol I think is what that was called.

S: Whatever the state police is. And I think there may have been some argument. I think Rita Schwerner might have confronted him some and he reacted as opposed to being a quiet, calm, neutral professional, but there was some kind of small confrontation, it was not a yelling match of any kind. Maybe it was demands being made or whatever from Rita Schwerner and Bob Zellner about, "What are you going to do about this? Why aren't you responding?" And then we all got back in the car and very calmly drove back to Meridian. No incidents happened.

The reason I'm talking about this in great detail is if you read [Seth] Kagan and [Philip] Dray's book, *We Are Not Afraid* three people go up, they don't identify the attorney, the incidents that they talk about, going up in the middle of the night, sneaking up there in the middle of the night, finding a church yard full of pickup trucks, and they all follow them into town. There's a big argument between the sheriff and Rita Schwerner at the motel and the FBI agent coming in and using what Claude Sitton actually said, "Get them the hell out of here. They're going to get us killed." That was based on interviews either with Rita Schwerner or Bob Zellner and it didn't happen that way. There was no wild ride through the woods, we just pulled up into somebody's yard. I read *We Are Not Afraid* and I got half way through the book and I thought, "Gee, maybe somebody's finally telling the story straight and I run into that and some other things and it's still all screwed up as to what happened.

J: Why do you think there's a difference in recollection here?

S: I don't know--I have to trust my memories and maybe other people are trusting their memories, but it's not the same story. I think when you consider the media attention, the

witnesses that were around, there has to be a way of verifying that some of those things took place, that with the media following someone around like Rita Schwerner, Bob Zellner who was with her all the time, there has to be something that exists where they talk about what happened that day. There were media right there on the spot at that motel. Why, when you look in the back of *We Are Not Afraid* is it just an interview with a couple of people? It isn't backed up by any other kind of documentation. My thought in reading that and some other serious things in that book is that didn't these people even look at the record? There had to be the newspapers, TV, magazines--

J: *New York Times*.

S: Yes. I haven't done the research to look it up, but there was so much coverage that could my recollection have been so radically different? There's got to be resources to back it up one way or the other, but I was the fourth person in that car. That I know, and that was omitted from the book, and I think that's a serious starting place for me to trust my memories.

J: Do you remember anything about former CIA chief Allen Dulles coming to Mississippi to investigate on behalf of President Johnson?

S: Well, I saw it in the newspapers. I think I was in Jackson and picked up a newspaper that had a headline with Dulles. I think I might have been in Jackson within a day or two of his arrival, but I remember the banner headlines of the Jackson newspaper about Dulles coming to town. That's as close as I got to it. What interested me more was that they were moving in something like four hundred FBI agents and establishing a permanent office in that state that would be very, very substantial.

J: A new field office in Jackson.

S: Yes. And they were talking about, for the foreseeable future, keeping those four hundred FBI agents there until some of the stuff was straightened out whether it was locating the missing men or just dealing with the host of civil rights and human rights violations that they suddenly recognized were going on in the state. There was nobody to respond to them so that was of much greater interest to me than Allen Dulles visiting or J. Edgar Hoover, their hero in white Mississippi, visiting. Just the practical aspects of at least the show of protections was there.

J: I have in my notes also that Dulles met with Negro leaders during that time and he stated that he thought the situation in Mississippi had improved. Do you think that that was also the opinion of the administration?

S: I wasn't involved on the level of Allen Dulles and the administration. I just know that the people I had contact with, whether it was other college students or community people, was that the situation in Mississippi hadn't improved. It was a terrible situation and nobody knew what it would take to even begin to deal with it, that this had been the way it always was and anybody could see that it was always going to be that way. Maybe there was suddenly a little crack that could be opened up wider. I don't know of anybody that I was in contact with or that I heard anything about that said the situation is better. It went on to be an awfully hot, long, dangerous summer. Maybe it wasn't as bad as it would have been otherwise, but it was really bad.

J: There have been some documentation linking law enforcement officers in Mississippi and FBI agents to Klan members. Did you feel that that was a situation in Mississippi that they were maybe one and the same?

S: Yes. A lot of my contact was with the Meridian police force and I mentioned talking to the assistant chief of--I think his name was Pfeiffer. And he in conversations was saying, yes, he knew his men were with the Klan. We had a foot patrolman in our section of town, Fifth Street and Twenty-fifth Avenue I think was the intersection where our office was located, and the foot patrolman there was Klan. He identified himself as such, the neighborhood identified him as such and he was just like a bully in a uniform with a nightstick walking up and down the streets keeping order in the black side of town. You had to treat each police officer as if they were a representative of the Klan and that meant the city police, the county police, the state police.

There was not enough contact with the FBI to make a value judgment on whether they were with the Klan or where they stood, but they certainly were not helpful. They were--at the very least they just stood by and watched and in that kind of hellish situation that is almost like helping the people who are perpetuating the violence. But we all assumed that they were all either sympathetic or active in the Klan.

I was surprised to make the contact with the assistant police chief where he was very, very concerned about what was going on. [He] couldn't do much, but he could help in some kind of underground ways. He was a very reasonable person to talk to and we worked out some kind of minor problems with people on our staff that the police had gotten after unreasonably like a kid picked up for a concealed weapon when he had one

of those little, dull cafeteria knives in his pocket. I went and talked to him about it and said, "Hang on a second." And he said, "Yes. I know what you mean" and wiped the record clean. But the basic assumption was any man in a uniform with a nightstick and a gun on his side was a Klan member.

J: As a communications person for the project, did you have any contact during the time of the investigation with the parents of the missing workers?

S: I didn't have contact with Schwerner and Goodman's parents. I made contact with Mrs. Chaney because she lived in Meridian. The first contact I had with the Chaney family was through Ben Chaney who was twelve at the time.

J: That was the brother of--

S: Yes, his little brother, and I met his sisters, I think there were two of them. Then I met the mother in early July; there was a birthday party for Ben and we all celebrated that in spite of what was going on and I think that was the first time I met his mother and I met her on several other occasions. There wasn't a whole lot of talking. I talked to his sisters and I talked a lot to Ben, as much as you can with a twelve-year-old about what was going on. He was terribly upset. His sisters were terribly upset. I think they had their heads screwed on a little better than the twelve-year-old brother. None of us knew what to think because officially the men had disappeared. The chances of them having been killed was so great, but nobody really wanted to talk about it in those terms and we kind of just all hung on together.

J: Did Mrs. Chaney mention the concern of the President in locating her son and the others?

S: Yes. No, that birthday party wasn't when I first met Mrs. Chaney. It was in Young's hotel. It was within a few days of the disappearance. She came to the hotel. I think some of the news people were there staying in Young's hotel where they were using a room. There were some people from out of town, I think civil rights workers that had rented rooms. She came in, she spent some time there. I don't think I had any contact with her, but I might have been introduced to her. At one point they said that [from] some pay phone in the hall that the president of the United States was calling and Mrs. Chaney supposedly went and talked to him. My understanding was that it was President Johnson who talked to her directly and expressed concern about her son. I've read in later accounts that she complained that he never talked to her. Some aide did, but he had talked directly to the families of the white boys that were killed.

J: Right. Records indicate that it was LBJ's special assistant, Lee White, who had called Mrs. Chaney and not the President himself.

S: My remembrance is that she was talking about the President calling. I don't know. She didn't say anything after that because I think she sold the rights to the story to *Life* magazine. They were saying, I think the call came in on a pay phone. "The White House is calling. The President's on the line." But that is what I remember her saying that the President had called and expressed concern about her son.

J: When director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, came down to Jackson, Mississippi, to open up a new field office there, did you feel at the time that he should have included Philadelphia, Mississippi, on his itinerary since the investigation was in full swing by then?

S: I have to look back on it, but in a way, I think it was a good idea that he didn't. He had a huge fan club in Mississippi of the people who were on the other side of the fence from us about all these things. I think if he had gone to someplace like Philadelphia the white community would have come out to applaud and admire him. And I think it would have bolstered their position in a community that was obviously a killer type of community. So I'm glad he didn't go to a place like Philadelphia--considering the response he got in Jackson and what I saw then, what I've read about later in a very limited way read about it that he got a hero's welcome when he landed in Jackson. I'm glad that [he] didn't go to Philadelphia. It would have supported the white community, the people that did what they did.

I thought years later when President Reagan, on the fourth of July, went to the Neshoba County Fair and talked about state rights, I began to feel the ache of what that part of that community had done to three people that I was supposed to be working with. He recalled for me the things I heard that summer that justified what they were doing and to see the president of the United States there at the Neshoba County Fair talking about this just revived it all. So I think if Hoover had gone it would have done the same thing. It would have been much more serious at the time.

J: When the news came that the bodies had been found, what were the feelings among your colleagues at that time?

S: There was an awful lot of sadness about it. There had been so much hassle that this had been a trick that had been pulled on the American public that they really hadn't disappeared except as a publicity stunt that there was the horror of finally having to admit

to yourself that they'd been dead all this time. The circumstances of their death, the way the bodies were treated, and yet the relief to know that the issue was finally settled. It would have been horrible if the bodies hadn't been found and years had gone by and nobody would know for sure and there would always be the open question of who did what. So you have the relief of having the answer and the sadness of having to admit to yourself what you probably have known all along. I don't know how to respond to a violent death other than with a great deal of horror and sadness. I don't understand people doing that, you know, killing.

J: What was your impression of the reaction of the White House to the deaths of the three civil rights workers?

S: I think that passed me by. I think I was just so wrapped up in just what was going on inside of me and my immediate vicinity that anything outside of that just totally went by me. I think the next thing that I had any understanding of outside of myself was the funeral at the sight of the burned church, the memorial service and what happened there. I remember the memorial service at the church in Meridian, some of the things vaguely that happened but it was really like the response to a sudden, violent death. This was a little bit prolonged, but I think it was the same kind of response, you just crawl inside yourself and you deal with the pain and a lot of it just--it whizzes by your ears. You never pick up on any of it or what's going on. I've never gone back and read the accounts of the response and what happened when the bodies were found. I knew that in some way that the people were horrified. I remember news response about the autopsy and the hassle over that.

J: The discrepancies in the results of the autopsies.

S: Yes. What I heard at the time when they did a second autopsy on Chaney was the pathologist said it's as if he'd been dropped from a plane at thirty thousand feet without a parachute. His bones were crushed. He'd been that severely beaten. What I had heard from various people in the community around Philadelphia and Meridian who came into Meridian and talked about it, was that the night of the murder that some people in town said that they had seen Chaney being beaten in front of the other two and that the other two were made to watch and it was just absolutely brutal. The autopsy seems to confirm the brutal beatings that were described to me within two weeks after the disappearance. So I think some of the other stories coming out about that he was run over by a bulldozer were just--I can't go along with it because of what I heard within such a short time of those beatings taking place and how brutal they were.

Also I heard somewhere within a while and I don't know. It's not possible to track these people down and I don't remember who told me or what, but somebody said that when it was discovered that they had beaten Chaney so badly that he wouldn't survive was when they decided to kill the other two. Apparently they just wanted to get Chaney and beat him and teach him a lesson and they went berserk and went too far.

J: Do you think that was because he was a black in the company of whites--

S: Yes. That was a fairly typical pattern of what happened all that summer in terms of my experience and what I was told before I went down there that yes, they would pick on a black first. It's kind of to make the others watch.

J: Why do you think that these things were told to you after the investigation and not told to someone during the investigation?

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

J: Why do you think that these stories or rumors were not passed on to the proper authorities at the time?

S: I think there were several reasons. The main ones I would pick out is that the people that passed on these reports to me and others were blacks that lived in Neshoba County. They were very frightened people given the situation where people had just been murdered. If they had seen these things, I think they would be terribly frightened and not want to expose themselves to any kind of authority whether it was FBI or expose themselves in the media so that the community could come and get them. The whites felt that way too. I think it was just a general distrust, an attempt that if they saw these things they wanted to say something about it, but protect themselves at the same time.

I know the first night, that Sunday night, I called some phone numbers that I found in Michael Schwerner's file; they were whites in Philadelphia and I called them and they believed--they eventually left Philadelphia after being under siege, they thought, for a couple of months. But those phone calls terrified them so much that they thought that the community would kill them, the elements in the community that were the murderers and the Klan and--

J: If they came down and investigated?

S: Yes, if anybody found out that a phone call had been made from the COFO office in Meridian to their home at the point when this is going on Sunday night, early Monday

morning. They were so terrified by those phone calls exposing the fact that there had been some contact with them in the past and contact now that they--. One fellow sat on his porch or had somebody in his family sit on his porch with a loaded shotgun until they could move their family out to South Carolina. I don't remember the name of these people but I think it's mentioned in *We Are Not Afraid* where one of the white families relocated, but I called them that night and that's the kind of atmosphere you're dealing with. White or black, if they passed on any of this information and literally exposed themselves publicly they felt that they were in great danger. So to compromise between just not saying anything and exposing themselves to danger they passed the word on through the civil rights organization and the contacts that they had.

J: Did the people in Philadelphia that you contacted at the time encourage you or discourage you not to call again or--?

S: No, they didn't. They sounded confused and maybe frightened when I called them. They knew nothing, had heard nothing. None of them offered to check it out. I don't think they could have without endangering themselves, but none of them asked not to be called again. I was simply told later that this one particular white family was that concerned about the phone call that it would have been--I would never have called them again knowing that they were that frightened by it but these were very frightening times. It wasn't that all the people in Philadelphia were on this violence kick or were willing to kill, it's just that there was so much of an element of that in the community that the whole community was prey to it. Very few people had the courage to stand up and say, "I don't like what's going on."

J: Did you feel at any time that the telephones were tapped?

S: Constantly. We could hear people on the line when we picked up the phone to make a phone call. I remember--we'd call the phone company every week to have them check the lines, if they were tapped, and they denied it. I don't know if they checked it, but I would pick up the phone periodically and hear, "Oh, she's on the phone again." Somebody was listening into the phone. We knew it. If I had to make some personal calls, or if [I had to make] some calls that absolutely needed to be confidential, I would go to a randomly selected pay phone with a roll of quarters or whatever change I needed at the time. It's quarters now; it may have been dimes then. But to make long distance calls or whatever. That's what I did to prevent anyone listening in on the calls because we assumed constantly that the pay phone and the direct line we had in the office were tapped. We could hear this on the line.

J: Was there any speculation as to whom the informant had been that tipped the FBI off to the location of the bodies?

S: No, I heard nothing about that. I read William Bradford Huie's book [*Three Lives for Mississippi*] several years later and found out that there was an informant. I don't know if it was the informant that he was talking about. I don't trust anything that he wrote from encounters with the man, but I was not aware that summer that there was an informant or if I heard it, it didn't make much difference. The important thing was that the bodies were found.

J: Right. It's on record that the FBI could have possibly paid as much as thirty thousand dollars and that the informants led them to the bodies.

S: That's what I have read and heard that the reward was thirty thousand dollars. I never heard any speculation as to who it might have been or that it was male, female, or whatever. I just never heard anything about it. What I have heard is that the bodies never would have been found without the informant.

J: After the bodies were found and I guess before the funerals or during that time of preparation for the memorials, what went on during that time?

S: There wasn't anything very special going on. There was a lot of excitement that the bodies had been found. There was a lot of sadness involved. We tried to keep the office open and deal with the media that was constantly coming in and trying to develop news stories out of what had happened. It really was not anything spectacular. There were a lot of expressions of condolence from people around the country that I remember, but I stayed out of any direct involvement with the funerals, memorial services and such. But I've read accounts where there was a memorial service at a church. I think what they might have been talking about was a church service for Chaney's funeral. The memorial service itself was held at the sight of the burned church where this all started and it was out in the open in the afternoon.

J: Do you remember any events from the memorial service? Did you attend that?

S: Yes, I did. I attended with Casey Hayden who was on the staff of SNCC. We had become sort of friends during the summer, spent a lot of time on several occasions talking and we went to the memorial service together. I remember we talked a lot at the time, being there. We made a lot of comments to each other about the local police presence at the memorial service. I think there's a famous picture of a car with all these

police officers leaning on one side and one of them scratching his crotch or some such really obscene thing at a funeral or a memorial service. And I remember Ben Chaney, twelve-year-old brother of James, getting up and making a very impassioned speech and there were a lot of other speeches.

J: What did he talk about?

S: I don't know specifically. I don't remember specifically what he talked about. The impression I have is that the pain of having his brother killed simply because he was black, trying to register people to vote. The twelve-year-old talked about his pain because his older brother who he apparently idolized and he was very violently killed. Violent death is hard to deal with to begin with, but when you're twelve years old and here's your older brother who's your hero and he's done in this way simply because he's black and is doing something in civil rights. That's what he talked about. The specific words I don't remember. It was painful to listen to.

J: Was Chaney's funeral before or after the memorial? I guess what I really want to know is what happened. There were circumstances that happened at the funeral, or different things that happened at the funeral.

S: It must have been after the funeral. What happened at the funeral was that those of us who had been among the original eight to go down were invited with the family to ride in the cars to the funeral, you know, funeral home Cadillac type of deal and we did that. I don't remember who I rode with, but I remember riding out to the funeral. It was at the black cemetery in Meridian and I stayed around for the funeral service, the actual religious part of it and afterwards--no, I guess it was before--I talked to the funeral

director, the black funeral director that had prepared Chaney's body. What he was telling me was that one of the good things that came out of the Vietnam War was that they had body bags. Otherwise they would have never been able to have decently buried Chaney, he was in such bad condition, because he had been literally crushed or beaten to death. The bodies having been buried for forty some odd days were in terrible condition and the only way he could handle it was to put Chaney's remains in a body bag in order to have a funeral.

Then he talked to me about why we were having the funeral in a black cemetery and he said that the families of Chaney and Schwerner had asked that they be allowed to be buried in the white cemetery in Meridian and they were turned down. And so Schwerner's family decided to take him home I guess to New York to bury him and the only place for Chaney to be buried was in the black cemetery. I have seen some accounts where they refused to allow Schwerner to be buried in the black cemetery and that's the reason they were not buried together, but it was actually the white cemetery's refusal to bury Chaney with Schwerner. Schwerner could get in, but Chaney couldn't, so the decision was made to separate them. I think the families, because they had worked together, wanted to keep them together and I don't remember there was any question of Andrew Goodman being buried with them.

J: Since he was a volunteer and not--

S: Yes, they had just met a week before, but the working relationship between Chaney and Schwerner was such that they wanted to bury them both in the white cemetery. I got the sense or maybe the funeral director told me that the attempt was made to get Chaney into

the white cemetery to deal with the integration issues involved. This conversation had to take place before the funeral service because when the funeral service ended something that absolutely horrified me happened.

We were under a canopy at the cemetery, the services were concluded and off, I guess a hundred or hundred and fifty feet away there was a cord put up or a cordon where the media were to keep behind that to not interfere with the family and friends that were at the funeral. The second that service was ended they broke the cordon and rushed in a pack of what looked like a hundred or two hundred newspaper media people came running like hell towards the family just as fast as they could yelling and screaming, wanting to get the first shots of the family after the service. I saw those people just coming in this crowd running as fast as they could towards us and I turned around and walked away. I went back to the car that I had ridden in to the cemetery and I just opened the door and sat on the--not on the seat but on the door sill of the car and just watched them, it was like animals in a feeding frenzy. This was the American media. I was so horrified by what they did, to do this immediately and to be like animals in a feeding frenzy to get their story. I had worked all summer with them and I know they were anxious and very aggressive about getting their stories, but this was beyond my comprehension.

J: The *New York Times* reported that during the service, during James Chaney's funeral, that there was a bomb threat. Were you aware of that?

S: No, that probably was kept from the people. I don't recall ever hearing anything about that.

J: What was your reaction to the charges against the chief law officers, Sheriff Lawrence Rainey and Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price of Neshoba County after the fact that--their jail was one of the first ones that you called when you were trying to find out if the missing men had been taken there.

S: I was not surprised that they were charged with the murders or that there was a group of, what, twenty, twenty-one people that were supposedly directly involved in the murders. I was not surprised. I was in graduate school at the time and heard the news of all the legal maneuvers that were going on and I thought maybe they'll never get convicted for what they did. They certainly would not ever get indicted in Neshoba County for murder. In fact, they still haven't. But I was glad that the people that we thought had to be involved were actually involved. It settles the question of dealing with all that paranoia that summer and then to know that probably your sense or your feeling or what you've heard or discussed with other people is very much correct. That they were the people to be afraid of.

J: The law enforcement people in Mississippi?

S: Yes. That they were involved to that extent and that we were very right in being very paranoid, very cautious in ever dealing with--never to be alone with them. To be isolated by them like these three men were. I don't know that I had a particular reaction about that phone call to the jail that I made and the discussion of what was for Sunday dinner. But I talked to the jailer's wife and she sounded like a pleasant--from what I remember of the conversation--she sounded like a pleasant enough lady, kind of confused that anybody would be asking about this and about people in the jail and to think that she had

to have lied to me. I think I had a reaction to that, like you would have with anybody, that even though they're a stranger you basically trust them, then you find out later they're just bald-faced lying. Same kind of reaction. What it cost made it far worse, but that's the only reaction I had to that.

J: Was there an explanation as to why the state never intervened with the charge of murder?

S: I have never heard any. Recently when they had that picnic in Philadelphia on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the disappearance and murder, I think it's the secretary of state of Mississippi was talking about now it's time for the grand jury to meet and consider charges. I think in my mind my reaction to the--and I put this in very general terms--the people in Philadelphia, Neshoba County, the people in Mississippi just kind of as a stereotype. The issues of coming to peace with what they did. I don't mean any particular person, but a situation was created that would allow this kind of thing to happen. I'll never come to peace with that in my mind or feel that the issue is settled until a grand jury meets and goes through the process.

I don't care whether they indict now or convict. I'm simply saying it makes a statement by that community that life has changed in Philadelphia and Neshoba County. Until that I'd have to be very cynical about their attitudes and their respect for everyone. Have some of these prejudices and violence and stuff gone underground because it's not fashionable to do that these days or is it really true that some fundamental changes have been made in dealing with human rights issues? Until a grand jury meets and considers this seriously then those questions are always going to be in the back of my mind and I think they ought to be in the back of everybody's mind.

J: For the record I think we should point out that the people that were charged were charged by the--

S: Violation of federal civil rights?

J: Yes, conspiring to violate civil rights.

S: And the most severe sentence was, what, ten years in jail and a ten thousand dollar fine for one person and they served a couple of years in a federal penitentiary and paid a fine or may not have paid it, I don't know. But that's the most severe penalty for one person and the others got markedly less sentences and only a couple of dozen almost that they know were involved, I think only five or six got convicted or a very small number.

J: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed on July 2 while the investigation for the three continued. Do you think that national attention of the case stimulated Congress to pass this legislation?

S: Yes. I'm certain of it. I talked yesterday about being in tune with the will of the people and I think when you see--it's the same phenomenon that happened with the Vietnam War. When you saw someone who could be your son on television fighting and getting shot and stuff it changes public opinion. When they put this on television--what was going on in the state of Mississippi--where it could be your son or your neighbor's son or your classmate in college that a lot of people could identify with. It was not some people which you had never encountered, what you perceived as a different--it was right there in front of you. When you seem to put that stuff on television things change and this is, I think, the first instance of it when they passed the civil rights act at that time. I think the same thing happened in summer with the voting rights act. I think it helped stop the war

in Vietnam to show it on television, to show what happened. It's brought into your living room. You can't avoid it.

J: As a civil rights worker, how were your feelings towards President Johnson after passing that act? You mentioned earlier that you had a lot of respect for him and you thought that he had done a lot for civil rights, but at the height of the investigation he recommends to Congress the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and it is passed during that time. How did you feel towards him?

S: Contrary to what a lot of people around me thought, I had fairly positive feelings about President Johnson. Many of the people I worked with had no respect or no positive feelings towards him. And it wasn't because he was perceived as a southerner, but simply because he was perceived as the authorities that they were confronting and fighting against. But I looked at this kind of thing and saw--I'm a political scientist; I was trained as a political scientist and studied the presidency in college under a very good teacher. And to look at what he was doing and saying this man really knows how to work that system to get things done. He's willing to take some risks that other presidents would never dare even consider. I had basically a very positive attitude towards what he could do. I never got into do I like him personally or was he an honest politician or a dishonest politician--I just thought that given my concerns he was beginning to take the risks as a president, which I think were phenomenal at the time and still phenomenal to change society. So many times you see the law catching up with the changes and here you have the law being instituted and the changes coming as a result of that. That's I

think a reversal of what we usually assumed and Johnson pulled it off as a good president, as a competent man.

J: Do you think the fact that two of these victims were white influenced how the events were covered by the national press?

S: Oh, sure. I think people pointed that out time and again through the years that had it--and I think Rita Schwerner said on the spot within days of the disappearance--that had it been just blacks that disappeared there would have been no coverage like we had. But you also have to remember this was a set up situation. We were down there intentionally sticking our necks out, literally risking our lives. It's unfortunate that this did happen, but they expected many more people to be injured or killed. There was a possibility of that. I don't think they really sent us to [the] slaughter, but this was a set up situation where you have two whites and a black killed.

Because the whites are there, they're northern whites, they're in a situation that's been well publicized, the dangers have been well publicized, the media's beginning to cover it. That it was all set up that the people that did this murder in Philadelphia had a very poor sense of what they could get away with at the time. I cannot believe that people were that dumb to think that they could pick off--with the existing publicity and what was going on in this structured situation--three people, murder them, and get away with it and not have their whole culture come crashing down around their ears. But they went out and they did what they did and that was the result. Mississippi and Alabama and some of these other places, that culture no longer exists or if it exists it exists

underground because of what these people did. It was a very stupid move. Other than the tragedy of it I can't imagine that they thought they could get away with it.

J: What effect did the murders have on the original goals of the Mississippi summer project?

S: I don't know overall. I think the effect on the statewide project or changing programs or deleting programs or not even starting them, I think that was minimal. I think the freedom schools and other things that were planned went on as scheduled in many places.

I spent most of my time in Meridian and saw that we were leaderless. Michael Schwerner was the project director, he knew the town well. Although they brought in a man named Bob Gore from CORE to head up the project temporarily, he was terrified of being in the South. He had no experience in Meridian, no contacts in the community. Of course, we had none because we had just arrived. We attempted to build some so that our community programs, the schools and some of the other things I think were interfered with. They went on, but I don't think that they were all that they could have been had these murders not taken place. We had an old school building, two or three story building, off somewhere in town that had a freedom school that was just packed with kids. And there were some good programs going on, but it's like it was much less than what would have been possible had the murders not taken place and people like Schwerner and Chaney and Goodman been around.

J: So you think that the murders did derail the program some?

S: To a certain extent. I know they derailed the community center program completely because the community center was up on the second floor above that drugstore and that

was their offices. That was completely taken over by what had to be handled as a result of the murders, the publicity, the people coming and going, the library that Schwerner had built up went totally unused all summer. And there were plans to get donations for a lot more books and bring children in and have story hours and have classes of adults in the community come meet in the community center to talk about voter registration or some other things that would--nutrition classes and classes for women in the community. Those things never occurred in that community center simply because the murders took over the whole place. I think the ping pong table was used twice that summer. What very limited poor recreation was available in that small area was just totally overwhelmed by what was happening as a national story. So yes, that end of it was hurt.

I think the freedom school was hurt to some extent. It took weeks before any voter registration work was done again and they had to bring in people from around the country to do it, and it did derail it to different degrees in different programs. I don't think that effect was carried over to other parts of the state. I think the violence that people had to deal with everywhere else, the church burnings, the beatings, the shootings, that interferes with your program, but I don't think anybody allowed for this kind of thing and how do you handle it if it happens.

J: Did any of the volunteers or students leave after the murders occurred?

S: No. None of us did. We all stayed. On a personal level there were a couple of times I was frightened enough that I called a friend in--he was staying with his parents--in Fort Worth, Texas, a Methodist minister named James Sessions--I called him a couple of

times because I was so scared about staying there, but I never left. One time I remember calling him at his parents' house in Cleburne, Texas, I think, and I told him that I was too frightened to stay and he said, "Get on a plane and get out," and after I talked to him for a while I hung up and thought about it and--. But after I talked to Jim and got off the phone I thought about it and I said, "No, I can't leave." There's too much that I'm committed to. I never talked with others about their doubts about staying. I know I had some, but stayed and dealt with [them] as scary as it was--what was happening was causing doubts. I think some people might have talked to the ministers that were brought in on the Delta ministry project about some of the things that were going on with them. It was a very tense time. You didn't know whether you were going to get picked off at any time, shot.

I remember being in bed one night. This family I was staying with had chickens in the backyard and they roosted in an old tree and too many got on an old branch and it broke. It sounded like a shotgun and I'm sound asleep in bed and I hear that thing and I'm immediately on the floor and crawling under the bed thinking somebody's shooting into the house. This is out of a sound sleep so you really--the only thing I have ever come across that begins to describe how I felt in that situation is to be in a war situation. To talk or to read about soldiers and what they do as they're always on alert and always aware that they could be picked off at any time. I think I mentioned that the strangeness of it was that it was America, a part I had never experienced before, but it was still so basically American that I recognized it. And yet here I am at three o'clock in the morning

just wide awake when the chickens break a branch because it sounds like a pop like a shot and I'm under the bed instantly, trying to think, "Am I being shot at?"

There were other instances, the people that we lived with were nervous. I remember getting a ride home, I worked in the office late and a Presbyterian minister from New Jersey offered me a ride home in a rental car that his congregation had provided to him while down there. We had been told before the summer started that we needed to disconnect the lights that come on when you open the car door and that was done in this car. But we sat there with the doors open, this hot, steamy night, talking before I went into the house and of course there were no lights in the car. So the people that I was living with saw that strange car out there and they were aiming their guns out, ready to fight off the Klan invaders. It was just two of us talking for a few minutes and then they saw who it was and they were just horrified that they might have killed us, but they were that--you see a strange car parked in front of your house and out come the guns, the heavy artillery.

J: Tell me about the families that you stayed with. How were they identified during the project as families that would take you in?

S: Well, Michael Schwerner arranged that. He had contacts in the community with relationships that he had established and my understanding in talking to him on the ride down as to where he had decided to place people was that he had gone out into the community and asked people if they would volunteer to take in a student or two. And he had gotten the volunteers that would take us in and had placed us there. I stayed with a family named Ray. I remember the woman's name, Helen Ray. I don't remember her

husband's name. But Edna Perkins, the other female volunteer, and I stayed with the Rays all summer and they were an elderly couple, not retired, but I think they were in their sixties and they were just some of the kindest people I'd ever met in my life.

J: Were you often paired in interracial situations? Were you paired with black families or were blacks paired in white homes? What was the ratio?

S: Well, the homes that we were in were all black and this was just--all of us were whites and we were paired with black families. The only person that I remember of the student volunteers that was not what you would call Anglo-American was a kid from the Pacific Northwest who was an American Indian. But everybody else was intentionally--you know, the white northern student. The national staff, Bob Gore of CORE and some other people were black. They were not the student volunteers who needed to be the white middle class.

J: Did you ever think--we talked some about the wiretapping on your phones. Did you ever think that maybe the families were in danger of being under investigation at all by the FBI or--

S: You mean the families we stayed with?

J: The families you stayed with, right.

S: I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised. I've had experiences since with the Secret Service and FBI with friends. For many years I was friends with a family here that are parents of Marilyn Buck who was involved in a terrorist involvement, the Brinks robbery. And I know the Secret Service and FBI hung around their mailbox and kept them under surveillance for many, many years because of what their daughter has done and they had

never been involved. I know that they've gone around and they've interviewed the parents' friends and other people associated with the family simply because of what their daughter has done. They have had nothing to do with her for many, many years, they're not involved in any of her activities. The father is an Episcopal priest. The mother is a nurse. The two kind, gentle people are horrified by what the daughter did, but yet the FBI hangs at their mailbox in Franklin, Texas, for eighteen months while they're searching for their daughter on the off chance that she's going to come home or write them a letter with a return address. It was ludicrous. I know they've kept the family under surveillance for years.

So I would not be surprised given the situation in the mid-1960s that yes, we were and the people we were associated with were all under some kind of surveillance. I'm sure that if I--under the Freedom of Information Act--asked for my file at the FBI, who knows how thick it might be. I've never asked for it, but I assume there's a lot of information. I don't know how long afterwards the surveillance might have continued, but given what's come out in other instances that I've read about that become public information I wouldn't be surprised.

J: What effect did the project have on the rest of your life, do you think?

S: I think it set a pattern. I work today as a caseworker for Caritas of Austin, which is an emergency agency that deals with the poor and the homeless. I serve on the board of directors of the agency and the work is very meaningful to me because we're working directly with people and having some kind of effect. That is quite different than what I've done for quite a number of years, which is working as a researcher and special

projects person for the state of Texas where I didn't have the human need contact, dealing with people that have needs. Finally I came full circle.

I got involved, because of what was going on in college, in discussions with a man that's remained my friend for almost thirty years, Dr. William Johnson, and he was a great influence in my life. I got involved in barbershops [and the] civil rights movement, went on to do community work or public service type work and then for personal reasons got out of it. And for many years did stuff that I guess you could call just pure, bureaucratic paper shuffling to get away from the involvement with people in the community and their needs and social change, other than working for elected politicians here in Texas. I don't consider that social change in the sense that I talk about it. But in the last couple of years, in my early forties, I made a decision that what I'm doing is finally meaningless to me as a person. That I need to get back into that direct involvement, back down in the trenches to some extent to bring the skills that I've developed for twenty years. The contacts, the resources, the ways I have of being creative and solving problems that I've learned over a couple of decades working as a bureaucrat. That I need to take those resources and bring them to bear on a situation that is much more meaningful to me.

All this stuff started a little over twenty-five years ago. It has, I think, determined the way my life is today. There's a direct path between one and the other. I got out for personal reasons, maybe I had seen too much, been hurt by too much of the violence that had gone on, the despair over making the kind of idealistic changes that everybody in their twenties wants to make. I went and developed resources within myself and in the

community that I live in and then several years ago made a decision that I've got to get into something more meaningful that can bring the resources to bear on it and discover that the job I have is difficult. I think very few people could tolerate it for very long, but I'm bringing something to it and it's myself and the resources that I have to give to other people. I never would have gone in the direction that my life has gone in if it hadn't been for the contact in college with people like Bill Johnson and the contacts I've had since. The work and the people I've met and the changes they've tried to make, their attitudes, and it all started with this kind of--it literally determined the whole course of my life.

It could have determined it in different ways. I could have gotten out for personal reasons in my mid-twenties and stayed out, never gotten back in. I could have handled it a lot of different ways, but it brings me back to wanting to do or contribute the same kinds of things that I wanted to do in my twenties, but with a lot more personal resources, a lot more connections. Maybe my gray hair makes me more respectable now or being forty-six is much more respectable than being twenty or twenty-one. Maybe what happened in that generation, my generation, twenty-five years ago is going to markedly change what happens in the United States because now my generation is coming into power. We had the civil rights movement and the war and other things that shaped us and I think changed us into a different generation, a generation radically different than anything that proceeded it in the world or in the United States. We're coming into our own now in terms of power and money and taking over the reins of this country. And I think the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam and some of the other things that we did are going to determine very markedly the history of this country because of what

we experienced when we were in our twenties. The tone we set I think to some extent for the rest of the country, opening up a whole lot of things that were closed issues like segregation. I'm just kind of fascinated year by year as I watch some of the things that happen that relate back to what I was involved in in the sixties.

J: How does this insight differ with the way you felt at the end of the summer of 1964 as you prepared to go back home and leave Mississippi?

S: I don't think it would have ever occurred to me that what happened that summer would have any historic significance. I looked on it as a tragedy, a thing to kind of work around, to work for. The kinds of things we were working for and going down there in the first place and just having something to work around to say, "Well, these people were lost in this campaign," but not understand the historic significance of what happened. That's not unusual. What I've noticed is that it takes about twenty, twenty-five years of time to pass before you can look back and say, "Gee, look what happened. It was historically significant." I don't think you can see that at the time.

I certainly didn't see it. I was twenty-one years old. I didn't consider myself a dumb kid. I don't consider at my age looking at a twenty-one year old as a dumb kid, but I know there's not enough mileage on you then to put these pieces in place or to use them or to use your experiences. I think you are better able to take the knocks and the blows that come and what happened that summer was just a series of acts of violence against a lot of people, not just the students, but the people in Mississippi. I think you absorbed those knocks and blows better, but you don't have any perspective on it and at forty six, yes, I've got the perspective. I think my bones ache a little bit too much that I don't want

to march up and down the street as much. I know I can't run as fast away from any kind of danger, but I have a better idea of the vision that started back then, a better perspective on it, a sense of history about what happened. It's a fascinating process.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 2

J: Is there anything else about this period that we have not discussed that you would like to have on record?

S: There is one thing that is very important to me. In reading the book *We Are Not Afraid* by Kagan and Dray I ran across a story that apparently is based on interviews with Charles Young and Sue Brown.

J: Who were they?

S: Sue Brown was a young black woman that was working in the Meridian COFO office. I don't think she was on staff. I think she was just a volunteer. At the time I thought she was about seventeen or eighteen years old. I was twenty-one and she just seemed a few years younger than me. In that book I read that she was twenty-one. I have some interesting doubts about that. But Charles Young was one of the members of the black community in Meridian, one of the leaders. He owned the hotel that was diagonally across the street from our office.

It said in that book that he and Sue Brown [the] Monday after the disappearance of Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney, got in their car and drove up to Neshoba County and hunted for the missing men. What actually happened was that Charles Young was introduced to me by Sue Brown as the owner of the hotel across the street and one of the black leaders and we--Mr. Young and I--talked in my office. I asked if people could go

up that afternoon in cars to look for the men and he said it was suicidal for anybody to go up there. I asked if he couldn't get a half a dozen cars together and go up as a caravan and see if they could find the men and he refused. He said it was suicidal.

Then someone, I don't know whether it was him or someone else, mentioned that Charles Young owned a small private plane. And I suggested to him that maybe they could fly up and locate the car from the air because it was like a single engine piper or some such thing and he said no, the weather was too bad and I asked him why because I didn't know anything about flying. He said there were the type of clouds that would make flying in a single engine plane dangerous and so I said, "Well, can't we check it out and see what the weather forecast is going to be?" I actually called the national weather service at the airport where his plane was located, made a call to the weather service and found out the flying conditions for a single-engine piper type plane. They advised against it because there were thunderstorms that might develop.

So Charles Young never went anywhere near Neshoba County, in fact refused. Sue Brown never went near Neshoba County, was not even involved in the refusal. It was simply that Charles Young said it was suicidal and they were not going to do it, neither one car or half a dozen cars. So the story that is related in Kagan and Gray where Sue Brown and Charles Young that Monday afternoon drive up and look for the men is totally untrue and it disturbs me that that kind of thing would be published by those men. But I think it points to an important thing that I have to say--not only about that book, but about others--is that there were five of us that survived and I don't know how difficult it would be to locate me these days, but I wonder why none of the other students that

survived and those of us that stayed in that office for four days were ever, ever--. There's never been a published interview with any of us, no comments, none of us have been located and I cannot believe that five of us would just disappear off the face of the earth as far as all this detailed research is concerned.

J: Do you know where the other four are?

S: I have no idea. I have never gone to any of the reunions or made much contact with people that were active then. A couple of years ago I made contact with Eddie Osborne of SCLC. He's on the national board and Brady Tyson, who is a former UN ambassador, teaches at American University. I met those and we started to talk some about experiences and people we know in common.

J: They were of the original eight?

S: No. I had never met them before a couple of years ago. I'm saying the students, Andy Chiffron, Edna Perkins and the others, what would it be, two others, two young men. I have never had any contact with them. I've never been to the reunions, they might have participated last June in Philadelphia, Mississippi. I haven't been to that. I haven't had any contact with them. But through the years I've never seen any published reports that any of us have ever been talked to. I certainly have not and I wonder why. There are interviews with Rita Schwerner and the Goodmans and the Chaneys and a bunch of other things that have come up. People that worked around the project, Bob Gore has given interviews. People that came and went have given interviews, Julian Bond has talked about it. Yet the five us that were left there, it's as if--it's very strange that none of us have been located and never talked to. Now here you have the anniversary of this and it's

an important issue in the newspapers and on TV for a while, the memorial to these murders and none of us are contacted or--I think it's very unusual. I'm not objecting to it, I like to keep my privacy, but I wonder why.

J: Is there anything in writing or documentation that says who you all are or were at the time of the project that would spark some interest from newspapers or reporters to investigate personal accounts of that time?

S: I think it would be fairly easy to locate the five of us. Our names are published in, for example, *We Are Not Afraid*, Kagan and Dray. They list the people, the five of us, by name. That's one of the books where our names are mentioned. My name was mentioned in quite a number of books as having been there. I'm sure there are historic records at the University of Wisconsin, at the [Martin Luther] King Archives in Atlanta. There are newspaper reports of the time that not only gave our names, but family references, which schools we went to, alumni associations might have been contacted, family members might have been contacted--just a whole host of things.

I have done research and tracked people down and talked to them about what they did. It was part of my job working for the state of Texas and it's not all that difficult to find someone unless they're intentionally hiding and I know I haven't and I can't imagine that the others would. We have not been public about it to a large extent, at least I haven't, but that's not the same thing as intentionally avoiding or hiding so there are ways--things to be explored that I think any decent researcher would look into and spend some time on until they declare it a dead end. I'm not aware that that's ever been done and yet I think the five of us have something important to say about what happened at

that time, not just the people that were on the periphery of it, but those of us that were most directly involved. I have never seen a published report or comments by any of us.

J: Is there anything else that you'd like to share?

S: There's a lot of instances, things that happened that I could talk about. You know, if you'd be interested in doing that some other time, but, yes, there's a lot more I could talk about. If we have the time to do it I'd be glad to.

J: Well, thank you so much for allowing this interview.

S: You're welcome.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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