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Interview with Helen Shiller

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1 JL: We are here in room 300 of City Hall in Chicago, Illinois. The date is April 22nd.
2 My name is Jacob Langan-
3
4 HS: 2010
5
6 JL: 2010. Um, and uh, alderman, can you state your name and spell it out?
7
8 HS: Yeah, Helen Shiller: H-E-L-E-N, S-H-I-L-L-E-R.
9
10 JL: Okay, and what is your occupation?
11
12 HS: I am the alderman of 46th ward in the city of Chicago. And that is- the 46th ward
13 is on the north side. It represents most of uptown and the north east corner of
14 Lakeview.
15
16 JL: Okay. Um, we're going to begin with just background, uh, background
17 information. Can you tell me about- where were you born? And when were you
18 born?
19
20 HS: I was born in 1947 in Brooklyn, New York.
21
22 JL: And, uh, where were you- where did most of your upbringings take place?
23
24 HS: Uh, on the east coast.
25
26 JL: East coast? In Brooklyn?
27
28 HS: No, I lived in Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island and then I went to high school in
29 Vermont and college in Wisconsin.
30
31 JL: Okay, um, and what were, any- were there any significant times growing up, uh,
32 that made you interested in politics?
33
34 HS: [pause] I thought this was about apartheid?
35
36 JL: Yeah, we're just getting-
37
38 HS: This is a much longer conversation so, why don't we get to it if you don't mind?
39 [Laughs]
40
41 JL: Okay.
42
43 HS: [Laughs] I'd appreciate that.
44
45 JL: Okay, well I guess we can start with, um, we can start with-
46

47 HS: I'll give you a newspaper article to read. I mean, you should just read- really, I
48 mean most of your questions would be answered if you just read The Tribune
49 Magazine article that was written about me about [pause] in nineteen.. [pause]
50 ninety- six I think it is. Um, but I can get you a copy- I'd be happy to do that.

51

52 JL: Okay

53

54 HS: And that will answer all of these questions.

55

56 JL: Okay, well, alright. Fair enough. Um, well I guess we can start with the, uh, The
57 Anti-Apartheid Ordinance-

58

59 HS: Mhm

60

61 JL: -that you formed in 1990. Uh, what was your motivation behind that?

62

63 HS: The, um, I had made a [pause] I was somewhat familiar with, um, some of the,
64 uh, independent struggles in Southern Africa. Um, largely throughout- I was a
65 student of it and uh, um, throughout the uh, [pause] seventies. And um, and was-
66 actually had direct um, communication with the people from Mozambique- I mean
67 from Zimbabwe who were stationed and- who were stationed at Mozambique. And
68 the Minister of Information for Zanu which was one of the, uh, one of the groups
69 fighting for independence in Zimbabwe, uh, was stationed- was in Chicago and uh,
70 had uh- I was an editor for a magazine , uh magazine in Chicago called Keep Strong.
71 And he asked me if I would, um, do the typesetting and design and production of
72 Zimbabwe News, which, um, he then took from Chicago and brought to Mozambique
73 where they were stationed, uh where the troops were stationed. So, uh, this was in
74 '76, '77, '78- in that range of time and uh, so I became very, you know, it was right in
75 the middle of what was going on there, writing about it and I was typesetting it and
76 hanging around and getting it printed. Um, and so I became somewhat interested in
77 what was- additionally interested in what was going on in Southern Africa. And was
78 a little bit disturbed about what was going on in Southern Africa because there was-
79 everything was clearly impacted, um, uh by the colonial relationships [clears throat]
80 and in both what was in Rhodesia and um, South Africa. It was a very clear, uh, it
81 was- there was a system that was similar to apartheid that existed in Rhodesia, uh
82 which then became Zimbabwe. Uh, they, Edison, who was a person who was here,
83 was one of the, uh, negotiators- one of the people involved in the negotiating team
84 that went to Lancaster in England and negotiated the agreement that created the
85 independence for Zimbabwe [unclear] for Zimbabwe. Um, fast forward to 1989, I
86 had an opportunity to go a conference in Zimbabwe. And, um, and a friend of mine
87 who, uh, was, uh, had some involvement with the government of Mozambique also
88 arranged for me on the same trip to spend some time in Mozambique. And- so in the
89 cor- I spent a couple of weeks in Zimbabwe and Mozambique and South Africa
90 because apartheid was still there. Um, but I spent some time in both countries and,
91 uh, when I came back I was- I mean and my experience was- I mean, was very clear
92 the impact and the negative impact that the, um, uh, the apartheid regime in South

93 Africa had on the entire region. Uh- so before that I had read about it, I knew it, I was
94 upset about it. I, uh, followed what had happened in the City Council prior- [office
95 secretary sneezes] to being a member of the City Council and legislation was passed
96 and, you know, I thought all that stuff was very, you know, it was a good thing we
97 were doing those things but after visiting the region I was very passionate and really
98 could connect to the actual impact on peoples' lives. So I was determined to come
99 back here and strengthen our legislation but hopefully from a perspective of having
100 a moment in time, uh, uh an impact that then could be- do something that then could
101 be duplicated elsewhere and close some of the loop holes that were evident being in
102 that region, um, the imp- you know, the need to be able to strengthen those loop
103 holes that people were getting around in terms of investments, in order to be able to
104 improve what was going on in the region. So I came back here, I actually- in those
105 days there was a program- I was, I had just been alderman for a couple of years and
106 there was a program on the Board of Education had, um that, uh, I can't remember
107 what I was called but they basically invited legislators, including aldermen, to
108 participate in the teaching, in eighth grade, teaching the constitution portion of the
109 curriculum every year in the eighth grade so I did that every year, I loved it. And,
110 um, that year when I came back in January- I usually do it in Jan- start in January- I
111 said I'm going to teach the constitution here by talking about apartheid. And, um,
112 [unclear] I also wanted to, uh, look at the apartheid legislation we had so I met with
113 all of the- I took the legislation and then I met with all of the local advoc- the people
114 that were involved with anti-apartheid activities and said 'Okay, help me figure out
115 and understand what the loop holes are and what we need to do to, um, one: to deal
116 with the- we had three banks that were- what I knew was there were three banks
117 still in Chicago that was under investments in South Africa. So I- the goal was to
118 figure out what to do to get them to divest and how to do that in a matter that would
119 impact divestment in other parts of the country. And so that's what I got: these folks
120 to help me figure out. And, uh in the process of doing that we... we met with- two of
121 the three banks were willing to meet people- willing to meet with us and we also
122 met with people who had large- a couple foundations that had a larger amount of
123 money in one of the banks, which was a local bank. And, um, over the course of the
124 next six months basically, [I] was able to put together a much- a piece of legislation
125 that, um, would have- would had, that had all three of financial institutions required
126 to divest by the end of the year or lose their ability to be a Chicago municipal bank
127 depository or to participate in, um, uh, in, in um various different activities with the
128 city of Chicago. Now two of the three banks worked with us to get there and, um,
129 were already working towards divesting in the third, um, you know, just would've
130 been- not been able to do any of those things if they had not divested. But, but I have
131 to say that it was all- the timing couldn't have been better because it definitely
132 dovetailed with the release of Nelson Mandela-

133
134 JL: Right

135
136 HS: Initially with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and then with his visit
137 to the U.S. including, uh, Chicago, so that I was able to use that momentum to- and
138 the awareness of what was going on- to be able to actually also get these things

139 accomplished. So, uh it was really- I was fortunate to have an opportunity to be able
140 to play a very small part in a period of time when there was already momentum
141 building to do that and to direct some additional attention, if you will, or activity
142 that hopefully helped it along. I mean, the day after we passed our legislation, the,
143 um, Port of Oakland did merely what we did but the idea was that even though
144 Nelson Mandela was released and the country was moving towards, um, uh,
145 towards, uh, eliminating apartheid- that hadn't happened yet and um, and the
146 feeling here among activists was we really needed to keep the pressure on. Um, so
147 that our hope was that by doing these forcing of these divestments that the message
148 was being sent and was being sent over a period of time with action happening over
149 a period of time- that we're not going to let up- that you're actually going to have to
150 do the deed- undo the deed if you will or -eliminate apartheid- really change your
151 system if, if in fact, the trend is going to change in terms of investment back into
152 your country. And to do that we had to make sure that there was going to be
153 ongoing disinvestment until such a time as apartheid was, was, uh- uh, banned from
154 the country. And um, and so that was why it was, uh, both on the longhand
155 opportune but on the other hand I felt really important and why it was valuable, I
156 think, that what we did then gave the- then had a domino effect, where there were
157 other, uh, locations like the Port of Oakland and the municipalities were able to take
158 what they had for the strength of it.

159
160 JL: Okay. Um, and going back to, say the mid-seventies, can you describe, uh, when
161 you- when was the first exposure of the- finding out about what was going on in
162 South Africa-

163
164 HS: I don't know. I don't know how to answer that. I mean, I was very- I mean, I read
165 about the stuff in Africa throughout the 70s from the time- I mean I was in college in
166 the late 60s and was always, um, you know, so... my reading materials always
167 included readings, information about South Africa, Southern Africa, other parts of
168 Africa where, you know, I was very much familiar with the region and what was
169 going on in the region. Um... that's all I can tell you.

170
171 JL: You don't- you don't have a particular memory of when you first heard-

172
173 HS: No, I mean, no. I was very much involved in, um, a lot of things going on and read
174 a lot of stuff and when of the things I read a lot about was what was going in Africa. I
175 mean there were- I read The Monthly Review- I remember the things that I read-
176 The Monthly Review, The Black Panther and Communal News Service. There were a
177 lot of sources of information that I had access to and utilized that, um, gave me that
178 information. And um, and obviously it was during the mid- I mean throughout the
179 70s there were people in Chicago that were here from, largely- I'm thinking mostly
180 the people that I knew were from Zimbabwe but from Southern Africa and the
181 region that I interacted with, you know, I would interact with. I can't even
182 remember or tell you how.

183
184 JL: Sure

185

186 HS: I just don't remember.

187

188 JL: Um, okay, and what was the journey to Zimbabwe like?

189

190 HS: What do you mean?

191

192 JL: Uh, I mean how, how long were you there? What did you experience? Who did
193 you meet?

194

195 HS: Well I went to Zimbabwe for a conference.

196

197 JL: Yes.

198

199 HS: And was in Harare and spent most- I think I spent most of my time on that trip
200 in Harare. And, um, so it was the city and I got to go around the city and, you know,
201 the conference- I don't even remember who the conference was with. But I knew
202 people- Edison Javogel who was the person who was here was still there, so I saw
203 him, and, um, [pause] uh and [I] had an opportunity there to get some, uh, have
204 some tours around the city and learn and meet different ministers and things like
205 that. There were also members of the press- I think I went there with, it might've
206 been a newspaper [pause] related conference. It wasn't- I didn't go because I was
207 alderman- I happened to be alderman. But I went really based on my previous
208 news reporting experiences and, um, so we, you know, there were people from
209 news- various newspapers that I was- also interacted with. And we went- when we
210 went to Mozambique, we were there as a guest of the government of Mozambique.
211 So they set up all sorts of tours and activities and things that got us out into the
212 country's- we were in Maputo, which is the capital. Uh, but we also got all out into
213 the, um, community over there and um, into the, uh, outlying areas and uh, visited
214 with a large number of different co-op's- agriculture co-op's. [We] Saw a lot of
215 schools. And, you know, we went to several, um, refugee camps. I mean there were a
216 lot of- that was during- went to some- Mozambique was hugely impactful from my
217 point of view. Um, we went to some hospitals. It was during a period of time- this
218 was 1989 and the end of 1989 and, um, Renamo, which was financed by the South
219 African Secret Service, um, was a rebel group that was established explicitly to
220 create violence and disrupt the, um, independent government of Mozambique. And,
221 um, and they would just go into villages and take the young men and boys and force
222 them to commit violence against their families and then take them away until they
223 never could- basically kidnap and tell them they could never come back because
224 they had done this violence. But, you know, a point of debt- they were forced to do
225 this. So they either died along with their families or they went along with the killing
226 of their families and it was just unbelievably vicious and unbelievably cynical and,
227 um, and it was totally orchestrated out of South Africa. Um, and so- and there were
228 landmines and other things all over the place. So we found people who had either
229 their arms cut off or their legs blown off or whatever and- so I spent- I actually am a
230 photographer too so I took a lot of pictures, um, and brought them back and did a lot

231 of stories. But I, um, we did a lot of interviews, uh in Mozambique with people in
232 hospitals and things. Now, I returned a year and a half later, um, in 1991 and spent a
233 month in- mostly in Mozambique, but about a week of that was in- well, no, mostly- I
234 think I spent a week mostly in Mozambique and [pause] Anyway, I spent a month
235 between Mozambique, South Africa, and, um, Zimbabwe. And, um, that was after
236 what I worked- everything else I've already talked about. And, um, and while they
237 were going through the constitutional convention process in South Africa. Um, but,
238 uh, but I think that most of the visits that we made to the hospitals and to the, um,
239 to the, uh, co-ops was in the first visit.

240

241 JL: And on a daily basis, how often would you encounter these acts of violence?

242

243 HS: What do you mean on a daily basis?

244

245 JL: Like during one day, how many times would you see this?

246

247 HS: I don't understand your question. I was there- I went and saw people in the
248 hospital or I went and saw people- talked to people who had been victims of the
249 violence.

250

251 JL: You've never seen- you didn't see firsthand the abductions of young boys-

252

253 HS: I wasn't- no, I don't think I would be here to talk to you if I had been in a village
254 when they came in. They would've killed me too.

255

256 JL: Um, but, uh, did you [pause] Alright. Did you, uh- what was it about teaching the
257 8th graders- what was that experience like?

258

259 HS: Well I was in a classroom that was; most of the students were, um, 60% of the
260 students were African-American. About 30% were Latino and the remaining
261 students- there were one or two white students- and the remaining ones were from
262 India or from Africa. And I could count on two hands the students- maybe one hand-
263 the students who knew, um, anything at all- who had any [pause] idea that were a.
264 people that lived in Africa or b. even knew what apartheid was. Or, I mean, literally.
265 On one hand: who knew what apartheid was and on one hand who knew Africa was
266 more than just a bunch of exotic animals. I was striking. And so I started to- so I
267 pulled out their social studies book and went through it. And the only reference in
268 the entire social studies book to South Africa, actually to Africa was in a phrase that
269 said 'African Slave Trade'. One phrase that said 'African Slave Trade'. So I was a little
270 upset about it so I went to um, the librarian and asked about books in the library
271 [about Africa and/or apartheid] and she got really upset. And decided- and started-
272 and started a campaign against my being- questions I was asking because the
273 questions I asked also led to the local school council wanting to know- I had some
274 questions about how the curriculum- I mean how the books were decided and why
275 there was nothing in the books that dealt with these questions that, you know,
276 whatever. And this was a social studies class. They were dealing with the world and

277 world history and why wasn't there anything about this? And I actually really only
278 wanted- I mean, I was teaching the constitution so my idea was- I was going to talk
279 about race as a way to parallel in the, you know- One-Man-One-Vote concept with a
280 parallel to what the constitution required here. But whenever I taught the
281 constitution prior to this anyway, I would start with how- my point about my
282 constitution is that it's a living document and it changes and it changes because the
283 demands that people make. And those demands have been historically based upon
284 people demanding, uh, equal protection under the law and, um, and civil rights. And
285 so, uh, and so I would start with the fact that when the constitution was initially
286 written, that the only people that were considered full citizens in the country with a
287 full vote were people that were white, male, and owned property. And then in fact
288 women couldn't vote but at least they were one person. But for purposes of counting
289 people, Africans- African Americans or Africans, um, anyone who was not white,
290 essentially but essentially slaves, specifically, were considered to be three-quarters
291 of a person for purposes of vote. So that- or for the purposes of, um, determining, uh,
292 for the census determined the, uh, the allocation of representation which
293 determined the- who got to vote. And not just who got to vote but how their vote
294 was counted. I mean it- it's not a voting thing, it's a consensus and therefore who
295 you get to vote for. So when you draw a legislative district, it's based on the
296 population. Um, and, if you- so the people who- so the slave owners were able to
297 count their slaves as three-quarters of a person in terms of being able to- which
298 gave them a lot more representation, uh, than their competing, um, uh, their
299 competing citizens in the north who- every person was counted as one but they
300 were each a person and they could actually vote. So they got to be able to vote
301 themselves for a lot more people, if you will. Um, but- but the real point being at
302 three-quarters of the vote- I mean one person was considered three-quarters of a
303 person as opposed to one if they were a slave and they didn't have any rights to
304 represent themselves or have any representation. Um, they came from- they never
305 had any uh, um, what do you call it, um [pause] They didn't have any rights. And so
306 that over time, people organized and, um, things changed. So the women got to vote,
307 there was suffrage and, you know- well first, you know, if you- if people were able to
308 vote, the property rules were changed and then, uh, the section- the rules for gender
309 were changed and then ultimately the roles, uh, everybody then- there was
310 universal suffrage and then there was improvements on the poll tax and then there
311 was the Civil Rights, uh, legislation that led to the Voting Rights Act so that you
312 could actually really be allowed to vote. Uh, so I think that's really an important part
313 of the story- about the Constitution and that I always taught that. Um, and, so this
314 was another way to get at it but to also put the U.S. in context or, um, the Civil Rights
315 struggle in the U.S. in context. And I felt that was really important because one of the
316 things that I saw in, um- ultimately- that I saw happening in South Africa. And it was
317 really clear right away- there was a discussion for about releasing Nelson Mandela,
318 um, turned into a reality- even though apartheid had not been ended and he- but he
319 had been released- what became clear and it was always clear from him- was that
320 because of the, uh, of the character of The Man in large measure had an impact on
321 the character of the movement in South Africa. It was clear that they were going to
322 take- they were going to break new ground in the path that they went into, where

323 they went down. Um, the whole notion of reconciliation that they developed was
324 clearly going- was a new path that no one had really done before and- or that I had
325 not- wasn't aware of. And for me it seemed that there would be th-th-the path- the
326 paths that they, that they forged would be areas we could really learn from in this
327 country. So I was trying to, sort of, raise that interest so that as that happened, it
328 would be more people engaged in that. And that was important to me. I think that
329 still is important and we haven't taken advantage of it. I was actually just talking to
330 some people in South Africa yesterday from a council because they were doing
331 something up by us this summer and, um, and, uh, and we got into this conversation
332 because I-I just don't think we took advantage of it. And what I do know historically
333 happened or at least from my point of view- my interpretation of this was that, um,
334 of some of the things that happened there was the whole, um, you know, the whole-
335 the whole myth of work that South African Secret Service developed when they did
336 Renamo and they had done something very similar- I think they were some kind of
337 scout- I can't rem- that they did something very similar in, um, what had been
338 Rhodesians in Zimbabwe, um, before independence there, um they did that in
339 conjunction with the Rhodesian Secret Service. Uh, there were all these, um, kind of
340 counter-insurgent, um activities that were really based on creating violence that
341 then also was done with Incata- which I thought was the genesis of Incata and
342 Southern Africa- South Africa that created a lot of the violence there as a way to
343 challenge and to trip up this new government that was going to, you know, really
344 turn the country around. So I- to me it was the [Old guard?] really trying to, um-
345 acting on their own cynicism and their own racism, uh, uh- putting everything they
346 had behind. Creating the, um, the dynamic that they wanted everyone to believe was
347 going to happen. And they did that through violence and pointing the finger, saying
348 'See, these people are violent' or what have you. But they were creating it. And it
349 was a challenge and it undermined- you know, it was not only undermined the
350 stability of the development of a new country but just objectively on an everyday
351 basis by making people fearful and other things. But they also had their own death
352 squads and went out and killed real leader- you know, the leader- or tried to kill him
353 and succeeded in some cases the leadership of the new South Africa. So, the
354 struggles that had to go through, um, are not unexpected and in some ways parallel
355 to struggles that people go through anywhere in the country including- in the world,
356 including here when there's change. But the level of violence was, you know, really
357 [pause] they raised it to a whole new level. And I think that, as we see in the, uh, in
358 the decades that had followed, that there has been violence- we never saw before,
359 that bad in countries again and again, uh, throughout Africa, um, that I think are
360 particularly modeled off of the activities that were really initially generated by
361 people who were trying to preserve very racist and institutional structures and legal
362 structures in both- in first in Rhodesia and then in South Africa. And the fact that
363 those are the legal structures that don't exist anymore and the struggles that people
364 have gone through and the different ways of which has been attempts to address
365 them are lessons that we should be learning from. And all the reconciliation efforts
366 in South Africa- we don't know half as much about that as we should in this country
367 where we clearly have our work cut out for us. And, you know, in Mozambique, um,
368 which I hadn't been back to in a long time but where I know there's a lot more

369 stability than there was 25 years ago, um, I think that is another example of- there's
370 got to, you know- what I remember- I thought of something- what I remember from
371 25 years ago being there was thinking- or however many years ago- it was 20-
372 somewhere between 20 and 25- was, you know, "I can't even imagine what it's
373 going to take for these young people, who have come back"- because you know,
374 they- they were [pause] Renamo was doing all that stuff but it wasn't like the
375 government wasn't fighting back and communities weren't fighting back. So there
376 was some effort to- and some success at recapturing some of these young people
377 and working with them to rebuild their lives. And, um, I couldn't even begin to
378 imagine what that would take. And the kind of effort that was- and clearly after, um,
379 uh South African apartheid was eliminated. It was going to be a whole different set
380 of dynamics in Mozambique because you didn't have a whole- such a powerful
381 government supporting this resistance that was trying to destroy your, um, your
382 own independence. And, uh, so I know that there have been things that have
383 happened over the course the last two or three decades that, um, are really infor-
384 can be informative to us. And we have so much violence, for instance, going on in
385 some of our communities and, um- by young people- by and for young people- um,
386 creating some real serious kinds of impacts that are not that unrelated to things -
387 that are different but similar- that other places people have gone through and- I've
388 had more- I have a longer experience with- um, and that maybe they figure out some
389 things that we could learn from, it seems to me [pause] I was reminded of that
390 yesterday. Uh, but, you know, sometimes when I see the violence here and been
391 inside of some of the schools or talked to some of the kids, I'm thinking, 'What were
392 those lessons? This feels familiar. There's got to be that there's some kind of lessons
393 in here."

394
395 JL: Right. And is there a particular reason why you haven't been back to
396 Mozambique for a while?

397
398 HS: Um, the opportunity hasn't presented itself. I'm pretty busy here. [laughs]
399

400 JL: Yeah, yeah. I was just wondering if there was, like- if you did- if you had just a- if
401 it was a place you didn't want to go back to personally-

402
403 HS: Well, no. I mean, the last- I always- I mean, the first time I went I was in
404 Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The second time: Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South
405 Africa. And, um there's no reason I haven't gone back except there hasn't been an
406 oppor- reason to do it. I mean, there hasn't been something [pause] there were
407 things that were happening that I had an opportunity to participate in.

408
409 JL: Right.

410
411 HS: And I could, based on the time. Those circumstances haven't come together
412 since then.

413
414 JL: So you would visit, uh, if you had the chance and opportunity?

415
416 HS: And the time and, you know, all the straws lined up? Sure. [laughs]
417
418 JL: Okay. Okay, um-
419
420 HS: Why, are you planning a trip? [laughs]
421
422 JL: Oh, no. [laughs] Um, but, uh, let's go to around 1994 when, uh, Mandela was
423 elected president. Um, this is a pretty-
424
425 HS: He wasn't elected until '94- no. It had to be before that.
426
427 JL: It was-
428
429 HS: Whenever he was elected- we can go there but I-
430
431 JL: Or '93, '93. Um, where were you at that time?
432
433 HS: I-I watched it on TV. I have no idea where I was but I was in front of a TV.
434
435 JL: Okay.
436
437 HS: Very, very happy.
438
439 JL: Of course. And where were you- or-
440
441 HS: I have no recollection. I remember watching the whole thing. I watched from
442 beginning to end and that's what I remember.
443
444 JL: And do you have any recollections when you first heard about him, uh, winning
445 the election?
446
447 HS: [pause] No, my memory is not that great. I don't remember- I know people
448 always say "Where were you when..."
449
450 JL: Right [laughs]
451
452 HS: Um, and, uh the- I mean there are some things I remember explicitly where I
453 was because I was right there. But, um, I just remember in each step of that process
454 being very happy.
455
456
457 JL: Okay.
458
459 HS: I do- I do remember being in South Africa, in Johannesburg for a huge march and
460 rally for a constitutional convention. That was extraordinary.

461

462 JL: What was that like?

463

464 HS: It was just- I've never seen so many people and the streets were completely full
465 and we ended up [pause] The rally was the- As I recall [I] ended up being in an area
466 that was surrounded by many- it was sort of in a park, but was surrounded by many
467 buildings or maybe it felt like a park because we took over the streets. But one of the
468 buildings was a prison. And so people were- as we went by, people were hanging out
469 the prison and had signs and things that were related to the demands- it was just
470 extraordinary. And, you know, uh, that- I was th- Nelson- I don't recall that Nelson
471 Mandela was there but- we were- I don't think he was. Um, uh, I'm trying to think of
472 the names of people. It was other- other leaders- there were almost every other
473 person in leadership of the ANC at the time was there, um, and spoke, um, and then
474 later on- I think later, if not earlier, I think it was later- we did see him- we did go to
475 a stadium where- in South Africa- in Johannesburg, where he- where Nelson
476 Mandela spoke. And, um, and I recall that. But, uh, mostly- but I really- that
477 demonstration was extraordinary. And right in the middle of it, because it was still
478 apartheid and still the South African secret police and blah, blah, blah-

479

480 JL: Right.

481

482 HS: There they were, with their camera sticking up in the middle of the street, in the
483 middle of the demonstration taking pictures of everybody although apparently-
484 clearly they were not as fearful as they were previously. I remember the yellow
485 vehicles which is- was the representation of the South African police. And, um,
486 [pause] and that was very symbolic of apartheid. Um, I spent a lot of time in
487 Alexandra, which is a township outside of Johannesburg [pause] with people from
488 Alexandra and, um, and that was fascinating. That was great because there were so
489 many parallels between Alexandra and what was going on there at that time and
490 uptown [Chicago]. Um, and, uh, so- and they were struggling with, um, the
491 development of the civic society and the changing of South Africa. And I was
492 struggling with heavy, you know, sort of a how-do-you-create a more active civic
493 society, essentially. And a community that had been neglected for years. And I was
494 just newly elected alderman. It was in my firs- I had just finished- When I was in
495 South Africa, I had just finished my first term. And, um, so it was- there were a lot of
496 parallels and um, and uh, and it- but it was very exciting because there was so much
497 going on. But you still some- but the old was still there. You just had the hope and
498 expectation for the future and people attempting, in a mass way- in that
499 demonstration, it was a mass demonstration- to in an attempt to define the direction
500 that things were going to go on. So it was- that was pretty dynamic. But I tend to
501 remember things that I'm involved in more-

502

503 JL: Sure.

504

505 HS: than I hear around me.

506

507 JL: Okay. Um, so let's talk about, uh, South Africa today. And what do you think –
508 have you seen any progression since, say, 1994?
509

510 HS: I can't speak knowledgably, I don't think, about South Africa today. Take me
511 there and I'll tell you about it. But I don't feel-
512

513 JL: I mean, from what you read or-
514

515 HS: Yeah, but don't really feel like I know enough to talk about it.
516

517 JL: Okay.
518

519 HS: That's what I was saying earlier. I think that, uh- and one of the conversations
520 we were having yesterday is that I- you know, my point was that I'd really like for us
521 to engage in that conversation because I think- they were asking me to be part of a-
522 of a meeting with some people who were trying to do some civil society stuff in
523 South Africa. And, um, that they wanted to learn from us. And I said, 'Great, I'd love
524 to do that.' But I really wanted it to be a two-way street because I think that there
525 [is] many things that we ha- I've had so many hopes and expectations of learning
526 many things from the work that they had done and kind of dropped a ball on it. So, I
527 wanted it to be a two-way street where we could really also learn some of the
528 lessons, uh, from their- all their reconciliation activities. And, you know, their- what
529 it has taken and the lessons they've learned in the process of creating a- basically a
530 new state because it's a completely- you know, out of a completely different ideal
531 that had existed for many years.
532

533 JL: Okay, and um, have you seen- I know it's- you say you can't speak knowledgably
534 because you haven't experienced it firsthand, um-
535

536 HS: And I haven't spent that much time- I mean, it happened- I mean, I'm not- it's not
537 like a I read everyday what's going on.
538

539 JL: Right. But from the people you've talked to from South Africa, um, who you
540 communicate with, uh, talking from- talking to them, do you see some signs of any
541 improvement?
542

543 HS: I can't- I think that we're- I can't [pause] I don't have the knowledge you're
544 asking me for.
545

546 JL: Is it-
547

548 HS: I can't answer this, okay? [laughs] You have to hear what I'm saying. You're
549 trying to get information from me I don't have.
550

551 JL: Okay, well, it was more of an opinion-
552

553 HS: I don't have one at this point.

554

555 JL: Okay. Um, I guess that will do it. Do you have anything to say about, um, just the
556 world? Like how far we've gone, do you think? Like what do you- what advice would
557 you want to give to the youth today? Like, such as when you were teaching 8th
558 graders in Africa-

559

560 HS: I wasn't teaching 8th graders in Africa. [Interviewer's note: one of my many
561 mistakes in the interview, I meant to say 'about' instead of 'in' When she corrects I
562 go with the act of clearly being mistaken] The teaching I was doing was here in
563 Chicago.

564

565 JL: Oh, okay. But what would you want to tell the youth today about maintaining
566 peace and, uh, keeping the anti-apartheid movement strong?

567

568 HS: Well [long pause] Um, the anti apartheid- I mean, apartheid is gone. Knowing
569 the history, like any history, is important, you know. The actual- the actual
570 government that was based on a legal system of apartheid- what was legal at that
571 time is no longer legal and no longer exists as it shouldn't be- as it should be. It
572 should be illegal [gently hits table] and it shouldn't exist [gently hits table again] and
573 that's the current status. Um, that it was based in a notion of the color line and that
574 part of it is a, uh, racist- racial approach to the division of people in our society
575 based on race and attributing value to that. I totally up hoard and think that is
576 something that is-is- there's nothing positive contributory in a positive way from
577 that perspective in any society. And we have it permeating our own as well as others
578 throughout the world. And so I think- to that extent- it's something that, um, we
579 need to continue to, uh, to address and to challenge. Um, the mo- and you know-
580 what's happening with young people today in this city, um, concerns me a great deal.
581 And, um, I-I think that we have, uh- I think a few things. One is we tend to, um, draw
582 very broad strokes and, um, and that's, you know, not helpful. Um, and secondly I
583 think that having said that, that as we-we live in a world where often there's
584 different levels at which people live in and consequently fail to communicate. It's
585 almost like we have people occupying the same space and not knowing the others
586 there. Or not acknowledging the others there or certainly not respecting the others
587 there. And, um, and the consequence on that, on the world around us, includes- in
588 my belie- view, some of the levels of violence we're facing now in Chicago which I
589 have, uh, which I'm describing after having said and I don't think we should draw
590 broad strokes because I don't think it's something that every young person is
591 involved in but which I think in fact impacts young people more than it impacts
592 other people. But I think that it impacts them because the world in which they live in
593 has already been impacted and has created a dynamic on which they have lived and
594 have grown and gotten to this point. And how do we address that? Honestly, I don't
595 know. And I'm struggling- mulling, I guess I'm in a mulling mode and I'm struggling
596 with that and am concerned about it and, um, and-and that's really what I can begin
597 to say about say on the subject. I-I think that it is very important that we remember
598 that we are human beings and that human beings are living, breathing creatures

599 who learn by making mistakes. And that, um, and that does none of us any good to
600 think- to act in a manner and to act out a manner that either feeds on anger, feeds on
601 a belie- forgets that we can mistakes as wholly as than now, as hypocritical or any of
602 those things. I think we have to really- it is- life, in many ways is a search for, um, is a
603 search. You know, people are searching all the time. And when that search is cut off-
604 it's a search. It's a process of development. And when that development is cut off,
605 and people are left with no place to go, then, um, or feel that they are- have no place
606 to go, they'll find a place; that's our nature. And, um, and they'll move around or
607 they'll move under or they'll move through. And, um, when, um, people are able to
608 collectively come together to attempt to redefine that and make something better, I
609 think we're usually in a good place. But when that's exploited and exploited through
610 anger and frustration and those things are encouraged and people- encouraged to
611 feel like they can't do anything, rather than collectively they can together, but rather
612 than together they can't and therefore shouldn't and therefore collectively should be
613 angry as opposed to productive. [laughs] I think we have what we face in the world
614 today and I'm a little bit concerned about it, quite frankly. And, um, when you asked
615 me at the beginning [about] my history and I told you to read the magazine and you
616 should. But there is one piece in my history that is very important from my point of
617 view, which is when I was very young, um, in nursery school, my father kept me
618 home from school and had me watch the TV, which was, uh, you know, early
619 versions of TV, so it was like one room in the house, it was a study. And, uh, it was
620 [pause] we had a lot of stations and the only thing that was playing on the TV that I
621 got to know about was, um, these hearings which was the army and navy hearings in
622 front of HUAC, the House of Un-American Activities committee for the congress and
623 they were dealing with the, uh, this was the end of the McCarthy hearings where
624 John McCarthy was going after everybody in the world who didn't like him and
625 calling him a communist. And he had gone a little too far and went after the army
626 and they were having these hearings going on. And this was really the turning point.
627 But basically he operated by, just, I mean, he operated by just making accusations
628 and putting people of the defensive. And, um, and they were often outrageous
629 accusations but they were based on a fear of communism and based on that, he
630 would basically ruin people's lives. Or with his actions. There were, you know, there
631 were a lot of people going along with him. Um, but he used the act- he used Congress
632 for awhile to do that and there were a lot of hearings in front of Congress when
633 people brought in front of him and there's a lot of history about that and people
634 know about it or can't find out about it. But my father had me sit there when I was
635 very young and said, 'I know you aren't done-' he made me sit there all week and he
636 said, you know, 'You're not going to remember- I'm doing this not because you'll
637 remember what you're watching,' so all I'll remember is a TV screen and people
638 sitting at a table and yelling at each other, speaking loudly, 'But hopefully you'll
639 remember that I made you sit here because I thought it was very important and
640 what I think is important is that you remember that there is something called
641 fascism and that you always have to be vigilant and address it and make sure- and
642 that the- and be willing to fight it because it's the most insidious thing that could
643 destroy a world.' Although, obviously, I'm using my words today for what he said.
644 And I said, 'Okay, whatever' [laughs] I remember it, I was sitting on a very warm

645 floor because the heat came through the floor, in front of the TV, and that I wasn't in
646 school and I was hanging out with my dad and that was kind of cool, and uh, a little
647 boring. And when I turned 18, that movie 'Point of Order' came out, and um, and
648 that was about the McCarthy hearings. And it dovetailed with another argument- an
649 argument I actually had with my dad over that summer, when- this is the year
650 between my first and second year of college. And he was outraged that I wasn't
651 involved in any kind of anti-war activity and wanted to know why I wasn't involved.
652 And, you know, I said, 'Well, I don't know.' And we had this huge fight and I went
653 back to school and watched 'Point of Order' and [he] told me to get involved. So I got
654 involved in the anti-war movement. So that was- by doing what I knew how to do, in
655 which I think is the lesson- you have to do what you can do. So I got back to school
656 and I used to sew all my clothes. And I love to sew and I went to the- there was a
657 group called The Committee of the War in Vietnam. And, you know, I'm not
658 interested in meetings. I wasn't particularly interested in any meetings but they
659 were- it was a group that was putting on fundraisers- plays to raise money to
660 support the activities- which were going on for the war in Vietnam. So, the play they
661 were putting on- so anyways I offered to be in a play, and the play they were putting
662 on was called 'The Hostage' by Brendan Behan. [at this point her secretary has
663 accidentally dropped a few things and laughs about it, which is captured on the
664 recording making it hard to hear for a few moments] And, um, now this is something
665 you should read. This is a quintessinal [quintessential?] and moral debate. And so
666 this is a play about- written by Brendan Behan- about, uh, an English soldier- about
667 a group of people in-in Ireland, in Dublin, I think. Dublin, well one of them, probably
668 Dublin. And they have kidnapped an English soldier and [unclear] And they are
669 trying to figure out what to do because they've held him as hostage because the
670 English army has, um, arrested a young man who is- they're both 17- uh, for being a
671 member of the IRA and they're getting ready to hang him. So they're in England. And
672 so in London. And so in Dublin, they're trying to figure out- they're holding this
673 soldier hostage to try and stop them from killing the, um, the IRA soldier. And, um,
674 and they have to decide what to do if he gets hung. And so it's all about that moral
675 dilemma and really ordinary regular folks and- it's just terrific. I mean, I'd just- from
676 a point of view of really, sort of 'what do you think in a humanity verses-' you know,
677 just a zillion kinds of ethical questions that I think is always good to look at-

678
679 JL: Right.

680
681 HS: because you have to put yourself in different people's shoes. And you have to
682 think of things from everyone's perspective if you really want to solve problems or
683 make it a better world. [pause] So there you have it. [laughs]

684

685 JL: That was a beautiful closing note. [laughs] Thank you very much

686

687 HS: [laughs] You're very welcome.