

**Julian Bond Oral History Project
“The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-68”**

Interview with Margaret Herring

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PREFACE

This interview is part of an oral history project entitled, "The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-1968." Unless otherwise indicated, the interviewer is Gregg Ivers, Professor of Government and Director, Julian Bond Oral History Project, American University.

The reader is encouraged to remember that this transcript is a near-verbatim transcription of a recorded interview. The transcript has been edited for minor changes in grammar, clarity and style. No alteration has been made to the conversation that took place.

Notes, where and when appropriate, have been added in [brackets] to clarify people, places, locations and context for the reader.

Biographical Note for Margaret Herring

A native of Ashland, Kentucky, Margaret Herring spent her formative years growing up in Winston Salem, North Carolina. In August 1964, Ms. Herring attended the Democratic national convention, where she heard Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer speak about the conditions in which African Americans lived in Mississippi. Mrs. Hamer's speech inspired her to move to Mississippi, where she went to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Ms. Herring then worked in the Atlanta office of SNCC for the next year and a half before going to work in Pikeville, Kentucky, for the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF). In 1968, Ms. Herring, along with her then-husband, Al McSurely, filed suit against Senator John McClellan (D-Ark.), claiming that a Senate committee had authorized the seizure of personal papers from their home in violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. After almost seventeen years, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of the McSurelys, holding that Congress was not immune from lawsuits contesting their right to seize personal papers during an investigation. The McSurelys also received a civil settlement for violations of their constitutional rights.

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“The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-68”
American University**

**Margaret Herring (20-JBOHP)
September 13th, 2019
Carrboro, N.C.**

**Interviewer: Gregg Ivers
Videography: Jessica Merriman
Production Assistants: Cayla Fox, Liz Groux**

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Margaret Herring [MH]

GI: Today is Friday, September 13th, 2019, and we are in Carrboro, North Carolina, to conduct an interview with Ms. Margaret Herring for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, sponsored in part by the School of Public Affairs at American University. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am Professor of Government at American University and the Director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project.

Ms. Herring worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Atlanta from 1964-1965, and then moved to Pikeville, Kentucky, where she worked for the Southern Conference Educational Fund. Ms. Herring will talk about her time in the Southern freedom movement, her organizing work in rural Kentucky and her work with and impressions of Julian Bond.

GI: Ms. Herring, thank you for agreeing to sit down and have this conversation.

MH: Sure. My pleasure.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

GI: Why don't we begin by having you tell us a little bit about your personal background, where you were born, any influences you might have had growing up, things like that?

MH: Well, I was born in Ashland, Kentucky in 1936 and my father was a Baptist minister, a Southern Baptist minister before they went conservative. They moved to Winston Salem, North Carolina, where he was pastor of the First Baptist Church. Basically, I grew up at home and in the church because I had to go to church every time the doors opened. I also had three older brothers who were very mean to me. We're friends now. When they got older, they weren't so mean. When I was a kid, they picked on me and hit me, and I was excluded from everything they I did.

And that was a gift because I realized what it was like to be an underdog. I always kind of identified with the underdog. I thank my mean brothers [laughs]. Of course, at church I heard all the Bible stories. We talked about Jesus a lot and memorized the Bible verses and everything. So that's my childhood. In high school, I was in the last segregated high school class, which was 1954, class of '54. I took four years of Latin. And in the last year of the fourth year the teacher was talking about the mythology of the Romans and we had all those great stories of the myths. One of the stories was about Leda and the Swan where later claimed that this God, Jupiter became a swan and they had sex and then she had a baby that was half-man, half-God.

The teacher said it wasn't all that uncommon for young women to claim that the father of their child was a God back then. And so this big light bulb went on over my head. It was like I realized that the whole foundation of the church was a fraud. And I didn't talk about this at home, but it was like a big revelation to me that this whole institution that defended society was a fraud, so that was a big revelation. Then I went to Wake Forest College. When I was a college and I had some teachers that were very good, a history professor in particular. But I really wanted to get away from home. I got married too early and had kids and everything.

GI: When did you become aware of the rules and the norms that govern Jim Crow society?

MH: Well, everything was segregated. We had this maid who came to help my mother. And. When I was a little girl, we used to drive her home. And her home was in the black section. And the pavement stopped. When we got to her neighborhood there was no pavement.

The inside of her house was very clean. But she had kerosene lamps and she an outhouse. I asked my mother why didn't she have any pavement [because] the pavement stopped, and why didn't she have electricity. I don't know exactly what she said, but she said something like, "That's just the way it is." But it didn't seem fair to me. And because of the gift of my brothers it bothered me a great deal.

GI: Did you ever cross the color line when you were young? Did you have African American playmates?

MH: There didn't seem to be any opportunity in Winston-Salem to do that. It was like their world and our world.

GI: Do you remember any hostilities, any offense, anything untoward that shocked your conscience?

MH: No. You're talking about the early '50s. I do remember a strike at Reynolds Tobacco Company. There were African American men carrying picket signs that said, "I'd walk a mile for a Camel. Now let Camel walk a mile for me." That was something that impressed me.

GRAVITATING TOWARDS THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

GI: You mentioned that you went to Wake Forest, and that you had some professors there who . . .

MH: The main thing this history professor did was question everything and say, "How do you know that's true?" That kind of thing – critical thinking. This was my first introduction to critical thinking because everybody else was just like, "This is the way it is." It never occurred to me that things could change, or I could help change things.

GI: So you graduate from college . . .

MH: No, no I did not! I got married after one year and we moved to Baltimore. My husband was in the Army. I guess I was nineteen in the late 50s. When he got out of the Army, he decided to go to medical school and I said, "Well, if you're going, go to a city where I can get an interesting job." He went to GW [George Washington University] in Washington [D.C.]. And that's when I started working for Drew Pearson.

GI: Who was Drew Pearson?

MH: He was a newspaper columnist, a muckraker. He was proud to be in that school of journalism. He had friends all over . . . [Capitol] Hill and the White House so it was like having a behind-the-scenes look at the power structure of Washington.

GI: When you went to work for him, was this a whole new world for you?

MH: Yes, it was a whole new world.

GI: Can you talk about that?

MH: It was a big revelation. I had two jobs. One was to open the fan mail, which [was] a big pile, and then answer some letters and write other letters for him to sign. Also, to send out his column on the teletype and type up his journal that he kept. It was like the inside story of what was going on from his perspective.

GI: Do you remember what year you began to work for him?

MH: It would have been 1960 or '61, around then.

GI: Did you travel much when you worked for him?

MH: I was just in the office doing my job.

GI: So you're doing your job and you find yourself at the 1964 Democratic Convention . . .

MH: Right.

GI: This appears to be a major turning point for you.

MH: It is.

GI: How did you get to the convention? What happened there to make it so important to you and then how did that convention navigate the next chapter of your life?

MH: Well, I went with Mrs. Pearson, Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson, who was a reporter. What I had been trying to get Mr. Pearson to write about all summer was what was happening in Mississippi because the summer of '64 had begun. I was just really in love with what black people were doing and Mississippi. It was like, I couldn't wait to get the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] press releases.

That was my job, to read the mail, right? I read them all. I was trying to get him to write about this and he wouldn't do it. You know, he would call up his friends and ask them what happened, not what I was telling him from SNCC. But occasionally there would be something. If a church got burned down, he would write about that. There was a mail man who was walking to Mississippi and I can't remember his name. He was killed on the side of the road. He had written to Mr. Pearson about his going and I saved the letter. I showed it to him, so he wrote about the assassination. And a few [other] things. He was in the Lyndon Johnson/Hubert Humphrey wing of the Democratic Party and not the Kennedy wing. I kind of admired the Kennedys. That's kind of what I did there.¹

I went to the convention and I kept bugging him because after work I would go out and there would be these sit ins on the boardwalk and I just thought that was wonderful. I'd go and sit down and everything and I'd come back and say, "They're doing this and that. Why aren't you writing about it?" One day he said, "Well, if you're so interested in this you go out and interview some of them and write it up and I'll run it in my column." I said okay. I went out and went to the Gem hotel, where the Mississippi people were staying, and I met some of them.

Mr. [E.W.] Steptoe came up to me and he asked me if I had had enough to eat that day.² And I said, "Yes, thank you." Then I stopped and I realized why he was asking me that question. It was because some of the people there had not had enough to eat. And it was like, "Oh, my goodness. Here I am with this good job and everything, and a house and these people hadn't had enough to eat." It was like, "What am I doing? What am I doing with my life?" I knew right then that I had to change. I met this guy named Jack Minnis and we talked a lot.

1. In April 1963, a Baltimore letter carrier named William Lewis Moore set out to march from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi to deliver a letter to Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett to demand an end to Jim Crow and to permit African Americans to vote. He was shot at point-blank range in the head and killed in Attalla, Alabama, just off Highway 11, about three hundred miles from Jackson. No one was ever charged with Moore's murder.

2. E.W. Steptoe was a major figure in the voter registration movement in Southern Mississippi. He was the founder and president of the NAACP chapter in Amite County during the 1950s. Mr. Steptoe encouraged the student movement to come into Mississippi and launch a wide-scale voter registration and education project.

He explained how the relationship [between] racism and capitalism helped the ruling class to have people fighting, that they could control people better. I never thought about that. But I learned a lot from Jack. I went home and quit my job and Jack said that I should come to Mississippi now. So that's what I did. He said in a few years you won't be able to come. I wasn't sure of what he was talking about, but I said, "Well, I said, okay, I don't know what's going to happen in a few years, so I'll go now. I made all these arrangements and went down to Jackson. I went to the COFO office, which is the Council of Federated Organizations. I met Jesse Morris and other people in the office.

They wanted me to go to Batesville, Mississippi, which I did. I stayed there for a while. Then it was, "Do you understand about the congressional challenge at the convention?" It was a challenge to the Democratic Party.

GI: Why don't you talk about that a little bit?

MH: In 1963, I guess, the leaders of SNCC and some lawyers, who were National Lawyers Guild lawyers, met to decide how to move things faster. One of the ways they did that was to concentrate on Mississippi. They knew that people couldn't vote and couldn't be members – Black people couldn't vote – or be members of the Democratic Party, so they set up an alternative party called the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Democratic Party. In 1963 or '64 they had a vote for Congress and Senate, and local leaders on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party ticket. When people went to the regular Democratic Party to try to go to precinct meetings they would say, "Oh, that meeting happened last week or, you can't come in." It was kind of like going into register to vote.

Afterwards, they would get their car insurance cancelled or they'd get fired or their home shot into, so it was a very dangerous situation. The challenge at Atlantic City was the seating of the regular Democrats. [James O.] Eastland and Jamie Whitten and those racist people in Congress. They brought their own delegates to the convention and said, "We are the real Democrats because we let everybody in, and we follow the rules of the formation of the Democratic Party and here we are. At the convention of course, when that happened, Pearson would call Hubert Humphrey to see what the deal was. But Jack Minnis had gotten me into the hearing of the Credentials Committee when Fannie Lou Hamer testified. She gave scathing testimony – I assume you've seen it – that was another thing that really affected me at the convention.

The Mississippi people were offered a compromise. Joe Rauh and Martin Luther King and the leaders of the "old movement" came to the Mississippi people and said we will allow you two seats in the convention. They took a vote, and Mrs. Hamer said, "We didn't come all this way for no two seats!" They rejected the compromise. Then all of these people got on their buses and went back home and that's when I arrived in Mississippi with them.

GI: Mrs. Hamer's testimony was huge for you?

MH: Oh, it was life changing testimony.

GI: What was it like to listen to Fannie Lou Hamer?

MH: It was transfixing. And I look back on my life that I hadn't done shit for these people. I just decided I would change.

MOVING TO MISSISSIPPI

GI: You go to Mississippi after the 1964 Democratic Convention

MH: Right.

GI: What was it like for you living and working among the local community?

MH: Well, when I got to Batesville, I stayed with this family in a house that didn't have . . . I think they had electricity, but they didn't have running water. There was an outhouse. I went outside and saw these kids and they had sores on their legs. Running sores. They all had that. And it was like, "Oh my goodness! What is going on? Why is that? Because I had never seen people like that with sores, running sores with fluid coming out. So then other people told me, "Well that's because they don't have a bathroom to wash in." So that was like, "This is awful." The people have to live. It was like a whole new world to me. I just observed and tried to take in as much as possible. The family made me sleep in the back room behind the chimney in case the house got shot into because it was very dangerous for them to have white people in their house living with them.

The other thing I noticed is that when I went to do the laundry at the laundromat there were these white women coming in to do their laundry. I said hello. But then I asked some of my friends, "Why are white women coming to do their laundry here?" They said, "Well they think the washing machines over here will get their clothes cleaner than the ones in the white [laundromats]. Because you know they had used to have a "laundress" come to do their laundry who were African American so they thought their washing machines would be and better. It was really crazy.

After the convention the movement decided that we would support Lyndon Johnson, that he was better than Goldwater. There were no signs or anything for Lyndon Johnson in Mississippi. One night we decided to go to Memphis to get to their Democratic Party headquarters to get some signs. We did and came back and another guy – I can't remember his name; it just went out of my head – we went to the white section asked this lady if she would like to put Lyndon Johnson's picture and her in her window and she said, "No. We don't put pictures of Communists in our window. I said, "Well, all right." And then I left. It was kind of scary, that the hate and hostility was just overwhelming.

GI: Was the hate and hostility that you encountered in Mississippi a different kind of hate and hostility that you knew growing up in North Carolina?

MH: Yeah, definitely.

GI: What were some of the differences between the world of Jim Crow in North Carolina and then what you saw in Mississippi?

MH: Well, back then I was not aware so I can't really say what the differences were, but it was very, very bad. It was really hatred in Mississippi. It was dangerous to walk down the street. That was the main thing. Once, when we had a little potluck supper and another guy from SNCC came over to me and said, "Are you scared?" I said yes. And he said, "You better be scared because that will save your life." That was the kind of fear that we all had. We never knew from one day to the next whether we would be alive. Of course, this was after the three volunteers had gotten lynched and other people have gotten lynched. We knew about churches burning down and Jimmy Travis had been shot in the neck driving home from a meeting. It was all very real. It was a war situation. But you never knew who was gonna be next. Maybe you? Maybe you would be.

GI: So you lived in fear when you were in Mississippi?

MH: Oh, yeah, definitely.

GI: And that helped concentrate the mind, in a certain way?

MH: Yes, in a certain way. Yes. The Congressional challenge was when Mrs. Hamer and Miss Devine and Victoria Gray and others went to Washington to challenge the seating on the House and Senate floor at the Capitol building. In preparation for that I did some work, which was to collect all the affidavits that had been given in 1964 about how black people cannot enter the Democratic Party and were excluded. I had to drive around to different projects in the state. I had a car. I went by myself because I had a Southern accent and I could talk Southern if the police stopped me. So that's what I did. I drove from around the state [to] different projects and got all those papers in my car and took them to Jackson. Then they asked me to work in the Washington office in D.C., which I did for about six weeks leading up to that challenge. That was pretty hard work in that office. Mike Thelwell was in charge in the office.

GI: Was this the same Mike Thelwell from Howard?

MH: I think so. He's in New England at a university now.

AFTER MISSISSIPPI: JOINING THE SNCC HEADQUARTERS IN ATLANTA

GI: After your experience in Mississippi, what happens next?

MH: Well, I worked in the MFDP office in Washington. We would have meetings and the night before the challenge. In other words, the night before Congress was back in session we were meeting in the office and a delegation came from Congress to talk to Mrs. Hamer and Miss Devine and Victoria Gray. It was led by John Conyers. He asked them not to chain themselves to the door of Congress. They had never thought to do that. It was a wonderful

idea. We didn't do it, but it was like, Conyers had this fantasy that we were going to do that. We didn't do that.³

But we did have people from Mississippi lining the tunnel from the House office building to the Capitol where they would go to vote, and they were just there all these poor African American Mississippi sharecroppers standing on on either side. These people had to walk through that gauntlet. The congressmen had to walk through that gauntlet to get to the floor of the house. That was very dramatic. After that I went to work in the SNCC office in Atlanta.

GI: What year was this? Is this still 1964?

MH: That would have been the January or early February of 1965.

GI: Were you assigned to the Atlanta office? Did you have any discretion where you would go?

MH: I was assigned to work with Betty Garman [Robinson]. She taught me so much.⁴

GI: What was it like to walk into the headquarters of SNCC with all these people?

MH: It was good! I was very much aware that I was not in charge, that African American leadership was in charge and I was just learned from them what to do. Jack Minnis worked in the office, so I had known him before.

GI: What exactly did Jack [Minnis] do?

MH: Jack was the research director of SNCC, so he was the one who got the demographic information from every project in Mississippi and Alabama and gave that to the organizers before they even went to town. They knew who the officials were, what the industry was, what the employment was, the unemployment, the churches. They knew everything about a town before they went into it. They didn't have to find all of that out. That was his job. Other things he did, too. He saw patterns in the way the capitalist system worked, and he understood about interlocking boards of directors of corporations who had invested in Mississippi and how they controlled the government. That was a very important thing. He sent out a newsletter about that. He gave the demographic information. He also gave who was on the board of directors and what other companies they were dealing with. It went much deeper than just the population. Jack did that kind of work. It was important and he did such a good job.

³. John Conyers (D-Mich.) served in the House of Representatives from 1965-2007. He was active in the civil rights movement prior to his election to Congress and was noted for his legislative achievements on civil rights and related matters.

⁴. Betty Garman Robinson worked for SNCC from 1964-1966. She was interviewed for this project (12-JBOHP).

GI: Would you consider the kind of work that Jack Minnis in those days to be somewhat innovative and groundbreaking, kind of ahead of the curve? If we look now at how sophisticated the analysis is and voting patterns and where people live and how to target them . . .

MH: Yeah, but he didn't have a computer or internet! He had Standard and Poor's and Moody's, and all of these reference books and he would know right where to look at each one of them. He taught people how to do that. He'd taught organizers to look it up in Standard and Poor. Look it up in Martindale-Hubble. See where that guy went to school. Get the background information so you know what you're dealing with. You don't just go in cold.

GI: Who were some of the other people you remember meeting when you arrived at the Atlanta office? How did you fall into your responsibilities there?

MH: Well, like I said Betty [Garman Robinson] was my mentor and Jack [Minnis] of course, but I want to go back a little bit about the congressional challenge. After the challenge was over, Jack and Jim Forman and Lawrence Guyot decided that the papers that I had collected, the affidavits and the written testimony weren't safe in the Jackson office. There had been a raid in Louisiana on James Dombrowski, who had records from this SCEF, which was the Southern Conference Educational Fund. They had raided his office and taken all his papers. Jack was afraid the same thing would happen to these affidavits. They got a trailer and put all of these records in these long file cabinets in it and asked me to drive it to Washington to the House of Len Holt. I did that. I had to leave at midnight. I just drove straight through all night without stopping to get to Len's house and found it. I knocked on the front door and gave him the key and unhitched a trailer and came back to Mississippi or Atlanta, wherever I was. That was one of the things that I did. I didn't think anything of doing that. It was like, "Sure, I'll do that."

I remember during the time I was there they moved from Raymond St. to the office on Nelson Street, which was in a different building and the office was much larger. During the course of the move, Jack and Forman decided that they didn't trust the people removing the records of the office, so they were taken home by some of the staff and then brought back when we got to Raymond St. That's kind of the way Jack was [laughs]. Some of those financial records were not returned and they were recently found in an estate sale and auctioned by an auction house over here in Burlington [North Carolina]. I went over to look at them. It was mostly just receipts from gas stations and a few letters and things like that. People sending in receipts for gasoline that was thirty-five cents a gallon or a hamburger that was fifteen cents. It was like all of these old records. There was an invoice from a bus company that took people from Ohio, from where the training had been for the summer volunteers to Mississippi. It just brought back how brave all those people were to do that to go into Mississippi. Anyway, now back to the office . . . [laughs].

Ruby Doris Robinson, Sheslonia [Chessie] Johnson, Ruth Howard and James Bond. Wilson Brown, who was a printer. There were always people coming through, staff people coming through the office. I remember once Stokely Carmichael came in. Part of my job was to

work with the Medical Committee for Human Rights and arrange doctor's appointments for people that needed to be seen by a doctor. One day Stokely comes in and he wants to know where the medical committee was. He comes in and pulls out the little pistol from his bib overalls and says, "If they come after me, I'm taking some of them with me." And then he put it back in his overalls. But anyway, that kind of thing, while you were working all these other things were happening.

MEETING JULIAN BOND

GI: Why don't we talk about Julian Bond a little bit?

MH: I met Julian, and he was just another worker, just like everybody else. He wasn't all that special. His job was to deal with the press, and so he wrote up press releases. He was a two-finger typist [laughs]. He was just a wonderful friend. It was like, you know this Bob Dylan song, "I'll Be With You When the Deal Goes Down" That's the song I think of when I think about Julian. He was that kind of guy. He had good sense of humor. I remember one time at a SNCC reunion, there were about two hundred of us there and Julian leans over to me and he says, "Margaret, I love all these people, even the ones I don't like." [laughs]

I used to drive him to the airport because he had speaking engagements all over the country. The first time I picked him up, he got in the back seat and I thought, "Well, okay." And then I start driving down the road and I looked back and he's lying down on the back seat and I said, "What's the matter with you? Why are you lying down?" And he said, "I don't want anybody to see me." I said, "Is it because I'm white?" And he said, "No, no. People come up to me all the time and I just don't want them to see me." And they did. You know, I could understand that. He was like, leave me alone for a little while kind of thing when he went out in the world.

GI: What do you think made him really good at his job and doing the kind of work that he did, and then developing that kind of notoriety?

MH: I think it was that he saw the big picture. He could see. He understood everything and this was typical of people that worked in SNCC. They could understand the big picture and their role in it. I think he could relate to people. What I enjoyed so much was that he saw the irony of life.

GI: Any particular examples of that?

MH: That's the main thing

GI: Were there any qualities that you saw in him that made him able to construct that narrative to relate to people in the outside world very well to navigate the press and do the sorts of things that he did? What was it about him that made him good at that kind of work?

MH: I think people trusted him. They trusted him with their personal life. And you could trust him, as you could the other people. But he just had this way of looking at you and

smiling. It's like he understood what you were saying. So that just got people to open up. I think that was kind of key.

GI: Do you remember the decision to run him for the Georgia state legislature?

MH: That was after I left.

GI: Did you follow that race?

MH: Yeah. In the paper I [followed] it.

GI: Why do you think he was selected, of all the people that could have been chosen to run for that office?

MH: Well, I imagine just because he was so well-known already. And people loved him. That's what you need to run for office, if you're gonna be successful. He wasn't just some "Joe Blow" from off the street. People knew Julian. They knew his family. He was a well-known person.

GI: Did any of this surprise you, him running for and winning office, and then not being seated by the Georgia legislature because of the statement supporting SNCC's opposition to the Vietnam War?

MH: It didn't surprise me at all, any of it.

GI: Do you think the decision not to seat him was motivated more by his support for the anti-war statement or because he was African American or because he was Julian Bond . . .

MH: It was a racist decision. Of course, the war had something to do with it, but it was because he was a black man. As he said on his gravestone, he was "a race man."

TRAVELING IN THE SOUTH FOR SNCC

GI: What were some of your responsibilities when you worked in the Atlanta office?

MH: Some other kind of work I did. I went on some trips across the South to the different projects and visited projects to see how they were doing. I remember a project in Arkansas out in the country. I stayed with this family and the woman owned property in the Delta. It was in her name, but this white guy was using her land to farm on and not paying her for it. She wanted to know what we could do about that. I mentioned something about the Justice Department, and she said, "Is there any justice in the Justice Department?"

It was like, what do I tell this woman? I don't think there is, but I don't know what else to say. That was one trip. On another trip, Jack [Minnis] and Forman sent me to Selma, Alabama, when King announced that there would be a march in Selma. The SNCC project thought it was very dangerous to do that and they didn't want to do it. Jack sent me to

Selma kind of undercover by myself as a white reporter. I said I was a freelance writer for *Parade* magazine.

GI: The Sunday insert?

MH: Yeah [laughs]. I stayed in this hotel, which has since been torn down . . . with some other press people. It was a beautiful hotel with arches that you can see in an old movie. Douglas Kiker and some other national reporters were there. The reporters from national news were there to cover the march.

Anyway, that night Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot in the back out in a small town away from Selma. Things really heated up. I went around and talked to the mayor of Selma and the judge and the sheriff as a reporter about what was happening. "Oh, everything's fine. Our colored are really good people and they don't cause any trouble." It was all like that, but I could really sense that underneath there was they were getting ready for something really bad to happen. I went back to Atlanta and gave them my report. I saw, when I was there walking down the street, Worth Long coming the other way. We looked at each other and I looked away, and he was kind of like, "That looks like her [laughs]."

GI: Who was Worth Long?

MH: He was a SNCC person. He was a poet and he was working in Alabama.

GI: I just want to go back to something you mentioned real briefly that I thought was important. You talked about the SNCC project in Alabama.

MH: And Arkansas.

GI: What were these projects that you were referring to?

MH: It was like the ones in Mississippi and Stokely was there. Voter registration. They started an organization called Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which [was] modeled on Alabama state law. Jack searched their constitution and told them how to do it. They were getting ready to run people for office in Lowndes County. I remember back in the office they were looking at logos for the logo and Ruth Howard drew a picture of a Black Panther and I think Dottie [Zellner] had also drawn the same picture somehow. Anyway, they adopted the symbol of the black panther on the ballot because a regular Democrat had a white rooster on it. This Panther that you now see in the [Carolina] Panthers football game is the same thing. That's their logo, too. They stole it from SNCC [laughs].⁵

GI: And I trust there's been no financial compensation for that?

⁵ The Carolina Panthers are a professional football team in the National Football League. They play their home games in Charlotte, N.C.

MH: Or recognition, acknowledgement or whatever.

LEAVING SNCC

MH: Anyway, in 1965, Malcolm was assassinated, and James Meredith decided that he would walk from Memphis to Jackson [Mississippi] This was '65. After the summer '64, a lot of people had gone back to their colleges and homes, but he decided he would do that by himself with no organizational backing. So, it was like, we can't let him be out there by himself. It was a bad idea but we're going to support him. As he was in the Delta, he it was when, at a meeting in the Delta that Willie Ricks and Stokely Carmichael began talking about Black is Beautiful and Black Power, about who really has the power in this country? We can take power away from the ruling class, basically what they were talking about. The idea of Black Power, which was very thrilling to me – it was like wonderful idea – began to take hold. It was like what they were saying was what white people needed to do [was] to go back to their own homes and organize against racism and against the Vietnam War. So that became a new challenge for me and other white people. In the winter of '65 I left the office of SNCC and moved back to Washington for a year.

I supported the idea of black power and white people working with white people for the future coalition. We had the same goals in the same program but in the future, we would unite and form a coalition and then we would take state power. It was a revolutionary idea. It was not a reformist idea, which we had been before, but a revolutionary idea. I worked at the United Planning Organization in Washington for a year. I reconnected with Sharlene Krantz. She was there and she was the secretary of Al McSurely, who became my second husband. In the winter of '66, I had talked to Al a lot about who holds state power and how to take it away from them. We decided that we would move to do that kind of work. How do you make that decision? Well, you go on a trip across the country and talk to other SNCC organizers who are white and see what they're doing and then you make a decision about what to do? We set out in a VW bus and in February of 1967, I guess it was. Yeah. We went to Louisville and met Carl and Anne Braden. They explained about their projects, one in the mountains of Appalachia and one in New Orleans that Bob and Dottie Zellner were working at, and Jack Minnis.

We went on further west and we met with Mike Miller and Marshall Ganz and a guy named Clint Jinks, who was not a SNCC person. He was the older guy who had been an organizer for a mine, mills and smelter workers union in Colorado. That was very interesting, the history of that.

We met Fred Jerome of Progressive Labor Party and then we came back and we decided that we would work with the Bradens, so we stopped and visited them again and then they said, "Well, why don't you move to Pikeville, Kentucky, and start a project there?" We decided to do that and moved to Pikeville on April Fool's Day 1967. After we got there and rented a house, we went to a SNCC staff meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Al was working for the Appalachian Volunteers and I was working for SCEF, so he had a little bit more money than I did. But anyway, we went to Nashville to the staff meeting of SNCC and Jack and Bob and Dottie [Zellner] were there as well.

Bob Analovich and the Bradens and the whole board of . . . SCEF, this was the Southern Conference Educational Fund, the whole board was there, and we met in the Methodist building. The purpose of the meeting was to hear Stokely Carmichael explain about Black Power and what that would mean for SCEF, for white people. The board is made up of white people, a lot of Jewish people, who taught at places like Tuskegee and Tougaloo College in Mississippi and historic black colleges. Some of them had come over after the Second World War or had escaped from the Holocaust or were Holocaust survivors. They kept up their good work. At that meeting, Stokely came and explained about his vision of black power. What that would mean for white people was to go back into the community and organize poor and working white people against racism and against the Vietnam War. That was an interesting meeting.

Al and I took a walk during the meeting, around the building and we saw this van. We heard talking coming from the van and we realized they were listening to our meeting. They were recording our meeting out in this van and it was Nashville police. Actually, they picked Al for saying that they were looking for a suspect in a bank robbery or something. Then they let him go after a while, but they wanted to get his fingerprints and everything. Anyway, we got home, and we took the *New York Times* but it got there two days late. I was reading the *Times* and there was a little article that said there had been a riot in Nashville two days after we had left. I didn't think anything of it, but it was there.

That summer, the Peace Corps wanted to do a training in Appalachia, and we had rented this house that had about four bedrooms and a barn. They wanted to use our house to do the training with Peace Corps volunteers and meet some people from Appalachia. You know, a cross-cultural thing. They came and there were black Peace Corps and white Peace Corps [volunteers] and those that stayed at our place. Some of the women moved in with friends. The boys slept in the barn and the girls slept in the house. They had their workshops and everything and then they left. This would have been about July or August.

There was an article in the local paper about a Chamber of Commerce meeting where they were talking about "outside agitators" coming up coming in to "organize our poor." That was kind of like a red flag for me. We decided to make the friendship of a local lawyer who was a union lawyer. Also, we decided we needed to get married, so we got married. I was five months pregnant. We went over to Virginia to get married and then came back. Soon after that the local commonwealth's attorney and the sheriff came, and the county attorney came and arrested us. I was fixing dinner and I looked out the window and I saw these men with guns coming across the field toward our house. I said, "Al, they must be looking for an escaped criminal or something. There's some men outside." Then, I heard a knock on the door, and they started coming in the back door. I was in the kitchen. Al opened the door and the sheriff comes barging into the living room and he says, "Where's Al McSurely?" Al was back at the door and he said, "I'm right here." Anyway, they come in and they take all of our books and our file cabinets and go through every piece of paper. All of the SNCC address lists, contact lists, position papers and correspondence. My personal diary and my love letters that I had so unfortunately saved up in a box in the back of the closet.

They arrested Al right away. When they found out that I had worked for SNCC, they arrested me also. We had a movie, it was called, "Via con Dios." It was the one that Clint Jinks had given us about the strike in Colorado, the mine, mills and smelter workers strike. The sheriff's deputy picks up this thing and says "Via con Dios? That must be from Cuba!" And another one picks up the *Village Voice* and he says, "Green-Witch Village! That's where them beatniks live!" It was like so surreal you couldn't believe that this was happening, and yet it was dangerous at the same time. I just wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. It was amazing. They took us and all of our papers down to the jail and arrested us for sedition. They put me in the women's cell and Al was in the men's cell. And so there we were. Our papers were in the jail cell or somewhere and I was in there. The ladies asked me, "Well, what are you in for honey?" They could see I was pregnant, and I said, "I'm in for sedition."

They just kind of looked at each other. I realized that they didn't know what it meant. They thought it was soliciting. I said, "Sedition means teaching people how to overthrow the government." And they said, "Well, that's what oughta to be done. Tell us about it! [laughs]" So we did. We stayed for about a week and then the Bradens put up their house for a bond and they came to Pikeville to do that. Then they were arrested for sedition also. We got out of jail, but our papers were held. Of course, back when I was arrested – I wasn't arrested yet – but I said, "I'm pregnant and I need to go to the bathroom." On the way to the bathroom, the phone rang, and they said, "Let her pick it up."

I picked it up and it was this guy Ron Carver, who I knew from Mississippi. When I was going around collecting affidavits on that trip, Ron worked in Starkville. I went out to this little hovel of a shack that was the project office, and I heard music coming out of that shack. It was Vivaldi's "[Four] Seasons" coming out of this shack, this poor place. I went out and Ron was there. We talked and we're listening to this beautiful music. Then he called me just on a whim to see how I was doing and to say hello. And I said, "Ron, our house is being raided and you need to call the Bradens in Louisville and tell them to call the press. And call Bill Kunstler and tell him to get involved in the case." He did. He saved our neck. It was like a really surreal thing. When I got in jail, I was with all these ladies and they were in for things like cursing a police officer

One was them for attempted murder because she was a "Woodbury." A Woodbury in Pikeville was someone – Pikeville was a dry county – so Woodbury [referred] to people who drank Woodbury aftershave lotion. She was in for attempted murder because one of her friends said she tried to push him down the steps. She was arrested right before the grand jury was dismissed for the summer, and she stayed in jail all summer. The guy didn't show up at the grand jury, so she was let go, but she had to spend the whole summer in jail. I mean it was like these really, really poor women. One said, "My chickens need to get let out." My parents came to see me in jail, so they were helpful and unhelpful. They meant well.

My mother ordered the jailer to get me a new mattress because she didn't trust the mattresses. After she left, I said, "I'm the new person here who has been here the longest. Pearl said she'd been here since May and I said, "Well, here I'll take your mattress and you

can take mine. That helped a little bit, breaking the ice. Anyway, we didn't realize at the time how extensive the government was working to destroy the [civil rights] movement. It was in the highest reaches of government, the FBI, IRS, everybody. The Senate committees were out to destroy us and whatever we did. The "Messiah Memo" from J Edgar Hoover. The COINTELPRO program, which infiltrated a lot of people. The political assassinations. We didn't realize how bad it really was.

After we got out about a month later, a man came knocking at the door. He was short and he was very flushed, and he said, "Are you Margaret McSurely?" And I said yes. He said, "I'm Mr. Brick. I'm from the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and I have a subpoena for you." I said, "Well, come in Mr. Brick." He came in and gave us his subpoenas. I said, "Mr. Brick, are you related to Mrs. Brick that works for Dr. McKenzie?" And he said, "Yes, she's my wife." Dr. McKenzie was my therapist when I was in Washington. I had an affair with Pearson, you know. I thought, "Well, this is strange, me being in love with a man like this." I went for therapy and Mrs. Brick was the secretary. Here's this guy, an investigator, [who] comes with a subpoena for us and for our papers. There are two hundred and thirty-five documents that Senator McClellan wants. The Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was re-name of the old Joe McCarthy committee and they were out to destroy whatever we did by different means, different methods. After he left, we called our lawyer immediately and told him what had happened. And they went to the Supreme Court of the United States to get the subpoena squashed. The subpoena gets squashed and we stay there through the Winter until 1968.

And that's when Martin Luther King was assassinated. He had started the Poor People's Campaign, which was a call for poor people to come to Washington to lobby and to have demonstrations, and the government was very frightened of this. Al worked to get people to the Poor People's camp. Meanwhile, I had the baby and I stayed at home in Pikeville a lot. We were also working with coal miners who had black lung. And then in the fall we got our papers back because the government had the right to keep them for a year for appeal after the subpoena was squashed. There were many hearings that I had to go to in Cincinnati and other places and then into federal court. What happened with the sedition arrest is that our lawyers moved the case from state court to federal court because you can't overthrow the Commonwealth of Kentucky without overthrowing all the states. There was a federal case. They did this based on the *Dombrowski* case [in Louisiana]. The *Dombrowski* case set the precedent to get our case to federal court.⁶

Their time was up, and we went to the courthouse to get our papers. Mr. Brick was there again with another subpoena. And he had the two hundred and thirty [six] documents that he went through with Al. There were all of my love letters and my diary and letters from Pearson. Position papers, address lists of SNCC and SCEF and contacts – all of those things. We got them back. But we were very afraid that something of what was going to happen next. I was I was horrified because I knew I could die for what I believed in, but I didn't

⁶. In *Dombrowski v. Pfister* (1965), the Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment prohibited Louisiana from prosecuting members of a civil rights organization for "subversion" and seizing their personal papers and effects. It also held that individuals were entitled to sue a state government for monetary damages.

think it was right for the baby to die. So that was what scared me the most. All year I was frightened for the baby, for Victor. His name is Victor, named after the great victory of the people. Anyway, a month after we got the papers back, when we were going through them again, and I saw what they had of mine, I knew I could never let that be seen again by anyone outside. We decided to burn the papers and burn everything. Should we call the lawyers? No, because they'd say it was destroying evidence. It's best that they not know. we went out and burned all that stuff up.

Then we had the subpoena to come to Washington and they got postponed and postponed. We went up there. On the way to the hearing, [Bill] Kunstler was there, and he had his briefcase. And we were riding together in a taxi. And he's opened up his briefcase and there were two joints in there. I said, "Bill, you shouldn't be carrying this pot around with you!" He said, "Oh well, if the cops stop me, I'll just say it's evidence." It was like this bizarre thing. On the way to the courthouse with Bill Kunstler and the pot, two joints, we stop at the courthouse – we're on the way to the Capitol – to file a lawsuit against the Committee for violating our Fourth Amendment rights because they had taken our papers without our permission.

We get to the hearing and they closed it. It was [an] executive session but we had about two hundred friends in the hallway trying to get in. We told them that we would not give them anything, that we would give them a copy of the brief of our lawsuit, which said that they had violated our constitutional rights. The reason that we filed it all the way to the courthouse was so that it wouldn't get dismissed before the hearing. That was Kunstler's idea. He was so full of chutzpah! So that's how that case started. We were held in contempt of Congress, and so that was a criminal case again. Then we had a civil case against the committee.

There was a big thing back and forth about which case would come first, and they decided to have the criminal case first. We had a jury trial on that. But the judge would not let the jury hear any of the circumstances of why we got the subpoenas or how we got the subpoenas. Just whether or not we turned the documents over. We were convicted of contempt of Congress, but we won on appeal, in the [D.C.] Court of Appeals. Then the question of our civil case against the committee, that took a long time to decide. Meanwhile, Kunstler was pulled to Chicago for the "Chicago Seven Case" – Abbie Hoffman, Dave Dillinger and Bobby Seale.

Then we got him a lawyer who was actually better lawyer named Morty Stavis. He did his homework very thoroughly. We had a jury trial and we won a judgment. We won that case. I was able to go back to college. That's why I went to American University and got my bachelor's and master's degrees. By that time, Al and I had gotten a divorce. He got married again and he went to law school. He became a civil rights lawyer. And I'm here in Carrboro, North Carolina. Still in the movement.

