

Civil Rights and the Southern Freedom Movement:

Three Veterans Talk with Mary Washington Elder Study  
Fredericksburg, VA via Zoom 01/24/2024

[Chude Allen, Marion Kwan, Karen Trusty]

Sponsor Jackie:

Well, thanks for joining us to hear more about the Southern Freedom or the Civil Rights Movement.

We do have a local connection, many local connections, but a big one is James Farmer. The late James Farmer was a professor at Mary Washington when it was Mary Washington College. And I was lucky enough to be in one of his classes. Hearing these first person stories is just so crucial. There's a lot to know though. So if it's useful, there's going to be a, well, even if it's not useful, there is a list of links for various topics that may come up today or that you might find interesting.

And it's on the calendar event page for this event for elder study.

And they're links from the civil rights movement archive and the SNCC digital platform.

We have three speakers from the CRMA and Bay Area Veterans with us today on Zoom. I'm going to give you like one or two sentence bios and I'm sure they will correct and amplify anything that I get wrong. I met Chude Allen, our first speaker when she interviewed me on Zoom for my current part-time job sourcing videos for the civil rights movement archive. She was an exchange student at Spelman, the historically black women's college in Atlanta and was recruited to go to Mississippi with SNCC.

Marion Kwan worked with the Delta Ministry in Mississippi in the summers of 65 and 66. And later Karen Trusty will be joining us. And she was also an exchange student for Spelman and participated in many SNCC sit-ins in Atlanta.

These women will share their personal experiences as veterans of the Southern freedom movement and how this influenced their ongoing work to make this a more just world. And I'm going to pass it off to Chude and we're starting with a video when she says it's okay. -

Chude:

Great, thank you so much for inviting us. We hope that you will have many questions because we as speakers find the questions so interesting and helpful to us. So hopefully you will feel free to ask us questions. I'm starting with a 1965 short little clip that was part of a television show in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on the civil rights movement. Someone came out and interviewed me about my experiences in Mississippi in 1964. I thought that it would be good to get a little bit

of a feel for what we were like when we were young. I was 20 years old when I went to Mississippi. And then when we come back from that I'll talk more about my experience. So thank you, Jackie, if we could have the video.

(Video playing)

♪ Move on ♪ ♪ Move on with the freedom fight ♪ ♪ Move on ♪ ♪ Move on ♪ ♪ We're fighting for equal rights ♪ ♪ Move on ♪ ♪ Move on ♪ ♪ Move on with the freedom fight ♪ ♪ Move on ♪ ♪ Move on ♪ ♪ We're fighting for equal rights ♪ -

(1964 Chude in video)

I went to Spelman College, Negro Girls College in North Carolina, Georgia on an exchange program from my own college the spring of my junior year. When I went down I made myself promise that I would not stay in the South and work on civil rights but that I would come back North. Because I felt as a Northerner my place was in the North.

However, when I was there I became very good friends with a Negro girl who was from Alabama. And I discovered that I could not visit her home in Montgomery during the spring vacation as would be normal for friends going to a college where one's very far from home. And I discovered because of discrimination and because of segregation that our friendship was very much hampered both in the white and the Negro communities. And I felt that only by getting very involved in the struggle at its ugliest and its most blatant problems of segregation and discrimination could I help to bring about a country and a world where we could become friends.

I was one of about 650 students who went to Mississippi to work in various projects for the Council of Federated Organizations.

The program was actually boiled down to two specific parts, freedom schools and voter registration.

I worked in the freedom school half.

I taught Negro history, a course in nonviolence and a course in religion.

My girls were very, very interested people. I was very afraid at first of how to keep order, how to keep interest and all the various problems that teachers have. But found instead that my biggest problem was how to keep up with their interest.

They had never known a white person as a friend before.

They did not think at first that they could ever become friends with a white person. But by the end of the summer, were telling me that they considered me Negro in many ways because I could not fit their definition of white because we had become friends and very close friends.

But the Negro students who were working with us were not half as convinced of our sincerity and our honesty and the whole thing. We're much more suspicious of our motives of why we Northern whites had come down.

I think one of the reasons for the suspicion of white Northerners by many of the Negro staff and fellow Negro volunteers wasn't the idea always that the white volunteers were going home in the fall, could always get out, that this was sort of a summer fling.

And I have to admit I myself, I'm getting very suspicious of white liberals. I'm afraid I've been hard on myself and I'm hard on other people because I feel that the Negro people in Mississippi and elsewhere have to commit their whole lives when they make a commitment. And it isn't fair for us to forget the whole thing or once in a while go to a civil rights rally.

I'd had to face what it meant to be white in Negro society and at least somewhat the Negro definition of what white means. Or perhaps I should say just for the first time being aware of my whiteness.

There's one problem that white girls face in working in Mississippi or any other Southern state. This is the problem of the sex phobia of the white girl and the Negro male. It pervades the white communities in the South and it comes in of course to the projects and civil rights workers themselves.

As a white female you bring danger to your project. It is more dangerous to drive in Mississippi if you have a white girl in your car, if it's an integrated car than if you don't. The one example where I personally know this to be true that as a white female I added danger to my project workers work was one time when I'd been invited to go to the University of Mississippi in Oxford and I was told to go with one of my fellow project workers was a Negro and his white companion in their car. They were doing voter registration work in Lafayette County where Ole Miss is.

I went to him and asked him to take me and he flatly refused saying that he was not going to put his life in danger by taking a white girl just to go speak at the Ole Miss campus. I finally persuaded this worker and his white female white coworker to take me to Ole Miss. We almost were killed as a result of this and I learned very well what it can mean to have a white girl in your car.

I think that it's hard to pinpoint the whole philosophy of why we went especially from the point of view of one little worker but I think that basically it was to get the people going by sharing any ideas and skills we had and hopefully they would take it from there.

I'd like to go back to Mississippi.

There's no doubt that working in the South is more rewarding with the Negro people. This is a problem. I feel we should be North. I feel we should be working specifically in our own communities. I also feel that's almost an impossible task. How do you talk to sophisticated northern white people who have money and like to relax when they're at home and are away from places like Mississippi and away from places like Northern Philadelphia and simply want to be left alone? How do you convince these people that they must become involved? How do you tell them that they must do more than just entertain a Negro family who's educated in their own home? How do you say to them that they must contribute both money and time to other people?

I believe, I do, that almost every white person in the country is prejudiced. You can't have grown up in our culture and not have some of these inside yourself. I find them myself and I feel I've just been lucky enough to have had Negro friends who've been understanding enough to help me through my discoveries and have accepted me with my prejudices I think my whole life will be involved in working with people and helping people and specifically working towards integration.

I feel very much like I'm a marginal person. I am not happy nor comfortable in white society any longer nor am I fully comfortable in Negro society.

And I know that at least for myself it's been a very lonely, isolated year because of this. ♪  
Move on with the freedom fight ♪ ♪ Move on, move on ♪ ♪ We're fighting for equal rights  
♪

Chude:

And this is what I looked like in 1964, the year before. This was me.

And I think there's one more picture, if we could see the other one. And this is me with one of the students that was in my, what we then called, Negro History class, Delois Polk. And if there's time later, I do have a poem that I was going to read about my relationship with Delois and her family. So we'll see. Great.

Wow, well, I didn't see that video again for 20 years. And of course it was a complete shock to then see myself at 21 when I was by that time 41. And it was the first of a beginning of people doing books and interviews and wanting us to tell our stories. That was back in the 80s. And then one of the things that we did in the Bay Area was that in 84, we organized a reunion for it to celebrate the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964. And we had it because we're in the West Coast. Instead of having it at a university and being formal, we had it in Tilden Park in the East Bay up in the trees and stuff. And it was a day of my life. It was a day of both of sharing.

And what I'd like to say about that just as an aside is that when those of us that were organizing it, we wanted to start our event with remembering the people who had died. And the question was, could we trust ourselves to remember everyone if we didn't make a list? Again, if we didn't do it formally. And thank goodness those of us that thought we should do it spontaneously won that particular debate. Because what happened with the people who had come was the people did not just remember the well-known SNCC workers. They remembered the people that they had lived with.

So we heard around the circle, the names of people, local people that we never would have heard of.

And one of the women who shared, she shared that she lived with a retired teacher. And the retired teacher had shown her a book that she had made to show the children about black history. And she also said that although she had then gone ahead and gotten a master's degree in education, no one taught her more about teaching than the woman that she was staying with.

And I tell you this partly to underscore the fact that it's easy to think from the histories that because the schools were underfunded, because there was so much that the black schools did not get in the segregated South, that that meant they didn't get a good education. But sometimes they had superb teachers who rose above the lacks and gave them the chance, the children to learn to think for themselves.

And that was also fundamentally what the freedom schools were. They were a chance both to introduce students in Mississippi who'd been so prevented from knowing all of what their history was to give them the chance to learn things, but also and primarily to learn to think in new ways, to be encouraged to be agents in social change. So there are examples, for example, of teachers who came in with books especially novels by black writers and the students never even having heard of or conceived of the idea that a black person could have written a novel or written a book. And there was an example from one woman who was teaching some younger children and she was asking them to name countries around the world. And they started to name China and different countries around the world. And finally she said, well, what about Africa?

And they said, does that count?

So to kind of have that sense of how much they were not only limited in what the institutions of Mississippi allowed them to learn, but to also the internalized racism that somehow because they were black, they did not count. And our job partly was just to go and open up to them what we knew existed, which by the way was limited, was about this much about black history because my school didn't teach black history.

And of course, as you heard in the video, back then the term of respect was Negro. So that was the term that we used then. So in terms of my class on Negro history, what I was given was a mimeographed lesson plans.

And so we'd gone to a training before we'd gone into Mississippi and those of us that were doing freedom schools and we were given this material to work with. So every night I would be reading the next lesson plan and then I would be going into the group that I worked with, which was the older girls and young women. And I would be sharing what I learned.

So I had that limitation. I knew nothing more than they did. I was just bringing in what the National Council of Churches and the Staunton, Lind and Charlie Cobb and the people who had organized the freedom schools, the materials that they had organized for us to take in. Because as I said, in my college, a well-respected college, there was no such thing as black history back then.

I came to Atlanta in the spring of 1964 to be an exchange student at Spelman College. And I did that in part because I had worked that summer in a day camp in a church setting in Northern Philadelphia, North Philly. And the church was in a black community. I lived with the black minister and his family. And it was just a very profound experience, both profound in terms of just the range of people and color.

And I had not grasped that I came from basically a segregated community in Pennsylvania, Eastern Pennsylvania, about 35 miles north of Philadelphia, because we had one black family and there was no way to grasp that segregation doesn't always have to be rules like it was in the South. It can also be done by redlining and the ways in which people could or could not get housing. What I didn't know mostly growing up was that the black community was across the river in New Jersey. I lived four miles from the Delaware River. And so we didn't go to the same school.

So my going to school with only one black family, I thought I came from an integrated community. I had no idea one that most of the people were limited to living in a poor area up on a hill in New Jersey because they didn't go to the same school.

So I didn't know. And so that's what I would say about when I went South is I knew very little. I knew very little about racism. I knew very little about white supremacy. And that's what I had to learn while I was at Spelman, was what the history was, what was going on in the South, but also just what our whole history had been and the role of white people in oppressing, enslaving, and then subjugating and through terrorism, keeping black people poor and separate and segregated and discriminated against in the South. And also I would learn later in more subtle ways in the North.

It was a very difficult time because all of a sudden I was learning also about myself and the ways I thought I was better because I'd been educated in a prestigious white college. And I learned how ignorant I was, how arrogant I was. And what I say in that video is what I would like to repeat here is that I was very, very lucky that there were black students and then within the movement, black and white people who supported me in coming to understand racism and white supremacy and to begin to change. Now, when I went to Mississippi, we first went to a training in Oxford, Ohio. I was in the second group. The first morning of our training, we discovered that three workers were already missing. And I knew enough to know that they were dead. I am under the impression from things I've read and heard that some of the volunteers still were a little confused, like maybe they were just captured, maybe everything would be fine. But I knew that the SNCC leadership and the Kofu leadership assumed already that they had been killed. So the second group, myself included, went into Mississippi with a knowledge that some of us were already dead. I'm sorry, I'm gonna mute one second.  
(keyboard clicking)

Jackie's gonna fill in with a few pictures.

(Photos from <https://vimeo.com/crma/> shown during break.)

- Thank you. I meant to turn off the message machine, but these things happen. Thank you very much. What I wanted to say about the going South, being in the second group, is that we, that meant that the whole week as we were being trained to be freedom school teachers or community center organizers, we were also dealing with the question of the terrorism and the violence being very real, as it already had been. The whole reason we were being invited was because of this terrorism, because people were being killed, because the whole country didn't care what was happening. And the thought was if you send their daughters and sons down, if you send their brothers and sisters down, if you ask people's nieces and nephews to come down, then people will care, because they will know somebody who's there. So the first day of our training, we'd been asked to separate by state and call our parents and ask them to contact their representatives, congressional representatives and senators and ask for protection.

And later I learned that what my father's congressman contacted him and said, "Get her out of there."

And my father said, "It's not about my daughter. It's about protection for everyone." And I just want to stress that my parents were not politically active. They were not people that were themselves going to be active in any kind of demonstrations. They'd never done anything like that. But they were behind me. They had joined a parents group to support those of us who'd gone, and my father was clear. It was not just about me. It was about everyone. On the website, the crmvet.org website that I'm part of, there is one story that I tell called "My Parents Said Yes," in which I talk about my parents and the support.

So that's a very important, I think, two things that I've now mentioned. One is that we went in knowing that we might die, and two, that we'd asked, we tried as best we could to get the

support of the people who loved us, to try to put pressure on their congressman to get support, which of course did not in and of itself happen.

Going in, the last night of our training, Bob Moses, who was leading the Mississippi Summer Project, stood in front of us. And Bob was a very charismatic person, but he was not a great orator. He was not an orator. He was a very quiet person. And I still can remember him looking at his feet, not even looking at us, looking at his feet and saying, how hard it was to send us in, knowing that three were probably already dead.

And yet the one thing he could say to us is, "I will be there too."

And as I close this part of my part, and of course I look forward to questions, I just wanna mention since James Farmer was mentioned as having taught at this college, that in his autobiography, he tells the story of organizing a core freedom ride and going and saying goodbye to the people on the bus. And his intention was to go back to New York to the office and be an executive, do office work. And one of the women said to him, "I'm so glad you will be with us, Mr. Farmer."

And so he had to get on the bus too. And then he tells what it was like to be in the prison in Mississippi. But I just love that, that idea that leaders are people who are there with you, not who are somehow separate. And that was definitely true for us going into Mississippi. And I trusted Bob Moses. I trusted the SNCC leadership. I trusted the whole program and I was willing to risk my life.

Thank you. And of course, I look forward to questions.

Are there questions now that I should answer before we move on?

Zoom Host Carol:

- We have a comment from one of our members of the three civil rights workers who were murdered in the summer of 1962 in Philadelphia, Mississippi. How did their murder impact your group going into Mississippi? I think you've talked about how you were all aware of it and prepared for it. -

Chude:

Well, I will say that being young in particular, and having listened to other veterans now talk, first of all, when you're young, you don't ever think it's gonna happen to you.

I mean, that's one of the things, very few of us actually thought we might die. I did, but most people like somehow being young, you'll transcend it. But also that, I mean, I've never seen a dead body. I'd never seen anyone who was dead. And as it turned out, I was in Holly Springs, Mississippi, the fourth person to die that summer, Wayne Yancey was on my project.



And that was the first dead body I ever saw. And how he died and whether it was just an accident or whether it was a planned and a created accident, no, we don't know. But he did die, he was a black man, he'd grown up in Tennessee, and he was from Chicago. He was a welder from Chicago.

So we both knew the risks, and it was hard to grasp, very hard to grasp being young.

That we might die or the people we knew might die or that, and how to deal with it. But we did know that we were taking a risk. And I think it changes your life when you make choices like that. I don't think you're ever the same again. At least that's my experience. Any other question that I should speak to? -

Audience Member J.:

Did you hear about the Quincy Project out of Tallahassee in the late sixties?

- No, I don't know that one, I don't think.

Audience Member J.:

- Yeah, it was a group, I was in it. It was a group of Florida State and Florida A&M students. Florida A&M was about black college at that time in Tallahassee. And there's a town about 20 miles west of Tallahassee, the state capital. And probably they had the most millionaires per capita of any city in Florida. But they totally underfunded the school system because they didn't want either black or white children to leave Quincy. They wanted to make sure that they knew just very basic stuff. And some of our student leaders on both campuses found out about it. And we would go over there and try to educate the students that there was a wider world. - There was, yes, yes. - Yeah. - Wow, that's wonderful. - Yeah. And I don't know if you've heard of the St. Joseph sisters from France.

Chude:

- Yes, I have heard of them, yes. -

Audience Member J.:

Yeah, they are not St. Joseph sisters. They taught at my high school, Bishop Kenny in Jacksonville. - Uh-huh. - But when they heard that the blacks were free in the United States, they came over to establish schools to educate the blacks. And that was 1866. - Wow.

Chude:

In your story about Quincy, if you haven't already done so, please consider signing up for the veterans of the Civil Rights Movement archive and telling that story. That would be a gift to everyone to know more about it. -

Audience Member J.:

Right. - Thank you. - Yeah, we met some good people and blacks and whites going to there.

Chude:

- Good. Okay, shall we move on to Marion now?

Marion:

- Can I come in now? - Yep.

- All right. You know, one of the things that I appreciate about what you've been speaking about, let me just give you a sense of what I was feeling when I was listening to Chude.

She and I never met in the deep South. We didn't know each other.

We found each other in the San Francisco Bay Area, you know, 50 years later.

But the thing that will always stay with me when I hear other fellow freedom fighters talk, is the sense of when Chu was speaking of the terror,

I immediately felt like it just happened to me a second ago. This feeling of being on your toes all the time.

Your six senses are awake.

You know what's behind you. You know the atmosphere around you. You don't have to open your eyes. You just sort of know that you need to be on your toes at all times. But when you're with your own people, when I say my own people, I mean, freedom fighters, the civil rights workers.

When we're together, I felt really sick. But when I'm out alone on my own, I have to just automatically put on this sixth sense cap and be aware of my surroundings. And it never left me until even now, I just, it's not a sense of fear, it's just a sense of tension that is surrounding me at all times. It's just a tension, sometimes it's a safe tension, other times it's a be on your alert kind of tension. I just want to say that because when we, when I speak or when I hear other people speak about their life in the South, that is often not talked about.

So let me start with a little bit about going back in time. I'd just like to briefly talk about my sense of history and how I came about to back into the South.

My sense of history has always been with the United States.

I'm a first generation born here, my parents came and I became, seven of us, eight siblings were born in the United States.

But with that, I always had a sense that there was a history before I came here about, when I think about civil rights, I think about what happened to this country. And I'd like to start just briefly with noticing in, in main, when I speak of civil rights, I think about over 500 years ago in 1492, indigenous peoples were forced from thousands of years being in this continent, forced into reservations.

500 or more nations had been forced into another area, very restricted area.

I remember that children were separated from the families because they had to go to English only schools.

Over 400 years ago, in 1619, the first indentured servant landed in the United States on the East Coast.

Cotton had become the industry for America.

And speaking of millionaires in Florida, there are more millionaires at that time in Mississippi per capita than anywhere else in the country.

I didn't know when I went down South that Mississippi was also the lynching capital of the country.

Like Chude says, you're just young, you don't think about these things.

And over 250 years ago, Mexicans used to own a lot of property in California in the Southern part of the United States, and they were taken away.

And then, where my history comes from, over 175 years ago, gold was discovered in 1848, the world heard about it. Much, much later generations later, my father kept thinking, is he's gonna leave China because of the famine and so much strife and so much civil war.

He was one of the many who later, of course, traveled by boat and ended up in San Francisco.

Another significant thing for me that I felt like was part of my history, in 1882, there was an act that prevented one race from entering the United States. And it was the only time that happened. It was called the Chinese Exclusion Act.

It prevented families from reuniting and any Chinese, except privileged classes, could not be admitted to the United States. And this went on for many, many, many generations.

So when I think about civil rights, I think about not just the black and white issue, but I happened to be in a place in the 1960s where the movement was the right time for me to get involved.

And how I did that, I had to get again, go back to Chinatown where I was born and raised. I always felt growing up in Chinatown.

I knew there were white tourists coming in and staring at me all the time because I lived in the heart of Chinatown and Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown. But for some reason, I've always felt growing up that I was unworthy to be an American.

I don't know how I got that, but I was told to be wary of whites. I was told that I should never leave the boundaries of Chinatown because it was too unsafe.

Except if I had to go, it was to go to school or to take my mother with me when she needs to go shopping because she couldn't speak English.

And we would take the bus to Marcus Street to go shopping for materials for, because she's a seamstress.

So I didn't know that, the glitter and the gift shop that you might see on Grant Avenue, these are not the memories I have of growing up in Chinatown.

I didn't know that until later that Chinatown has always been, as still is today, below poverty level, according to the US Census.

And that's the community that I lived in, but I don't think about that. I think about how precious relationships were in Chinatown. How we all knew each other and adults, when I was growing up, you call adults and acquaintances, they don't have to be blood related, but we call each other uncles and aunties.

And we talked about so and so down the street and we have all this gossip and good and bad things about the community. But I felt really safe and I knew that that's the only place that I belonged. (laughs)

So being in Chinatown was also the most crowded area in the city of San Francisco. I don't remember a lot of green grass, there's no parks, there's small playgrounds, there are swings and there are sandboxes. I mean, that's about all I remember.

And there are a few places growing up in Chinatown where I can go except churches.

And I found that when I was later in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, that's what the community, the black community do also, they go to churches. That's the only place that's public that they can go to, that they can call their own. And there was a very vibrant, active community center for youth that taught us about community, the value of community, taking care of each other, taking care of our elders, which is a long, of course, many of you know, it's a value and a tradition in Asian culture about respecting elders.

And family. And so that's how I grew up, learning community work, volunteering.

And that place is still active, it's called Cameron House.

Cameron House is part of the Presbyterian Church throughout the country, it's part of the Presbyterian Church organization.

So the reason why I mentioned that was because it was, I'm sorry, I forgot about the photo.

Jackie, can you get a photo of Chinatown for me? Thank you. And so this building you see here on the upper, the highest floor on the right side or three windows, that's our bedroom apartment. We have two apartments. One is nothing but bedrooms because the apartments were small and across from that you cannot see in this picture, across the hallway in the back of this building was another apartment and we use that apartment for my living room, my mom's sewing and my mom and dad's bedroom.

And we have a living room kitchen. So it's actually a three room apartment.

The third one is the bathroom and where we wash our clothes.

So this is Chinatown and that's where I grew up in this building.

So it was at Cameron House, the Presbyterian Community Center that I finally got in touch with another church related college through them. I ended up in the Presbyterian College in Nebraska. Don't ask me how, that's another story.

And my parents permitted me to go because they felt like it was safe. It was church related, it's got to be safe. Anything church related has got to be safe. And that's their understanding.

I left after two years at city college, I felt like I was so stymied. I felt so restricted. I felt like I had no freedom. And I just needed to get away. And that's why I asked my parents if I can go to this college. Because I just want to get out of Chinatown. I want to get out of San Francisco.

And so that's what happened. And when I was there, I was there for two years. I finally graduated, but before graduation, there was a professor who spoke about his experience.

(odd sound)

I noticed the sound, is there?

I can't hear.

Shall I keep going?

Zoom host Carol:

Kathleen, I think you have an answering machine going. - Oh, I'm so sorry. We're going to mute you, okay?

Thank you.

Sorry, Marion. -

Marion: All right, so Jackie, you can give me the Delta Ministry photo.

So here I am in front of the Delta Ministry office.

This professor when I was in college in Nebraska, spent two weeks during our spring break.

And he talked about going to a place that's sponsored by the only civil rights organization sponsored under the auspices of the National Council of Churches. And that's the only one that was situated in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

And here I am in front of the office.

And his experience were so vivid, and he just was fresh out of there. He just arrived back in the college, and he started talking about it. I was so inspired that a classmate and I, a month after graduation, a month after he spoke, we graduated, and so my classmate, Karen, and I looked at each other and we said, "Hey, that's where we're going. "Yeah, that's where we're going." And so we packed the bags, took the bus, and went down to Mississippi.

And that was history for me. That was, the rest is history. I thought that my experience was buried in history, and, but here I am speaking about it.

I thought I was retired years ago, and here I find myself being so energized as if this just happened, because what happened to me in Mississippi changed my life profoundly, very much like what Chute has been saying about her experience. But at that time, we didn't know it then. We just thought that it was someplace serious that we're going to, someplace important that we're volunteering for. Again, I didn't know any black people before I left Chinatown, and I didn't have to explain myself as a Chinese until I went down there, and I've learned more about being Chinese by being there.

Okay, Jackie, I think you can get this off.

And maybe the other photo is fine.

I lived among the Negroes in their community.

Here's Mrs. Sims, and there's chairing my classmate, and this is where we lived.

Mrs. Sims made us grits every single morning. It's, you know, to me, it's similar to a Chinese rice that I eat sometimes at home, but I've been served grits every single morning, faithfully by Mrs. Sims.

She would go to church.

I remember the 95 degree heat. I remember the temperature and the humidity is exactly the same.

I sweat and they sweat.

Mrs. Sims sang in a choir, and I sang along with her. I knew some of the hymns and the stories.

When I walked in the neighborhood, they had these little screening porches, and I would walk up and they would invite me in and gave me a glass of water, and we would sit, and they would sit on their porches, and I would sit with them on their porches, and I would listen to their stories.

And they were amazing stories.

Most of them sad stories and tragic stories, but that's how I became part of the community.

I felt like they, it was a safe for me. I felt like I don't have to watch my back. I knew that I was going to be protected by them in the community, and one of the things that Karen and I did was we started, we created a girls club.

They were like between 11 to 15 years old.

And the people in the community trusted us to take their children outside of the community.

And we did voter registration in the community, but we also tried to integrate pools. We tried to integrate the YWCA.

We did a lot of things together.

But one of the things that I, I want to emphasize this because at that time, it wasn't important to me, and now it was the pivotal moment of my experience in Mississippi, and I never would guess that. These girls, there's Maddie, there's Savannah, there's Johnny May, there's Alice, there's Amor.

There's so many, Marjorie, Marilyn, and sometimes we're relaxed, and once in a while they would say, "Marion," in their sudden slur, "could you speak some Chinese?"

And so I would start speaking Chinese, and immediately they would all laugh, and they would laugh, and they would laugh, and tears would come out of their eyes, and they would double over, and I knew exactly what it was.

They were not laughing at my accent. They were laughing with joy.

Finally, they were hearing something that's different in life. They were in touch with the outside world, whereas they couldn't because they were trapped. They felt trapped like, I felt like I was trapped in Chinatown. They felt like they couldn't get out because there was two dangers, and so whatever I could give them, I could share with them, they were so grateful.

They were so curious, they were so smart, but they didn't have the opportunities for things that I take for granted.

They may have been felt persecuted continuously.

For me, I felt like I could come in and out a little more easily than they could, even though I was a minority.

And they taught me at these moments how what it was like to be trapped, and I really felt that because I felt that way too.

So when I talk about Hattiesburg, I talked about my home. There's a home there. There was a community that was mine. I had two homes. I felt like there were two communities, but they're the same because I was familiar with the poverty.

I was familiar with the boundaries, and I was familiar with the restrictions.

I was familiar with how people care for one another and how they care for me and how they trusted me with their children.

I was lacking with them about gossiping, and I was home with all of you.

And I tended to transition easily, slipping from one community to another, and that's why I went back the second summer because I felt like my family was there. Another set of family was there, and I need to go back.

I think I'd like to end here,

and maybe we can open for questions and answers now.



Audience:

- Marion, did you feel the sense of discrimination in the South because of your Chinese heritage or because you were white-ish?

Do you think that you were in greater danger than your white fellow organizers?

Marion:

- What I did not realize was that people in the South was confused when I got there.

They didn't know what to do with me.

If there were two restrooms, white and colored, where do I go?

And if I go, it depends on where I was. If I were in a big place like Jackson, Mississippi, I may think about something, but if I were in a small town, I have to decide, which is very strange, that I could go into both and I could be in trouble in both.

I decided because it was very easy for me to just decide when I go to the restroom, I go to a drinking fountain, I would go colored because I'm with the colored people, I'm for them, and I want to stand up for them. And I consider myself colored. And I think the black community considered me colored.

- Thank you. -

They would not call me Miss Kwan, they would call me Miss Marion. - That's right.

- It's interesting, that's a very astute question because I don't know if you've read about the black community I don't know if you've read about my first day on the job where I went to a courtroom and the judge and the sheriff deputy didn't know where to place me because I was with an integrated group. And when they went to the black's town to move, they didn't move and when it got to me, they didn't know what to do with me.

And the judge had to dismiss the case because they didn't know where to place me.

And that was profound for me.

It should have been profound for everybody else in the courtroom, especially the judge and the sheriff, a deputy that raises is a ridiculous issue to fight.

Why don't we fight something else?

So the answer is, it depends on who I come up with, I come up against.

Most of the whites considered me colored simply because I was with a group of outside agitators and I was a northerner.

- Thank you, that's an interesting observation.

Chude:

- Perhaps this would be a good time to take a break, a five minute break.

And then it'll be Karen Trustee, I'll introduce Karen. - Great. - Thank you.

Zoom Host Carol:

Jackie, I'm going to go ahead and pause the recording and then we'll pick back up when, after five minutes at say 2007,

Sponsor Jackie:

- Okay.

Zoom Host Carol:

- Actually, if you've got slides to show, I'll leave the recording going. - Yep.

Sponsor Jackie:

- That works.

(Photos shown from vimeo.com/crma during break)

<deleted keyboard sounds during break>

Zoom Host Carol:

If Karen is ready, we can get started again.

Karen:

- I'm ready.

- Okay. - Okay.

Chude:

- Well, let me just introduce Karen Trusty. We did not know each other in the South, but some of our experience parallels. But as you will see, everybody's experience is different. And it's one of the things if you go to the website and you read people's stories or listen to the interviews, it's just amazing how each person's story is unique. Anyway, here's Karen's unique story. Karen?

Karen:

- Hi.

Let's see, I started getting involved with a movement pretty much by accident. I was going to a college in Connecticut, Connecticut College for Women.

And I didn't fit in there.

I don't know if you've ever seen the movie "Mona Lisa Smiles," but it seemed like the whole college was geared toward us marrying a good husband rather than what I thought I was going to college for.

And I really didn't like it. And so they had an exchange program. At the end of my freshman year, this is in 1963,

I signed up for an exchange program to Spelman College.

And they accepted me and I went the fall of 1963.

And I had a radio guy once say, "You mean you just got to Spelman because you didn't like the college you were at?" And he started laughing. And I said, "Yeah, that's why I got to Spelman." And when I went to Spelman, I was very sort of, I wanted to be a psychiatrist and I was really glad to be out of Connecticut, but I really didn't know what I was doing.

And Marion talks about grits and grits were one of my favorite meals. And I left on my birthday, my 19th birthday, on my train to go down to Atlanta.

And we always got to ask what we wanted for our breakfast. And I had grits and bacon and eggs. And little did I know that the next six months I'd have grits, bacon and eggs at Spelman, which was a joy. I mean, I'm not complaining. It was just really funny though, how little I was aware of what I was doing. And so I got on the train, I went to Spelman and quite frankly, I come from a very dysfunctional home, violent home. And I was really so glad to get out of there as well as Spelman, as well as Connecticut. And to come to Spelman with a whole,

I was so greeted and so loved really from the start. Not everybody, but there was just a graciousness and a generosity toward me that I remember had ever. And I had my first best friend when I was at Spelman.

And when I went, I had some vows that I wouldn't get involved in the movement and that I wouldn't date anybody. And I was very happy to be here. And that I wouldn't date anybody. And I can't remember the third one. I'm sure I broke it too.

So when I was there, the way the movement worked was that the Greensboro Four started in February, so 1960. And Atlanta had already, the student movement had already had one round of demonstrations for integration.

In the town. And then when I was there, they came up again and the activity started going again. And so I wasn't gonna go get involved, but I saw this little sign on a tree.

And it said, if you have questions about the demonstrations, come to this meeting. So I went.

And James Foreman, who was the executive secretary of SNCC, was leading the meeting. And people were asking different questions. And finally, I raised what I call now my lily white hand. And I said, well, I wanna be a psychiatrist. And that's how I wanna help people. And this is, I don't wanna mess up my career, basically, by getting involved.

And I had worked for a summer in a mental hospital. And I had seen racism. And also I'd seen the role of psychiatrists, which was pretty much just to give out medications.

And so I raised my hand and asked this question. And Mr. Foreman graciously, I can't even believe he was so kind. He just took it so, he said, that is a really great thing that you wanna help people. But the problem is, is that you really can't help people. Until the system of racism is undone.

And that was such a truth to me. It hit me right between the eyes. I mean, it was just like, and the next day I was on the picket line.

It erased that whole thing because it was so true. And I knew it from my experience in Kings Park Mental Hospital. And I knew it from my, it was just a true statement.

That the people that I wanted to work with, not necessarily black people, but I knew I wanted to work with poor people and people who are not on the top, but who were suffering on the bottom or having trouble with their lives. And it just wouldn't work the way it's set up, the hierarchy, just, I saw that that wouldn't work. So I'm on the picket line and I sat in at Lester Maddox's restaurant.

And he would later turn to be the racist governor of Georgia. And he was the one who brandished pickaxes at all of us. And I got arrested.

And one of the things I was the most afraid of was getting thrown into the white jail. All the jails were segregated. And so I was afraid of being thrown into the white section. And I was so afraid because what they did was they would beat you up and not let you sleep. And I know a person who, another exchange student from Connecticut, she ended up in there. They poured ice water on her all night and just tormented her basically.

And so I was very, very afraid of that. So they put me in this room and I kind of went crazy. I was so afraid. And to this day I can't decide whether I really knew what I was doing. Anyway, I totally raised hell in this room. And I just started yelling and I was picking up the bed and throwing it down and just doing whatever I could do to resist really. I mean, I was just very, very scared. I was 19, you know.

And so they didn't know what to do with me either.

And I decided later that they were afraid I'd hurt the white people. So they put me in to the black section. And I was so happy. I mean, I was just ecstatic that I didn't have to be afraid. And we sang civil rights songs and freedom songs and it was just a whole different deal.

And so I was in there for six days.

At one point, actually I was in twice. So the second time I was in there for six days with Dick Gregory was part of that action.

And it was in January in Atlanta. And Atlanta, even though it's in the South is cold in January. And they decided to turn the heat off.

So we can talk to you. The whole jail was full of freedom fighters and demonstrators. And so we could talk to each other through the pipes. And so that go from floor to floor. So we started, you know, plotting how to get them to turn the heat back on. And so we, I didn't come up with this idea, but what we were told was that, okay, at three o'clock or whatever time, everybody pick up their double steel bed frames over your head, okay, and drop them.

And it was to be at three o'clock.

Well, that jail almost fell down, I swear to God. The whole place just shuttered.

And, you know, it was a really, I mean, it was very intense. It was every bed on every floor. You know, and I think it was six floors. And so the next thing we knew the heat was turned back on. So it was like one of those little stories that you see that when you resist, you can make some headway. You may not make get out of jail free, but you do make some headway in terms of what they're trying to oppress you even further in the jail. And that was really fun. And of course we sang songs nonstop and stuff like that. So to me, it was a pivotal moment of learning about resistance.

And, you know, just in looking back, I just go, oh, that's where I figured out that if you band together, you can really make it, you can change things. Or even if you go crazy solo, but you resist. I didn't even know I was resisting. I was so scared, but I did resist and they got scared. And so they broke all the rules and put me on the black side of the jail.

Now, you know, you would think now, of course, if I'd been in Mississippi, none of this would have happened. So it was way too dangerous, but we're in so-called genteel Atlanta.

And so, and you know, there's a lot of camaraderie. I was one of the few whites on the line in terms of picketing.

And it felt good, but I also knew that because of that, I was a target and people would yell, you know, I was a race traitor and I was this and that. And to them, that's what I was. To me, I was, I don't want to be identified with you guys. You know, no thanks, I'll take something else. And so it was a very, very good thing. And then when I got out of jail, I had already been volunteering at the SNCC office. And when I got out of jail, I was immediately sent back up to Connecticut College.

And I got back up there and there was a fundraising thing because the other student from Connecticut was in the white side and was being tortured pretty much or harassed 24 seven. And so they were raising money for her bail.

And I got off the plane and they walked me into Connecticut and said, "Now Karen, don't lose it. You can't get mad. You can't swear. You can't do things. You got to behave yourself here. Now, you know, I'm taking this total cultural shift. I don't know if it other people who went from the movement type thing to so-called regular society, which for me was white society, oi, you know, oi vei. It just, it was just a real switch.

And so all my friends are calm down, calm down, you know, go up and behave yourself. And I did. And I talked about Marty being in jail and people were saying things like, "Well, didn't she ask for it?" You know, just things like that, which the comprehension level of most white people was so low. I mean, mine was too before I had these experiences, but I can't imagine that I would have ever said, "Didn't she ask for it?" So I was extremely depressed through most of my situation at Connecticut for my last term. And I decided that I'd go down for Freedom Summer.

Because that's the other thing. The whole aura or res and tetra, or why you're in the world is so different when you're fighting for freedom. It's just like you have a purpose. You have a community. You have something that's really right to do. And compared to getting through the next term of college at Connecticut, it was, "People have often said, you were so brave, Karen." And I said, "Well, if you imagine this room up here that is full of light and full of excitement, and full of, it's not excitement the way you think of it in sort of rock and roll terms, but just sort of a thing that happens inside. You're genuinely moved by what's happening. And there's this room full of light, okay? And then down at the stairs is my regular life, which was very kind of drab and kind of miserable. And I was trying to get, figure out what to do about my parents and what I wanted to do with life. And so which would you choose at 19? Which would you choose this other life? No, thanks. I was really wanting something different. And that's a lot of what the Freedom Movement offered me was a whole different way of looking at the world and looking at my life. And I am so grateful because when I think if I hadn't had that, I would have gone on to my parents' trajectory and done graduate school and done this and done that. And instead I got some agency. I felt agency there. I felt like I was doing something that I really signed on for.

I really signed on for it emotionally.

And I mean, it was freedom, yes.

And I didn't sign on for my home life.

I was put in there, but I wouldn't sign on for it. And so I understand there's many people who have a great deal of attachment to the idea of family. And I'm happy for them because that means they had a good family that made sense. My family didn't make sense. And so to have something like the Freedom Movement make sense and also have a sense of enrichment, it was such a blessing. I was so lucky.

And I'm so grateful for the fact that I got involved. And I really, I just sort of say,

I had a woman say to me once, well, you just ended up where you were supposed to. It didn't really, wasn't like I chose all these things in this regular sense of the thing. I didn't go down and help people or anything like that. I just went down.

So that was a very good experience. And then, so when I was in Freedom Summer, I was kind of considered staff because I was allowed to go to the staff meetings, which was because SNCC already knew me and they trusted me and they knew that I understood. Whereas there were many.

And what I mean by that is I understood the violence potential. I understood the position of black people in Atlanta.

I understood, I understood not fully, but I understood more than most. I understood more than I did when I arrived.

Whereas the other students coming down for Freedom Summer had not arrived yet. They were just coming in green. And so I had an understanding more of what we were up against. And also I'd been volunteering at SNCC every possible moment.

And so I, anyway, so I got to be a little bit on the inside track and at the training center, I was basically working in a communications department with Betty Garland and under Julian Bond.

And I don't know if you know, but SNCC had an entire communications department that communicated to the nation and the world about everything that happened in the South. And then they had that way of doing it. They had a newsletter that came out every week. And then they had the freedom singers touring all the Northern colleges, talking about what was happening with the freedom movement. It was a very coordinated deal. And that is some of the reasons why everybody knows about the civil rights movement, really. It was a very impressive. And my job in the summer when I was in Mississippi was they had something called the Watts line, which was I think it's wide area telephone service or something. And it was a free long distance calls. You had to pay a lot for it, but you got free long distance calls. And of course we were making calls all over the place because say somebody disappeared going from Jackson to Greenwood and they didn't show up on time at a certain point, we'd start calling their family and their congressmen and everything. So people would start calling down to all the jails around there to see where they were. And it was a very, it was the only defense we had. Eventually if somebody was really disappeared or being beaten or something, we would call the justice department and we rarely got any response from that, but nevertheless it was in there and it was told.

And so I took place, took part in the training center of all the students coming into the, into the going to Mississippi.

And I was working with Dottie's Elnor at the time and we were trying to keep track of all the students and who had registered and who hadn't and all that stuff and where they were going.



And on January, June 21st, it was just in the middle of the first week, I think. We got the message that three civil rights workers disappeared and that was Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman. And two of them were from North, that was Goodman and Schwerner. And James Chaney was from Mississippi, a local activist there.

And for SNCC, it was really hard news. I'm just telling you to be in that office and have us learn that they disappeared. Nobody knew where they went.

And on the second day, the SNCC people knew they were dead and nobody else did.

And it was hard. I mean, it was, we knew that stuff could happen. But it happened so fast before we even got started, before the really movement veterans had even gone into Mississippi.

And so it was intense. And there was a whole meeting with all the people, all the volunteers and Bob Moses talked about it and said, there's no shame in leaving. You need to talk to your parents.

You need to know that this is a truly a danger and you need to know this. And so 50 years later at the 50th reunion, we had a meeting of the volunteers that went to Mississippi, primarily the white volunteers. And this one volunteer said, well, I didn't believe him.

He said, I just didn't think he was, that could happen.

It was sort of like, I didn't think that could happen in America or something like that. And I was so shocked that somebody wouldn't believe Bob Moses.

Because Bob Moses was the first person that go into the rural Mississippi area, Macomb, and had been shot at and all this stuff had happened to him. And somebody was saying they didn't believe him. Now I get it because it is a shock to the system to think that it can get that bad.

And also it brings up a lot of fear for when you're going to Mississippi yourself. But it was just interesting to watch me go, you what, you didn't believe Bob Moses? Like to me, the words that Bob Moses spoke were like pearls of wisdom.

He didn't speak a lot. He was just this quiet, strong, brilliant man.

But when he spoke, people listened. It's like that commercial about bank or something.

When Bob Moses spoke, people listened. And I watched him in staff meetings that were with the SNCC staff that were hard. And when he stood up and started speaking, all those volatile, very talkative people sat down and listened. So he was a great leader. And one of his greatest strengths was that he listened and then spoke.

And so there I am at Oxford, Ohio. And we've all learned that the three guys disappeared. Some of us were going back to Atlanta and some of us were just going straight on to Mississippi. I was going back to Atlanta because my father had told me if I went into Mississippi, that he would have a nervous breakdown.

And at the time I was not able to stand up to that, I would say. I would have taken it on myself.

And that was too hard. So I had decided that I would work in Atlanta for the summer.

And so when I went back to Atlanta and I drove the people from Oxford to Atlanta, and it's a very windy road if you ever look at it. And we were doing it at midnight and I pretty much drove the whole time. And Dottie Zellner always says, "You're the person who saved my life "because I couldn't have driven." So it was just one of those things that as a person, as a support person, not as a leader, I just would do anything. And so I remember finally getting to Atlanta and just about collapsing, but I was happy to do it. And so I'm in Atlanta and several of the people are going to Mississippi.

And again, I got to be with staff meetings and one of the staff meetings, it wasn't really a staff meeting, it was just a gathering of people that were about to go into Mississippi.

And there were a bunch of the really strong veterans there.

Charlie Cobb, Prathia Hall, just a lot, quite a few people that were going into Mississippi.

And I was in the room and they started singing and they would sing in freedom songs because they were thinking, as far as I could tell, they felt like, this may be the last time.

And they started singing that song.

And if you haven't heard it, it's a beautiful song. It goes, this may be the last time. This may be the last time. This may be the last time. May be the last time, but I don't know. It may be the last time we sing together. May be the last time, but I don't know. And it goes on to eat together, sing together, pray together.

And they did a lot of verses and people were just, one person got on the floor and started praying. It was just a very intense time.

And I was so moved by the honesty and the raw emotion and the acknowledgement of fear through that song. I still was one of the high points of, not high points, one of the more impactful points of my time there.

Because quite frankly, my father and my family and a lot of white culture, I'll say, doesn't deal with their feelings of fear and oppression. They deal with it by striking out and blaming.

And I don't wanna put, I'm not trying to put down the whole white race or anything, but I'm saying as a general rule, this is what I've found is that there's not a way to deal with things. And that's one of the reasons racism still exists actually. And so to be in a room with people so present and so honest about the fear and also about they're gonna go anyway. There was never a question that anybody was gonna turn around. We will not turn back.

And so that had a huge impact on me. And so they went to Mississippi and all of them lived through it. And I stayed in Atlanta working in the communications department.

And what's my time like? Can somebody tell me where I am? Cause I'm just talking.

I do have a website that Jackie's putting up there. Actually the way to get to my, I have a movie, a DVD that you have to, at this very moment, you have to go to Vimeo to find it. And it's called "In Rarified Air."

Or you can find me under Karen Habermann Trusty usually. We're working on it. I just realized that it wasn't up on the site right now. So it will be, but anyway. -

Chude: So Karen, we have about 20 minutes left for the program. So it would be good to wind up, I think.

Chude:

- I- Yeah, as soon as, you know, to just finish your story that you go to Mississippi or how you want to talk. -

Okay, well, I got involved in going into a rally and a very frightening experience of Klan people. It was a segregationist rally. I really didn't know what I was getting myself into, but I did that. And then I ended up going to Mississippi after that. And I worked on the eight shift of the Watts line, which means I took reports from people. I still have some of the pages where somebody calls in and so-and-so was arrested and he's in this jail, or so-and-so got beaten up, or so-and-so got shot at, or there were 37 churches burned that summer, one of the churches got burned. So there was a lot of action happening that summer, and a lot of organizing. The organizing was really impressive. I mean, they formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which then went and challenged the Democratic Party up in Atlantic City. And also on the micro thing that was happening is there were all these social things that were happening between Blacks and

Whites and the families we lived with. And for instance, most Black people had never sat down and eaten with a White person on an equal basis. In fact, it was outlawed.

There was a law that said you could not be in a social situation and an equal situation. I mean, what?

And so if you did that, you could get arrested.

And so all that stuff was thrown away. Black people were used to being called boy and son by their first names. And we all called, said, Mr. Allen, Mr. Farmer, Mr.

All those things, Ms. Hamer, Ms. Baker, all those things were, they're small, but it's earthshaking when you think of that had been 400 years of these or three, whatever it was then, 350, solid social norms that if you broke, you could get killed. That's how serious it was. And that's why nonviolence is so effective because what it shows is if you do something nonviolently, if you watch the first part of the movie "Gandhi," he doesn't have a pass and he keeps dropping his pass in the fire and the policeman hits him. Well, that seems crazy in a way, but what he's illustrating is that pass system was not just a pass system. The bathrooms were not just colored and white. They were a whole part of a social system that was right underneath that social system was violence to maintain it. - That's right. - It's shocking how violent it was.

And I never really understood it until I got attacked in that rally. And I saw there's 10,000 people in here that wanna kill me.

I didn't think that, I thought that later. But I'm telling you, it's just like you don't, the depth of violence is really intense. And we're seeing some of that in today.

We are seeing some of that in the violence of judges who were trying to do an indictment and their families get threatened.

It's part of the whole deal.

And we just need to, I just wanna say one thing about today. What we saw in Mississippi was a rigid caste system.

Now, to be honest with you, I believe now that there is a rigid caste system all over America. I now say all of America is Mississippi right now. And so in that caste system, one of the things that white people get is they have a feeling of superiority to the people on the bottom.

Consistently black people have been on the bottom.

And by that, that means that white people are hanging on, not all of us, but they're hanging on to that feeling of superiority and that's their identity.

And I believe that that's why the things that are happening today are so intense because really the caste system is breaking apart to a certain extent. It's still there, but there's more black people in. Barack Obama was the president, that kicked up all these failings. And when they marched in Charleston, Jews will not replace me.

These things that are really deep for people psychologically. And so I've just straight into a whole different topic and I'm gonna stop now, but it's something for you to think about. There is a new movie called "Origins," which is basically the movie made from the book "Caste," which was written by Isabel Wilkerson, who to me is one of the best black writers ever. She wrote "Warmth of Other Sons" and she just fantastic. It was one Pulitzer's and all that stuff, but she has such heart to write all these things. And so I highly recommend you do that because I think that is what is not being said often on the news, even MSNBC, they don't call what Trump is doing as a strategy. He's using it as a strategy to get people shaken up about the caste position. So on that note, I'm very glad I was in the freedom movement and I'm glad to be here. And if you have any questions, I'm more than welcome to take them and love to all of you for having us. So thank you.

Chude:

- Thank you, Karen. So do we have any questions?

Zoom Host Carol:

- We don't have any in the chat box, but everyone is welcome to unmute themselves if they'd like to ask a question in person.

Sponsor Jackie:

- Well, Chude, this is Jackie. You mentioned having a poem to read. -

Chude:

Yes, I do. Should I do the poem now?

Sponsor Jackie:

Yeah, that'd be great. -

Chude:

Okay, so this basically speaks to Karen's point also about the small things, the little things that happened that actually, as she said, were against the law of being involved in what we call social environments and where we were equals. And it's called "Delois."

(see <https://www.crmvet.org/poetry/pchude.htm#delois> for formatting)

Whenever I thought of that summer in 1964, I remembered Deloess, one of the students in the Freedom School.

So many images flood my mind, but the main memory is of us walking along the side of her father's fields when she brought me home to spend the night.

We walked on a dirt tractor road in the quiet evening of the evening,

far from the prying eyes of racist whites. We walked and talked, the slow talk of friends out for an evening stroll with the sounds of birds and insects keeping us company.

It felt so normal.

Normal. There was nothing normal about two young women, one black and one white, walking together in Mississippi in 1964.

Nothing was the least bit normal about this young 20-year-old white Freedom School teacher visiting a black student's family. There was nothing normal about the friendship that had developed between us. And yet, that is how I remember it. She offered me an evening of quiet friendship in spite of all the fear and tension we face challenging racism in Mississippi. She wanted me to come to see her home and to meet her parents.

Oh yes, I remember dinner. Not the food, but the tenseness as I sat at the table, all of us being polite and trying to make conversation as we ate. Her parents had a watchfulness that I assumed was a fear of racist whites as well as their own ambivalence about white civil rights workers.

Yet, when I think back to that dinner now and see her mother studying me over the bowl of collards and beans, I wonder if it wasn't also personal.

What mother doesn't study the friend her 18-year-old daughter brings home? The girl who represents the world outside, the boundaries of family and community.

I don't know if her mother liked me or whether that was even a question in her mind. But I do think she was looking for what her daughter saw in me for clues about how her daughter was changing.

And I do think she was anxious about what those changes would mean for both herself and her family.

I've experienced enough of life now to know that all change is difficult, even when you want it, even when you know it is good. And change after all was what the freedom schools and the voter registration work were all about. Changing Mississippi, changing the relationships between black and white, changing ourselves.

- Thank you. And I thought that not to take away from Karen's ending about today, I also just wanted to, I thought it would be good to end with this idea that is my truth. And I think most people's truth that we're involved in social change, action movements, is that we changed.

We said we wanted to change society. I'm not sure I understood how much that would require of me to change. I can only say I am better for it. I can say that Vincent Harding, black Mennonite professor, who was also very active in the Southern Freedom Movement, he said that made the phrase, the movement makes us human. And I would say that's accurate. That we were not in a white supremacist, racist society, white people cannot be fully human unless we are fighting all the time to change that. And that change requires personal change too.

And so that's my experience. And my experience, I think both Marion and Karen would agree that we changed for the better and that the movement, our experiences then, and the ongoing struggles have continued to challenge us to change.

Thanks.

- And Marion and Karen, do either of you wanna have a last word?

Marion:

- Just one thing, that change cannot come without us being shoulder to shoulder with each other. We may have differences, but what I'm learning the most is my moral compass that it's not race, it's class, and it's our moral compass.

And I think that without the moral support I get often from my group, which shoot as part of the group,

I would not have survived it. I think it has to come through constant support of one another through our humanity.

- So thank you, Chude. - Great.

And Karen, any last word?

Karen:

- Yeah, well, I love the term moral compass because I feel like that to me is what SNCC gave me. I mean, the moral compass there was singularly focused on racism and changing racism, but in the process, it was really about accepting humanity.

And accepting human beings who had been so cast out.

And I realized that moral compass stuff is really important because if you don't have it, you're kind of lost.

And I'm so grateful for it, just so grateful.

Chude:

Thank you. - Great.

Audience comments:

Thank you very much, yes. - Yes, really. - Well, thank you three for doing this for us with us.

- Jackie, thank you so much for bringing this program to us. This was so inspiring. And as I said, all of you ladies are my new heroes.

Sponsor Jackie:

- You could read more about them on the Civil Rights Movement archive.

- There are many links on the Elder Study Calendar web event page that Jackie has provided us with. So if you'd like more information, please go to the calendar and check some of that out. - And do check out the video page.



We're on Vimeo and the links are on the regular archive page, but lots and lots and lots of things.

Chude:

And thank you, Jackie, for pulling it together in the Zoom host too, for having it smooth and easy. -

Sponsor Jackie:

Oh, I did forget one picture you had sent. - I was gonna say, yeah.

Karen:

- I'm in the center there. At 19.

And this is the woman who went into the white side of the jail, Martin Walker. - She's on the left and Karen Kunzler, who is on the right, was in High Springs with me that summer. - Yeah.

And Martin actually had to go all the way to the Supreme Court to get her charges dropped. I was never charged.

So I guess they were still scared of me. (laughs) - I just wanna mention that we have a book club here at Elder Study and we did read Caste by Isaac Ferguson. So we really enjoyed it. - That's great.

Zoom Host Carol:

- Thank you so much, ladies. Anyone else have any questions or comments? We've got some great session. Thank you, thank you. Powerful and unforgettable, thanks.

We're a quiet group, we like to type little comments.

Final chatting:

- It's cool that you have this group. I mean, I think it's really great that you have this group. - We have about 300 members. - Really? - Wow, really?

- Between 50 and 100 come regularly to our presentations. - And you're all welcome to join.

- Good plug, Carolyn, good plug. - Send us an invite.

- Thank you.

- I'll make sure Jackie knows how to get that to you.

Thank you so much, everyone.

- All right. - About time to wrap up then. - Yep.

- That's all of you and maybe we all survive in the next year.

- It will be an interesting year, actually. - Yes, it will be. - Well, one of our election officials is coming to talk to us on, I believe January 30th about get out and vote. - Yeah.

- All right. - Talk to your grandchildren.

- Yes.

- Thank you very much, Jackie. Thank you for organizing this and I'm gonna end the meeting for all and thank you all. - Thanks. - Thank you.